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JANE L. MCINTYRE

I. Introduction

Book II of the *Treatise* minutely anatomizes the passions Hume dubbed "indirect." As the account of pride, humility, love, and hatred unfolds, principles are uncovered, causes are exhaustively examined, experiments carried out, difficulties presented and solved. The barrage of detailed description and theorizing threatens to overwhelm even the most devoted of readers. By contrast, Hume's explicit treatment of the direct passions appears perfunctory. Indeed, Hume states: "None of the direct affections seem to merit our particular attention except hope and fear."¹ Desire and aversion, though usually mentioned first as examples of the direct passions, receive no separate analysis.

This paper argues that, contrary to what Hume leads us to expect, Book II of the *Treatise* does entail significant conclusions about the direct passions. Further, this implicit theory is important to understanding Hume's account of the passions as a whole. I will begin with brief comments on the historical background to Hume's discussion. I will then analyze Hume's treatment of the direct passions, particularly in relation to the indirect. Finally, I will examine the implications of this analysis for a fuller understanding of the calm passions and the virtue Hume called "strength of mind."

II. Background to Hume's Discussion

Hume's relative inattention to the direct passions is partially understandable, yet still puzzling. To see why this is the case it is helpful to know two things about the relationship of Hume's work to earlier accounts of the passions. First, one feature of Hume's theory of the passions that is distinctively original is the categorization of the passions into the direct and the indirect: neither this terminology nor any equivalent classification occurs in earlier or contemporary works on the passions. Hume gives a succinct summary of the direct passions (desire, aversion, grief, joy, hope, and fear) in terms of their causes: they "arise immediately from good or evil, from pain or pleasure" (T 276). The indirect passions (pride, humility, love, hatred, and all their various compound and dependent forms) receive a less illuminating introduction: they "proceed from the same principles, but by the conjunction of other qualities" (T 276). Ultimately, the causes of indirect passions are explained through an amplification of Hume's principles of association and the introduction of other important principles, such as sympathy and comparison. This new classification therefore reflects what Hume took to be the discovery of an underlying distinction between the causes of the various passions.

Hume's initial characterizations of the direct and the indirect passions presume that, however new the terminology, the causal mechanisms underlying the direct passions would be familiar, while the causes at work in the indirect passions would be unfamiliar. This presumption is supported by the second important fact to which I wish to call attention. The analysis of *desire* figured prominently in many earlier theories of the passions. Even when love was identified as the primary passion, which it often was, its different forms were accounted for by its direction toward different objects. Love, in this sense, was a generic form of desire, not the person-directed indirect passion we find in Hume. Related to this focus on desire is the fact that many earlier works addressed the topic of the government of the passions—that is, their control and direction. Although other passions, particularly anger, were discussed in this connection, unruly desires were the passions most often in need of control.

While the main focus of this paper is not Hume's relationship to the history of theoretical work on the passions, it will be useful to have, as a point of reference, a differently organized account of the passions. For Hume scholars, Hutcheson's *Essay on the Nature and the Conduct of the Passions* provides one particularly interesting example of a work that takes the analysis of desire to be central, and that treats standard topics such as the government of the passions.² Hutcheson's aim was to show that not all of our actions proceed from self-love—that the desire for the good of others is a basic feature of human nature. He defined desire in a manner quite similar to Hume's later definition of the direct passions. "Desires arise in our Mind, from the Frame of our

Nature, upon Apprehension of Good or Evil in Objects . . ." (*Essay*, 7). Hutcheson developed an elaborate account of desire based on his theory that we have, in addition to the external senses, an internal sense, a public sense, a moral sense, and a sense of honor. Corresponding to each of these senses are distinctive pleasures and specific desires—desires of sensory and aesthetic pleasures, public happiness, virtue, and honor. The desire of these pleasures is either selfish or benevolent, depending on whether their object is pleasure for oneself or for another person. One form of desire, calm universal benevolence, is, on Hutcheson's theory, the motive most approved of by the moral sense, but the violent sensations that accompany many desires tend to "prevent all deliberate Reasoning about our Conduct" (*Essay*, 29). "We obtain Command over the particular Passions," Hutcheson wrote, "principally by strengthening the general Desires thro' frequent Reflection, and making them habitual, so as to obtain Strength superior to the particular Passions" (*Essay*, 30).

Hutcheson's theory illustrates the contrast between Book II of the *Treatise* and earlier works, not only in its classification of the passions, but also in its thematic focus. The *Treatise* contains nothing like Hutcheson's dissection of desires. In one respect, Hume's attention to the indirect passions is not surprising: these were his invention. But Hume provides little guidance as to how the analysis of the indirect passions would either contribute to, or redefine, the ongoing philosophical debates that focused on the direct passions. Hume's comments on the relationship between the direct and the indirect passions are quite limited. Neither the "Abstract" nor "A Dissertation on the Passions" provides a clear picture of his account of the passions *as a whole*. The comparative brevity of Hume's treatment of the direct passions might suggest that, in this area, Hume thought that prevalent views of the direct passions were generally correct, needing only to be supplemented by the recognition of the indirect passions. I will argue that, on the contrary, Hume's theory forces a substantial reinterpretation of the nature of the direct passions.

III. The Direct Passions: Some Unexpected Features

One obvious and somewhat paradoxical feature of Book II is the fact that the indirect passions are discussed before the direct.³ Although Hume provides no rationale for this order of argument, we can draw a parallel with a strategy described early in the *Treatise*. Hume wrote: "as the impressions of reflexion, viz. passions, desires and emotions, which principally deserve our attention, arise mostly from ideas, 'twill be necessary to reverse that method, which at first sight seems most natural; and in order to explain the nature and principles of the human mind, give a particular account of ideas, before we proceed to impressions. For this reason I have chosen to begin with ideas" (T 8). Hume discusses ideas before "impressions of reflexion" because ideas figure among the causes of those impressions. Book II also "reverses the method which

might seem most natural” and explains the indirect passions before the direct. If Hume’s strategy is the same in these two cases, we would expect that the indirect passions are among the causes of the direct.

Initially, this relationship between the direct and indirect passions might seem implausible—the direct passions, after all, are supposed to “arise immediately from good or evil” (T 276) or “arise from good and evil most naturally” (T 438). “Desire arises from good *consider’d simply*, and aversion is deriv’d from evil’ (T 439, emphasis added). There is, however, textual evidence, drawn from Hume’s discussion of the indirect passions, that the direct passions do not always have a simple causal history. The most significant passage illustrating this concerns the relationship between the indirect passion of love and the direct passion of benevolence, the desire of the good of another. (The same relationship holds, of course, between hatred and the desire for the misery of another person.) In characterizing one of the differences between pride and humility, on the one hand, and love and hatred, on the other, Hume wrote: “love and hatred are not compleated within themselves, nor rest in that emotion, which they produce, but carry the mind to something farther. Love is always follow’d by a desire of the happiness of the person belov’d, and an aversion to his misery” (T 367; see also T 608 n). Hume emphasized that this connection between love and desire is causal, and that benevolence is not inherent to the emotion of love itself: “This order of things, abstractedly consider’d, is not necessary. Love and hatred might have been unattended with any such desires, or their particular connexion might have been entirely revers’d” (T 368). Benevolent desires, which are themselves direct passions, arise in the complex causal context created by the indirect passion of love. We take pleasure, for example, in another person’s witty or intelligent conversation, and, through the double association of impressions and ideas, that pleasure gives rise to a pleasurable feeling of love for that person. It is this indirect passion of love, according to Hume, that causes the desire of that person’s good.⁴

Pity and malice are also passions that are accompanied by the desire for the happiness or misery of another person. Hume’s explanations of the causes of these desires is once again enmeshed in the *indirect* passions. In pity, the desire for the happiness of another arises from sympathy. In malice, although sympathy makes me feel the happiness of another person, and this communicated sentiment is itself pleasurable, if my own situation is miserable, the comparison will be unpleasant (T 375–376). In this case, through sympathy and comparison, therefore, the happiness of another becomes painful to me, and, as in hatred, I desire that person’s misery. These examples show that an important category of the direct passions, desires for the happiness or misery of other persons, do not arise from good or evil “consider’d simply,” but only in the context of the complex associations of the indirect passions. Contrary to what we might expect from Hume’s descriptions of the direct passions, the indirect passions figure among their causes.

Initially, the analysis of desires where there is a prospect of pleasure for oneself appears simpler. Hume gives the following example:

Thus a suit of fine cloaths produces pleasure from their beauty; and this pleasure produces the direct passions, or the impressions of volition and desire. Again, when these cloaths are considered as belonging to ourself, the double relation conveys to us the sentiment of pride, which is an indirect passion; the pleasure which attends that passion, returns back to the direct affections, and gives new force to our desire or volition, joy or hope. (T 439)

In this scenario, pleasure gives rise to desire and volition. As soon as we think about the possible result of that volition—that the beautiful clothes might become one's own—the anticipation of pride's pleasurable glow reinforces the desire. Here the indirect passion doesn't cause the direct, but does strengthen it.

This is one of the very few places where Hume traces a temporal sequence of the passions, so it is tempting to take it as a model for the connection between pleasure, the direct passion of desire, and volition. And this discussion does dovetail with some parts of Hume's account of the indirect passions. Objects like "a suit of fine cloaths" appear, for example, in the account of the causes of pride in *Treatise* II i 10, "Of property and riches." Hume's primary interest in this section is to show that "houses, equipage, furniture, cloaths" cause pride through the pleasure of their "utility, beauty or novelty" (T 310–311). These same objects reappear in another role later in this section, as causes of desires we might wish to satisfy, when he turns to the explanation of the pride a person takes in wealth (T 312). The "suit of fine cloaths," through its pleasurable beauty, operates as a cause of both desire and pride. A fuller consideration of Hume's discussion of the indirect passions, however, indicates that the causal relations depicted in this case cannot be generalized.

The analysis of pride catalogs a wide range of pleasures, including the satisfactions of having a virtuous character, or a fine reputation, as well as the joy in property and riches. In spite of his various statements about the direct passions, Hume does not treat all types of pleasure as natural and immediate causes of desire.⁵ This is made explicit in the passage cited earlier distinguishing pride from love, where Hume states, "pride and humility are pure emotions in the soul, unattended with any desire, and not immediately exciting us to action" (T 367; see also T 382). Both pride and love are pleasurable emotions, but emotions differently related to desire and action. Further, Hume's theory offers an explanation of why some pleasures—particularly, I think, those related to personal character—do not fit the simple model of the direct passions. The connection between desires and specific volitions is a causal one for Hume. When "exerting any passion in action" we use causal

judgments to choose means to our ends (T 416). These causal judgments are supported by experienced connections between actions and the pleasurable ends we hope to achieve. Having a virtuous character, or a fine reputation, involves patterns of actions over long periods of time. As a further complication, these patterns can often be realized in many alternative ways. Our experience here is often diffuse, and no one action, or set of actions, is associated with achieving these pleasures. When we reflect on the pleasure of a virtuous character, "the idea is too general to have a strongly felt tie to any particular actions. "A general idea, tho' it be nothing but a particular one consider'd in a certain view, is commonly more obscure; and that because no particular idea, by which we represent a general one, is ever fix'd or determinate, but may easily be changed for other particular ones, which will serve equally in the representation" (T 425). For this reason, Hume argued, general ideas have less influence on the imagination, and therefore on the passions.

From this discussion it appears that Hume's formulaic pronouncements about the direct passions, particularly desire and aversion, are not consistent with his account of the indirect passions. Even in simple cases, desire is not a "natural" (T 438), "immediate" (T 276) effect of "good consider'd simply" (T 439). This point can be put more strongly: the basic explanatory principles Hume develops for his account of the indirect passions make it impossible to hold a simple theory of the direct passions. Once we begin looking at what Hume says about the direct passions in the context of what he has said about the indirect, it is not very difficult to see why this is the case. In his first introduction of the concept of impressions of reflexion Hume wrote: "This idea of pleasure or pain, when it returns upon the soul, produces the new impressions of desire and aversion, hope and fear, which may properly be called impressions of reflexion, because derived from it" (T 8). At this early stage in the *Treatise* no further qualification would be possible. But all ideas are subject to the principles of association. Therefore the ideas of pleasure and pain are never considered simply, but always occur in the context of numerous associations. This is, of course, the central idea behind Hume's theory of the indirect passions, but it affects the direct passions as well. I desire the "suit of fine cloaths" for their beauty, but their beauty is judged in comparison with the possessions of others (T 375). Pride in dressing well may strengthen my desire, but only if those for whom I have esteem value fine clothes (T 321). The most beautiful suit may inspire no desire if I am "a-part from company," and would experience none of the pleasure that reflects back on me from the appreciation others might have for my finery (T 363). Hume's observation that "[w]e can form no wish, which has not a reference to society" (T 363) captures the insight that our desires, direct passions, are always embedded in, and emerge from, the associative and sympathetic context of the indirect passions.

IV. The Influence of the Calm Passions: Some Unanswered Questions

So far, I have been arguing that, given Hume's theory of the indirect passions, the causal background of desires is necessarily more complex than the *Treatise's* brief account of the direct passions suggests. I will now argue that this enlarged view of the direct passions, one which acknowledges that the direct passions are always thoroughly enmeshed in the indirect passions, can contribute to a better account of the influence of calm desires on action.

Hume was not the first philosopher of the passions to appeal to the concept of calm passions. Calm desires played an important role in Hutcheson's theory (as was noted earlier in this paper) but were also noted by Malebranche. In Hume's theory, as in those of his predecessors, calm desires are those that are experienced without "sensible agitation" (T 419). Unlike his predecessors (perhaps even Hutcheson), Hume could not derive the force or strength of calm desires from their connection to reason. For one of the important roles of calm desires in Hume's theory is to explain the origin of the mistaken belief that reason influences action. Reason alone, on Hume's view, is incapable of producing or preventing action (T 414). When we "counter-act a violent passion in prosecution of [our] interests and designs," it is not reason at work, but calm passion (T 418). It is only because the calm and tranquil action of the mind in reasoning is similar to the operation of calm desires that those "who judge of things from the first view and appearance" confound the two, and conclude that reason has an influence on action (T 417). It is these calm passions that are "vulgarly call'd . . . reason" (T 419).

For this position to be viable, some passions that are strong enough to curb violent desires must still themselves be calm. A calm but strong passion could both influence action (through its strength) and feel like the operation of reason (through its tranquility). Hume therefore needs an account of how calm passions can be strong. Hume agreed with most of his predecessors that violent passions have the force to influence action.⁶ His account of the direct passions concentrates on the factors that make passions more violent: proximity, especially in space or in the near future (T 428–429), uncertainty, opposition (T 421), novelty (T 423), particularity (T 424). By contrast, distance, especially in past time (T 431), security (T 421), familiarity (T 423), and generality (T 425) lead to less violent emotions. A pleasure that is near, and tinged with a little uncertainty and novelty, has a stronger influence on the passions than the pleasures that are familiar, secure, and perhaps a little more distant.

The difficulty with this discussion, however, is that it pays attention to only *one* of the dimensions along which the passions can be measured—the continuum between calm and violence. Since what Hume needs to establish is that desires can be strong *without* being violent, his account of the causes of violence in the direct passions works at cross-purposes to his argument. Hume

has, actually, very few comments on strengthening passions without increasing their violence—this in spite of the fact that he asserted so clearly that we must “distinguish betwixt a calm and a weak passion; betwixt a violent and a strong one” (T 419). The three features that Hume explicitly mentions in Book II regarding the strengthening of calm passions are custom (T 419, T 423), reflection (T 437), and resolution (T 437), but only custom receives any substantial discussion. Custom contributes to making sentiments calm by reducing their novelty, which would make them more violent. But Hume also thinks it contributes to their strength even when they are not violent: “The pleasure of facility does not so much consist in any ferment of the spirits, as in their orderly motion; which will sometimes be so powerful as even to convert pain into pleasure, and give us a relish in time for what at first was most harsh and disagreeable” (T 423). Custom, therefore, can create strong, calm pleasures. This explanation of calm passion has the serious defect that Hume gives no account of how custom itself works in relation to the passions. He doesn’t say anything in Part iii of Book II about how a calm passion might *become* “a settled principle of action” (T 419), given the powerful forces that contribute to the violence of the passions working in opposition to it. I will return to this point below.

It should be noted that the features to which Hume points as strengthening calm passions are nearly identical to the ones that Hutcheson appealed to in the *Essay*, where he wrote that we strengthen calm desires “thro’ frequent Reflection, and making them habitual” (*Essay*, 30; see also *Essay*, 166). This is significant because it highlights an important fact: Hume makes *no use* here of the resources that are unique to his own theory—the indirect passions and their related principles. The weakness of Hume’s explicit treatment of calm desire in Part iii of Book II is related to the weakness of his account of the direct passions more generally. Both stem from Hume’s failure to fully integrate the discussion of the direct passions into his innovative theory of the indirect passions.

Hume’s discussion of the “love of fame” in Part i and of the theory of sympathy developed there and used throughout other parts of the *Treatise* yield a better explanation than we find in Part iii of how calm passions gain strength. If I consider a remote good, my desire for it may be calm but weak. Sympathy can strengthen our passions, not by making them more violent, but by joining them together, in a sense, through a communication of feeling. Passions communicated through sympathy can support each other. Broadly shared passions gain strength. This is how the inherent weakness of general and distant views (which are, after all, characteristics of the moral point of view) is overcome by the operation of sympathy. Faint interests and pleasures that are revealed by sympathy to be “more constant and universal” can counterbalance our individual interests, not just in speculation, but in practice (T 591).

Hume describes the virtue of strength of mind as “the prevalence of the calm passions above the violent” (T 418). I noted above that although Hume says in *Treatise* II iii 4 that a passion which becomes a “settled principle of action” will be both calm and strong, he doesn’t explain how such a principle could become established. How could a calm passion have sufficient strength to prevail over a more violent one *before* custom takes hold? Hume has an answer available to him in his account of the indirect passions. Calm passions can become settled principles within an individual, directing action without opposition (T 419) and creating a “tendency or inclination” toward similar actions (T 422) because they gain strength initially from being shared through sympathy. Interestingly, the same features that make a passion calm, such as generality and distance from one’s personal interests, also make it more likely that the passion will be shared by others.

V. Conclusion

I have argued in this paper that the account of the indirect passions in Book II of the *Treatise* entails an interesting, complicated, and fruitful view of the direct passions. The direct passions are always embedded in the sympathetic associations of the indirect passions. Once this is recognized, Hume’s theory can provide a more satisfactory account of the calm passions than is currently available in Part iii of Book II. Hume does not pursue these implications. The deep differences between Hume’s theory of the passions and theories like Hutcheson’s were already clear—perhaps he did not want to magnify them. There are other possible explanations. In many respects, the arguments in “Of the will and direct passions” have greater affinity with Book I of the *Treatise* than with the first two parts of Book II. When he came to rework the ideas in the *Treatise* in the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Hume linked the account of the will to Book I’s analysis of causality. The analysis of the forces influencing the will, as Annette Baier has already noted, refers back to *Treatise* I iii 10, “Of the influence of belief.”⁷ And, Hume’s discussions of the direct passions of hope and fear (which I have not covered in this paper) are connected to Book I’s account of probability. These themes come to dominate Part iii of Book II. In the development of the account of the direct passions, the indirect passions surprisingly take a back seat. The unity implicit in Hume’s account of the passions was therefore never fully articulated.

NOTES

1. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd. ed. revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 439. All references to the *Treatise*

are to this edition and will be cited in the body of the paper as "T" followed by the page number.

2. Francis Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections with Illustrations on the Moral Sense* (London, 1728). References to this work will be given in the body of the paper as "Essay" followed by the page number in this edition.

3. In "A Dissertation on the Passions" the order of presentation is reversed. See David Hume, *Philosophical Works*, ed. T. H. Green and T. H. Grose (1882; reprint, Darmstadt: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1964), vol. 4, 139–166. John Immerwahr gives one account of the reason for this in "Hume's Dissertation on the Passions," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 32 (April 1994): 225–240. I have a different view.

4. This view contrasts with Hutcheson's view, mentioned above, in two ways. For Hutcheson, the term 'love' itself denotes the desire of the happiness of another (*Essay*, 64). And, benevolent desires are original, part of the "Frame of our Nature" (*Essay*, 7).

5. This is another point of contrast between Hume and Hutcheson. As indicated above, Hutcheson held that "[o]ur original Desires and Aversions may therefore be divided into five Classes, answering to the classes of our Senses" (*Essay*, 7).

6. But Hume thought there were exceptions: "A poetical description may have a more sensible effect on the fancy, than an historical narration. It may collect more of those circumstances, that form a compleat image or picture. It may seem to set the object before us in more lively colours. But still . . . [t]here is something weak and imperfect amidst all that seeming vehemence of thought and sentiment" (T 631).

7. Annette Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 157.