



John Bricke. *Mind and Morality: An Examination of Hume's Moral Psychology*

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Book Reviews

JOHN BRICKE, *Mind and Morality: An Examination of Hume's Moral Psychology*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. Pp. x + 263. ISBN 0–19–823589–5.

In this close analysis of Hume's moral psychology, John Bricke treats Hume as a thoroughly systematic thinker who aims for a comprehensive theory of mind. Bricke seeks to reveal the systematic structure of Hume's thought by a process he calls "regimenting" the text. Bricke also has the aim of placing Hume's theory in the context of contemporary action theory, the terms of which are inspired in large part by Davidsonian analyses.

To provide a theoretical framework, Bricke starts off with an analysis of practical reason and takes the basic analytical options to be conativism or cognitivism. He then argues that Hume's is a conativist theory of action and moral action. (Bricke subsequently goes on to argue that Hume's view should be understood as an "expanded moral conativism." More on this shortly.) The central concept for conativism is desire: as a reason for action, desire plays an ineliminable motivational role. Bricke provides detailed arguments designed to establish both that for Hume it is desire that plays the essential motivational role for action and that Hume explicitly rejects a cognitivist theory of action, moral action, and moral evaluation. On the face of it, neither of these are controversial claims. In chapter 2, Bricke offers an analysis of the centrality of desire taking *Treatise* II iii 3 as pivotal to the analysis of *action* in which desire is central.¹ In chapter 3, Bricke extends the analysis to specifically moral action and judgment, taking T III i 1 as a pivotal section.

In addition to these two sections of the *Treatise*—T II iii 3, "Of the influencing motives of the will"; T III i 1, "Moral distinctions not deriv'd from reason"—Bricke includes a third as "pivotal" (2), T III ii 1, "Justice, whether a natural or artificial virtue." The first sections argue, among other things, that

a passion is an "original fact" or "original existence." This distinctively Humean claim is central to the conativist thesis. Hume characterizes a passion as distinct from a belief in virtue of its not representing something external (or for that matter, internal, i.e., another passion) to the experiencer. Bricke reworks this claim, admitting that the resulting conception may be "only insecurely Hume's" (25), to be a point about how passions, and specifically desires, relate to the world, rather than a denial that they are representational in any sense. This way of relating is defined in terms of the notion "direction of fit." Bricke argues that passions, and specifically desires, as well as beliefs, can have representational content, and even the same representational content. *But*, whereas a belief can be evaluated in terms of its correctness, that is, in terms of its conformity in some sense to the way the world is, a passion is neither correct nor incorrect; it just *is* the way some person feels about the world or desires the world to be. Thus, if desire is a species of passion broadly understood, then it is a mental or psychological state whose relation to the world is one that aims for satisfaction; it has a "world-to-mind direction of fit." A belief, on the other hand, is truth-evaluable; it has a "mind-to-world direction of fit." Bricke wants to articulate a conception of passion, and of desire, that adequately distinguishes it from belief and that will "point the way to Hume's conativism" (25).

In keeping with his method of regimenting Hume in order to reveal the underlying systematicity of Hume's thought, Bricke combs the *Treatise* and *Enquiries* for textual evidence. Given the pivotal role Bricke assigns to T II iii 3 and T III i 1, textual support ought to lie therein as well as elsewhere in the text. In T II iii 3, Hume claims that he is endeavoring "to prove *first*, that reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will; and *secondly*, that it can never oppose passion in the direction of the will" (T 413). Is Hume talking here about passion in general, or does he mean to suggest that specific kinds of passion influence or direct the will? There is support in the text for the latter. For example, there is the Hobbesian language ("emotion of aversion or propensity," T 414) and the example of the *desirous* merchant (T 414). Following the provocative claim that "'Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger," Hume comments that a "trivial good may . . . produce a *desire* superior to what arises from the greatest and most valuable enjoyment" (emphases mine). In commenting on why reason might be confused with passion, Hume says:

Now 'tis certain there are certain calm desires and tendencies, which, tho' they be real passions, produce little emotion in the mind, and are more known by their effects than by the immediate feeling or sensation. These desires are of two kinds; either certain instincts originally implanted in our natures, such as benevolence and resentment, the love of life, and kindness to children; or the general appetite to good,

and aversion to evil, consider'd merely as such. When any of these passions are calm, and cause no disorder in the soul, they are very readily taken for the determinations of reason . . .

Beside these calm passions, which often determine the will, there are certain violent emotions of the same kind, which have likewise a great influence on that faculty. 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 417–418)

While these passages may not be decisive, they do lend support to a claim that desire plays an important and possibly a central role in practical judgment. The more comprehensive thesis of *expanded* moral conativism that Bricke wishes to advance, namely that desire is central not only to action, but to all moral action *and* evaluation, including the claims of justice, is one for which the textual support is less direct, more open to interpretation, and thus one which readers may find less persuasive.² In what follows, I will try to lay out in broad strokes the general structure of Bricke's treatment.

The analysis of practical reason establishing desire as the central motivating influence on the will is used as a basis for *moral* conativism via the systematic connection between T II iii 3 and T III i 1. If I understand correctly what Bricke is up to, I take it that a key passage supporting this connection would be the following:

Since morals, therefore, have an influence on the actions and affections, it follows, that they cannot be deriv'd from reason; and that because reason alone, as we have already prov'd, can never have any such influence. Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason of itself is utterly impotent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not the conclusions of our reason. (T 457)

Morals have an influence on the will, and that which influences the will is, from T II iii 3, desire. Therefore, putting the point in admittedly simplistic terms, morals excite desires and those in turn direct choices and actions that could be called moral. While Bricke takes T III i 1 as the place where Hume offers a direct argument for moral conativism with respect to practical reason, he does not highlight this passage. Rather, he argues that Hume's strategy in this section is to present two arguments to support moral conativism and to subvert moral cognitivism. The first applies the conclusions of his general conativism; the second attacks the moral cognitivist's claims about the distinctive evaluative content of purported moral beliefs (74). As Bricke sees it, Hume's strategy is to subvert moral cognitivism by showing that moral realism can neither give a naturalistic account of moral relations (or qualities,

although Hume's focus is on the former) nor can it establish a connection between alleged moral features and volition (T 465; Bricke 101).

However, Bricke is interested in showing that excavation of Hume yields not only moral conativism with respect to practical reason (i.e., wherein desires serve as major elements in reasons for action), but an *expanded* moral conativism, that is, can accommodate those moral "judgements" or "opinions" that are not construable as desires. He suggests that there is a comprehensive configuration of moral desires and affections that is isomorphic with a general configuration of the passions (107). According to Bricke, passions or sentiments consist of desires and affections. Bricke's analysis of the comprehensive configuration of desires and affections is worth quoting at length:

The complex Humean picture of the intersection of desire, belief, volition, and affection that has now emerged, if obviously an idealization, is a theoretically satisfying and illuminating one. While eschewing his psychological atomism, and while emphasizing some things he does not himself emphasize, it depicts a structure clearly present in the passions as Hume describes them. Building on the basic configuration of desire, belief, and volition that constitutes action for a reason it introduces the concept of affections, the concept of states of satisfaction or dissatisfaction consequent on the realization, or the failure to realize, the satisfaction-conditions on desire. Introducing special classes of person-implicating desires and affections, as well as person-directed passions, it introduces a yet more complicated configuration. Person-implicating desires (perhaps through the volitions to which they give rise) prompt the person-implicating affections of joy or grief that in turn prompt the person-directed affections of pride or humility, love or hatred. The person-directed affections of love or hatred in their turn generate the desires Hume calls benevolence or anger. These desires, it goes without saying, prompt volitions, affections, and desires in their own turn.

Attention to this more comprehensive configuration . . . reveals the functional or causal position of the affections and how that position contrasts with those of desires and volitions. . . . Precisely because of their ties to desires, and thus to volitions, affections can serve effectively in elliptical explanations of what a person does. Being cognizant of the comprehensive configuration, one can understand an agent's action when told that she acted from love, . . . even though [this explanation cites] affections rather than desires.

Commitment to the comprehensive configuration appears to commit Hume to an unqualified thesis of the *centrality of desire*: the satisfactions or dissatisfactions that constitute the affections, whether

person-directed or propositional, whether person-implicating or not, presuppose desires and the conditions on their satisfaction. (69)

Bricke's treatment urges setting aside the kinds of phenomenological description of sentiments that Hume favors and considering their functional and causal roles. The comprehensive structure he offers along these explanatory lines is extended to the analysis of specifically moral desires and affections via the claim, noted above, of isomorphism. The distinctive features of moral desires are universality, impartiality and their several person-implicating dimensions (107).³ Nonpractical moral judgments are "person-implicating propositional affections that are consequent upon the realization of, or upon the non-realization of, the satisfaction-conditions on specifically moral desires. These judgments, themselves instances of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, are specifically moral isomorphs of the affections Hume calls 'joy' and 'grief'" (149).

Bricke claims that this isomorphism is justified on systematic as well as substantive grounds:

Hume's direct and indirect arguments [against cognitivism] secure *moral conativism*, a theory specifically about moral reasons for action, *not* the *expanded moral conativism*—the comprehensive theory of moral desires and affections—to which he is committed and which we have now elaborated. Directed against moral cognitivism construed narrowly as a theory about moral reasons for action, they do not as such rule out essentially cognitivist accounts of other-than-practical moral judgements. Given the case for moral conativism, however—a case that includes Hume's constructive characterization of specifically moral desires—the requirements of simplicity and comprehensiveness of theory, and the requirement of a theory that fits moral thinking to a background theory of human cognitive, conative, and affective capacity, conspire to make a nearly compelling case for Hume's expanded theory, for his complex and inclusive theory of moral judgements as moral sentiments. What misgivings remain require Hume's attention to the facts that we do commonsensically think and talk in terms of moral beliefs and moral truths. To be quite compelling, Hume's expanded moral conativism must be seen successfully to subvert—or somehow to accommodate—*these* seemingly cognitivist appearances. (156)

The cognitivist appearances that Bricke thinks need to be subverted in order to successfully advance a non-cognitivist theory of morality could consist in the characterization of corrected moral sentiments as affections one

would feel if one were properly situated with respect to the persons and actions under consideration. Stroud, among others, puts the point nicely,

Our situation and our feelings are constantly changing, as are all our impressions, and we soon learn what we *would* experience if we *were* in a certain position that we know we are not in at the moment. . . . [T]hey are judgments about what we, or perhaps anyone, *would* feel on contemplating the object in question from a 'steady and general point of view'. The judgments are thus 'disinterested' in that they are not a direct expression of our current feelings or interests. (Stroud, *Hume*, 191)

Stroud goes on to say that while he doesn't think this puts Hume "completely in the camp of the moral rationalists" (191), it does divorce moral judgments from *actual* feelings. If that is so, then in the absence of an *actual* feeling, what else besides thought or belief would be operating? If I understand Bricke properly, his treatment of Hume as an *expanded* moral conativist aims to avoid this cognitivist appearance by suggesting that the mental state underlying such judgments is a moral desire, namely, a desire about how one wants people in general to behave (or not). This desire is an actual component of the mental economy whether the objects of moral evaluation are close or remote, and hence whether our feelings of approval or disapproval are strong or weak. Our nonpractical moral judgments or affections are, according to Bricke, person-implicating propositional affections or person-directed affections that presuppose moral desires and are therefore instances of satisfaction or dissatisfaction (149). Beliefs may be involved, i.e., beliefs about whether some moral desire has been realized or not, but what saves the theory from cognitivism or cognitivist appearances is the core necessary role of desire.

The final move in the systematization of Hume's moral theory, prior to the concluding chapter on moral agency, involves a treatment of justice or more generally of convention and "artificial moral desires" (chs. 5 and 6). The third "pivotal" section, T III ii 1, is taken by Bricke to establish that some moral desires implicate "artificial desires," that is, desires which depend on the existence of complex human conventions (Bricke, ch. 5). In contrasting natural and artificial desires, Bricke suggests that Hume's usage of "natural" and "non-natural" is not univocal and that this has been cause for some misunderstanding of Hume's account of the moral claims of justice, justice consisting in "artificial desires." In one sense, "natural" means simply nonmoral; in another sense, it means not artificial. Bricke then argues that moral desires implicate *both* natural, nonmoral, desires (a thesis for which Hume explicitly argues) and artificial nonmoral desires, i.e., desires that require the presence of conventions (171). The conventions constitutive of justice claims, then, can be construed to place moral demands on an agent because they are "implicated" by moral desires.

Bricke then argues that Hume must show that narrowly interested non-moral desires, when functioning within an appropriate framework of convention, correspond to the claims that the rules of justice make on an agent's conduct (195). As Bricke sees Hume's treatment, moral desires second narrowly interested ones. The difference between them is that between the impartial and the partial.

From her narrowly interested point of view, a co-operator desires that she comply with the rules of the particular convention to which she is party. (She also desires that the other parties to the particular convention comply as well.) From the moral point of view, by contrast, she desires that individuals act as narrowly interested parties to determine conventions of justice, that they be co-operators who act as the rules of convention require. (226–227)

Reinforcement or impartial seconding of one's own narrow interests consists in "making impartial application to [one's] own case" and impartially desiring that one "have and act from a co-operator's narrowly concerned desire to comply with justice's demands" (227).

Finally, Bricke concludes with a discussion of moral agency (ch. 7). Agency is understood as having the power to act in a certain way, specifically the power to act in light of the reasons one has for action. *Moral* agency consists in having moral desires and of being moved to action by those desires (235, 234).

This is a rich book. I have merely gestured at some of the themes (such as moral agency), and have not done justice to the many detailed arguments that Bricke offers in defense of his interpretation of Hume. I have rather focused on articulating an overview of the systematic picture Bricke offers. I have done this in part because the density of critical analysis offered for each thesis advanced sometimes leads the reader into an analytical thicket from which a view of the larger systematic theme is obscured. This is a book that demands patience and perseverance from the reader. One may not be persuaded that in the end Bricke's analysis is Hume's or even Humean. I find, for example, the analysis of convention and justice illuminating, but the treatment of specifically moral desire somewhat forced. I also wonder how to reconcile Bricke's claim of the core role of desire with the more spectatorial side of Hume's treatment of moral judgment. Bricke advocates setting aside Hume's psychological atomism, and I admit to finding that an appealing recommendation. Dispensing with or downplaying Hume's atomism may be a useful strategy for revealing ways in which Hume's treatment of mind continues to have philosophical import. That is different, however, from pushing the expanded conativist thesis. I am not sure that conativism as Bricke sees it would do full justice to the treatment of emotion and specifically moral sentiment in the mental

economy as Hume sees it. Specifically with respect to moral evaluation, it is a provocative thesis to advance, namely, the thesis of *expanded* moral conativism, that at the core of moral evaluation is moral desire. Morality is about conduct; if action is conativist, then the idea that moral evaluation is, at its core, conativist certainly suggests itself. On the other hand, I have some trouble seeing moral affections of approval and disapproval as at bottom satisfactions or dissatisfactions of desires. It seems to me that when Hume does talk about moral affections in terms of a feeling of satisfaction (e.g., T III i 2, at 471), the notion of satisfaction may have a broader connotation than one defined strictly in terms of desire, as, for example, when one finds a musical performance or a painting one is contemplating, "satisfying." Bricke himself acknowledges that what he offers is in places an "idealization" or regimentation rather than strictly or purely Hume's theory. In any case, through his sustained analytic rigor in identifying and developing systematic themes, Bricke casts a penetrating and incisive eye over dispersed but recurrent arguments and themes in Hume's work. Bricke also brings Hume into dialogue with contemporary philosophical concerns, and in so doing demonstrates that there are rich resources in Hume for ongoing philosophical work.

NOTES

1. References are to David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), hereafter cited as "T."
2. Bricke is not the first to make this general claim. Stroud, for example, says, "Given Hume's view that a desire or aversion is involved in the production of every action, his conception of morality has the consequence that a desire or aversion is somehow involved in the making of every moral judgment" (Barry Stroud, *Hume* [London: Routledge, 1977], 179). Bricke, however, attempts to flesh out in detail what that "somehow involved" might mean. Others, like Penelhum, would be less likely to endorse an *expanded* moral conativism.
3. We might note here that moral action, that is, action that elicits approval, can and even ought to be motivated by nonmoral desires. *Moral* desires are desires that persons act in morally approved ways, not that they must act from impartial, universal desires.

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