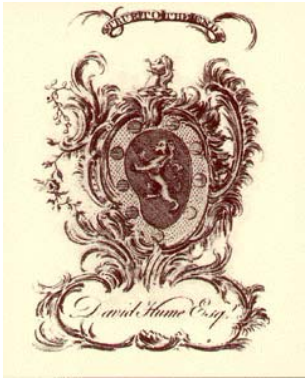

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PÁLL S. ÁRDAL. *Passions, Promises and Punishment.* Edited by Mikael M. Karlsson and Jorundur Gudmundsson. Reykjavik: University of Iceland Press, 1998. Pp. 256. ISBN 9979-54-348-5.

For all of us who have had our understanding of Hume's thought deepened by Páll Árdal's ground-breaking work on the centrality of Hume's theory of the passions, it is a great pleasure to have these essays gathered in this volume. The editors are to be thanked for making them all available together, and for including Fred Wilson's substantial essay on Árdal's work as an introduction.

There are fifteen papers in the collection. Part I contains three essays on punishment and sympathy; Part II comprises six essays on the nature of promises; and Part III consists of six essays on Hume. While it is most appropriate for readers of this journal that I concentrate on the papers in Part III, I begin with brief comments on some of the others.

"Some Reflections upon a Standard Definition of Punishment" is a critique of H. L. A. Hart, and a warning against using legal punishment as a paradigm for all forms of it. "Does Anyone Deserve to Suffer?" is a stimulating argument against the common belief in what Butler called "ill-desert"—the belief that the wicked, just by being that way, merit suffering (here or in Hell). One can, as Árdal says, qualify this belief by denying that anyone is entitled to *inflict* the suffering; but Árdal is against the core belief itself. I only wish this piece were longer, and that he had said something in it about the natural correlative thesis that virtue ought always to be its own reward. In "Of Sympathetic Imagination," he argues for the moral centrality of sympathy, indicating the importance of it in the moral systems of Hume and Adam Smith. He points out some of the inadequacies of Hume's account, while omitting, strangely, the importance sympathy has in his system for the generation of justice, through making us conscious of the effects of unjust behavior on others.

The six essays in Part II give us a detailed and resourceful theory of the nature of promises, a theory that includes perceptive criticisms of Hume's position on this issue (see particularly essay 7, "Hume and Reid on Promise, Intention and Obligation"). The essence of Árdal's own analysis, presented at the outset of the first essay ("And That's a Promise") is that promises are statements of intention that need not involve the use of the *word* "promise" in order to be made. This qualification is important in view of the disproportionate attention given to promissory locutions in the wake of Austin's treatment of performative utterances. Árdal sums the point up nicely when he says that "'"I promise" does not make a statement' does not entail 'promises are not statements'" (75).

In order to derive the obligatoriness of promises from artifice, Hume attacks the opposing view that this obligatoriness is natural. He does this by

saying that if it were, promises would express either resolutions or desires or volitions; each view leads to absurdities. Since there is no independent motive to entrench promise-keeping other than the sense of duty, its obligatoriness has to be derived from convention. His account typically centers upon the commercial interest we all have in the institution of making undertakings on which others can rely; this institution comes to have a moral dimension attached to it in the same way that other forms of justice do. Árdal rightly parts company with Hume by denying that the promising convention, and its obligatoriness, attaches to the use of a particular form of words. His own view that the force of the convention attaches to a special class of statements of intention is an undoubted improvement on Hume's view (though his modifications on pages 128–31 must be noted). Altogether, this group of essays amounts to a monograph of high quality on a basic social practice, graced with many wise and humane observations.

The papers devoted to Hume's philosophy in Part III are impressive, and contain the insights one would expect from the scholar who first made clear to us how important Hume's theory of the passions is for understanding his theory of value, thereby freeing us from the old (and natural) view that it had no important implications beyond that of showing off the way in which his atomistic associationism could be used to anatomise our mental life. Kemp Smith, of course, alerted us to the fact that the mental science on show in Book II is also at work full steam in Book I; Árdal deploys his understanding of these matters to take us much further than this, so that we are now able to have a deeper understanding of Hume's psychology of evaluation (essay 13) and of what is and what is not going on in the "is-ought" passage (essay 12). In this review I would like to comment from my own perspective on two very significant pieces, namely essay 11 ("Some Implications of the Virtue of Reasonableness in Hume's *Treatise*") and essay 14 ("Convention and Value"). In the former, perhaps the richest in the book, Árdal examines the different senses of "reason" in Hume. When he is urging reason's practical impotence when unaided by desire, Hume seems to equate reason with understanding or truth. When explaining the nature of approval or disapproval, he distinguishes them from other calm passions by telling us that they are aroused by impartial or unbiased judgments, and in Book III, Part iii, Section 1, he attributes his judgments to "that *reason,* which is able to oppose our passion," which he declares to be "nothing but a general calm determination of the passions, founded on some distant view or reflexion." Árdal calls this distant view "reasonableness." Hume, he says, judges it in terms of its utility, and considers it to be a virtue. The virtue, then, would be the *habit* of making dispassionate rather than interested judgments. This trait could manifest itself both in the formation of vulgar opinions and in the formation of philosophical theories. So our beliefs, both natural and philosophical, may be viewed as having utility, and therefore as being proper objects of approval. While this may make Hume too much of a pragmatist for some tastes, it has the great interpretive

merit of providing grounds for recommending beliefs that Hume denies to be otherwise based on good reasons. (It would, for example, provide an essentially moral basis for preferring beliefs based on induction to any of their competitors that were based on superstition.) It also brings the Humean account of the virtues to bear directly on the epistemology of Book I of the *Treatise*.

This last feature of Árdal's exegetical strategy reappears in essay 14 on "Convention and Value." He argues here that Hume's theory of language in Book I only makes clear sense in the light of his later theory of the artificial virtues. Hume is not, he insists, committed to defining meaning by reference to private images as is so often said; on the contrary, ideas only have the place they do in the meaningfulness of our discourse through the observance of linguistic conventions. These arise through the same perception of mutual interest that lies behind the practices of justice, and require the habit of objectivity. So the "concept of a responsible language user is strictly analogous to the concept of a just man" (233).

There is no doubt that this recognition of the implications of Hume's theory of the virtues enriches the understanding of the discussion of generality and abstraction in Book I. I have to express some mild reservation about it, however. While it is no doubt a genuine feature of the Humean understanding of the fully functioning social being, we are not, in my view, at liberty to forget that the Hume of Book I insists, in neo-Cartesian fashion, that we are unable ever to reach beyond our impressions and ideas. So a full Humean story will have to include an account of the generation of the beliefs in the world of objects and other persons that is presupposed in the formation of conventions, and I find it hard to see how these beliefs can be formed, or articulated, if linguistic conventions have to be in place before the thinking this demands can occur, and before beliefs of any sort can be articulated. There seems to be a circle here that is analogous to the one Hume locates in those who wish to base the convention of promise-keeping on some prior contract that could not be entered into if promises did not exist already. I do not suggest that Árdal is wrong in his reading of Hume; it is rather because I feel largely persuaded by him that I think Hume has a problem.

The collection of these essays is most welcome, and a great service to Hume scholarship and to the philosophical community at large. My only complaint is that while the editors have provided a good index, they have not indicated where the essays in the book first appeared. One has to work this out from cross-references, which are only present in some cases. This aside, I am sure we shall all be in their debt for a long time, and I would wish to join my words of tribute to those in Fred Wilson's opening essay on Páll Árdal's work.

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