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Hume Studies Volume XXVII, Number 1 (April, 2001) 3-84.

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Moral Skepticism and Moral Naturalism in Hume's *Treatise*

NICHOLAS L. STURGEON

Section I

I believe that David Hume's well-known remarks on *is* and *ought* in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (T 469-70)¹ have been widely misunderstood, and that in consequence so has their relation to his apparent ethical naturalism and to his skepticism about the role of reason in morality. My aim in this paper is to display their connection with these larger issues in Hume's work by placing them in a more illuminating light. Readers may wonder whether there is anything left to say about the passage containing these remarks; they may also share Barry Stroud's suspicion that the vast literature focused on this one paragraph has "given it an importance and point out of all proportion to its actual role in the text of the *Treatise*."² But I have some new things to say. I agree, moreover, that many recent discussions, in projecting twentieth-century assumptions onto Hume's text, have accorded this passage the wrong sort of importance: that is part of what I want to correct. But getting clear about what Hume is saying here is, I shall argue, a way of moving familiar and obviously central questions about his views on morality into an unfamiliar but revealing focus. Hume's *is-ought* thesis is commonly, and I believe correctly, seen as an application of his more general skepticism about the capacity of reason to discover "moral distinctions." But that general skepticism is usually taken, in turn, to conflict with those many passages in which Hume

appears to say, in a reductive and naturalistic vein, that ascriptions of moral virtue and vice simply state certain empirical facts, facts about our own sentiments. My central thesis, however, is that Hume's view that there is a logical gap between *is* and *ought* is not merely consistent with his reductive naturalism, but actually depends on it. It is precisely *because* moral ascriptions state the facts that they do about our sentiments that no *ought* can be derived from an *is* and, a bit more generally, that reason is unable to discover moral distinctions. Hume's skepticism about reason in ethics depends, I shall argue, on his reductive ethical naturalism.

This is not the usual understanding of Hume's views, and it will require careful explanation and defense. I shall proceed in several stages. My first step, in Section II, will be to argue that Hume's naturalism is at least consistent with his skepticism about reason, and in particular with his remarks about *is* and *ought*. I shall show this by focusing on a difficulty often taken to epitomize the conflict between these two strains in his thought: namely, that the paragraph containing these remarks (T 469–70: henceforth, the *is-ought* paragraph) and the one immediately preceding it (which I shall call the matter-of-fact paragraph (T 468–9)) appear, on their most natural readings, flatly to contradict one another.³ On the most common reading of the *is-ought* paragraph, it assumes the existence of two classes of statements, *is*-statements and *ought*-statements, and declares that no member of the latter class can be derived entirely from members of the former. In the preceding paragraph, however, Hume appears in the guise of an ethical naturalist and subjectivist, and, if we take him at his word, simply equates a moral judgment with one asserting what he himself calls a "matter of fact," albeit a psychological fact about oneself:

So that when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it.
(T 469)

But, one supposes, if a moral assessment of an action or character is equivalent in meaning to a description of one's sentiments, then it can be derived from that description, and there is certainly no logical gap between the description and the assessment, no gap between facts and values. So what has happened to the skeptical divide between *is* and *ought*?

Commentators have found it hard to accept that Hume, in two immediately adjacent passages, should have contradicted himself quite so directly. But what I have called the natural readings of these two paragraphs are very plausible. To be sure, the *is-ought* paragraph stops short of *saying* that no *ought*

can be derived from an *is*.⁴ It says merely that the transition from *is* to *ought* is “of the last consequence,” and

that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. (T 469)

But “*seems* altogether inconceivable” has struck most readers as Humean irony, rather than caution, especially since it is hard to see how a merely apparent inconceivability could “subvert all the vulgar systems of morality” (T 470), as Hume promises that attention to his remarks on *is* and *ought* would do,⁵ or could prevent reason from discovering “moral distinctions”; and that reason is incapable of such discovery is not only the central thesis of the section which the *is-ought* paragraph concludes, but is a theme Hume emphasizes elsewhere.⁶

So the natural construal of the *is-ought* paragraph seems correct (and I think it is). But so does the natural construal of the matter-of-fact paragraph, especially since its identification of moral facts with facts of some sort about our sentiments, facts that we can know, is also a frequently repeated theme of Hume’s ethical writings. There are variations in his account of whose feelings, and just which of their feelings, are in question. But although we shall eventually trace some of these variations to a deep difficulty in his view, none of them makes questions of virtue and vice any less questions of fact.⁷ There are of course ways to construe the matter-of-fact paragraph at less than face value. One common suggestion, for example, is that Hume is here struggling, not quite successfully, to formulate a noncognitivist view according to which moral statements *express*, but do not describe, the speaker’s own current sentiments. But this reconstrual does not extend at all comfortably to those other passages in which Hume appears to be identifying moral facts with facts about human sentiments, but not with facts about anyone’s actual current sentiments.⁸ And, in any case, the search for alternative readings is largely motivated by the assumption that any more straightforward reading will leave the matter-of-fact paragraph inconsistent with the *is-ought* paragraph; and I shall show in Section II that that assumption is mistaken. (It may also be partly motivated by a different assumption: that the natural reading, on which moral judgments turn out to be beliefs *about* our sentiments, conflicts with, and would have been seen by Hume to conflict with, his prominent thesis (T 457) that moral judgments play a role in motivation that reason alone never does. But I shall argue in Section III that Hume would have seen no conflict between these views, and hence that this further assumption, too, is mistaken.)

The key to avoiding the inconsistency is to see exactly where Hume draws the line between *is* and *ought*. This is the main point I believe previous writers have missed: that although Hume's distinction is one that matters to his epistemology of morals, it is not the twentieth-century philosopher's "fact-value" distinction. This much can be established quite firmly, moreover, just by careful attention to the section of the *Treatise* in which these two paragraphs occur; and it suffices by itself to remove the apparent conflict between Hume's subjectivist ethical naturalism and his views about *is* and *ought*.

But it still leaves unanswered several obvious questions about *why* Hume should say what he does, and these will require us to range farther afield. The most prominent question is of course why he thinks no *ought* can be derived from an *is*, but it turns out to be useful in answering that question to have dealt with some others first: so I start out in Section III by asking why it is that, in the matter-of-fact paragraph, he describes the facts about our sentiments that constitute moral facts as "objects of feeling," rather than of reason. I argue that he means by this that they are known without inference; that he believes this because he deliberately models moral qualities on secondary qualities, and is misled by standard eighteenth-century characterizations (including his own) of secondary qualities into thinking that this will make these qualities objects of noninferential knowledge; and that this mistake explains some important features of his position. It explains, in particular, why he believes that he can without inconsistency (a) combine complete skepticism about the capacity of reason to discover moral truths with the view that we do have moral knowledge, and, again without inconsistency, (b) combine the views that (i) moral judgments embody genuine knowledge, that (ii) these judgments motivate "of themselves," and that (iii) although sentiments motivate "of themselves," reason never does. Since his deepest views about knowledge will *not* allow him to treat as noninferential the knowledge of our own sentiments he wants to count as moral knowledge, however, he cannot in fact combine all these doctrines; so any consistent reconstruction of his views will have to decide which features to treat as basic.

I argue that we should take the reductive, subjectivist, naturalistic strain in his moral theory as basic; and I do so not only on the evidence of the passages commonly recognized as supporting it, but also on less familiar grounds. For I argue that it offers the best reconstruction of Hume's *skepticism* about the capacity of reason to establish moral conclusions. At the conclusion of Section III I suggest that a competing, noncognitivist reconstruction of his reasons for this skepticism—focusing on the motivating power moral judgments are supposed to have and beliefs about "objects of reason" to lack—accommodates Hume's views far less well than is usually thought. And

in Section IV, returning to the question of why he believes in an *is-ought* gap, I argue, again contrary to the usual view, that a naturalistic understanding of his theory supports his belief in this skeptical divide very nicely. His subjectivist naturalism is avowedly designed to model moral qualities on secondary qualities, and to contrast them with facts that are “in the object,” as Locke thought primary qualities were; but Locke is emphatic that from no amount of information about an object’s primary qualities could we ever derive conclusions about its secondary qualities. Hume, I suggest, thinks that a similar point holds in ethics, and for similar reasons. That is why his belief in the barrier between *is* and *ought* is not only consistent with his reductive naturalism, but actually depends on it. The naturalism makes moral facts into facts about our sentiments; and conclusions about our sentiments cannot be derived from any amount of objective information, information about the objects of those sentiments.

In Section V I address a number of objections to my suggestion. All of them bring out interesting consequences of my view, and at least one constitutes a severe challenge to it (though I defend an answer). In Section VI I ask whether anything like Hume’s view, as I have described it, has a chance of being right. I argue that he is clearly wrong, and wrong for reasons that are already in the critical literature on his moral theory—though they have not been seen as objections to his views on *is* and *ought*. His *is-ought* thesis, on my understanding of it, depends on taking our moral feelings to be similar to secondary-quality sensations, but in the respects that matter they are not similar: so Hume is in my view mistaken, but mistaken for reasons of some philosophical interest. I also point out some features of his own account of (especially) the artificial virtues that should have led him to see the relevant difference. Of course, if there are features of his views that ought to have led him to reject the *is-ought* thesis, as I interpret it, that means (as I concede) that although my interpretation fits with some things he believes, it conflicts with others. However, I argue, this concession is less damaging to my reading than one might think: for, I claim, the conflict I point to in Hume’s views about morality (and, specifically, about the moral sentiments) is just a special instance of a tension that is clearly present anyway in his treatment of a wide variety of mental states.

Two general points, finally, about the discussion to follow. First, although I undoubtedly run against the current in taking Hume to be offering reductive *analyses* for moral judgments,⁹ I should make clear that I do not suppose him to regard these “analyses” as ones that would be accepted as adequate by just any competent speaker. I take his reconstruction of these judgments to be epistemologically motivated and deliberately deflationary. I thus find little to challenge, on Hume’s behalf, in J. L. Mackie’s contention that

when an ordinary speaker calls an action vicious, he surely does not *mean* merely that it is such as to provoke in him the reaction (whatever it may be) called blaming,

and hence that, to give Hume a “defensible view” in the matter-of-fact paragraph, about attributions of vice,

we must read him as intending to say that this is what you ought to mean, because that is all that, on reflection, you could maintain.¹⁰

All I claim is that it is this epistemologically reconstructed (or “deflated”) content that Hume takes as the basis for answering questions about the logical or evidential relations of an attribution of vice to other statements—including, most prominently, the question whether such an attribution might follow from any *is*-statements.¹¹

Second, I am concerned throughout only with Hume’s views in the *Treatise*, philosophically his most difficult and interesting work—and surely topic enough for one paper. I cite a fair bit of evidence from his other works, but only when it appears to illuminate the doctrines of the *Treatise*, either by helpfully restating the same or nearly the same views, or else by developing them in ways that may indicate the direction he was moving in that earlier work.

Section II

I begin with my argument that there is no inconsistency between the *is-ought* paragraph and the matter-of-fact paragraph. On the usual interpretation of the *is-ought* paragraph (and on mine), Hume says that no *ought* can be derived from an *is*. In the immediately preceding matter-of-fact paragraph, he says of the vice in “any action allow’d to be vicious” that it consists in a certain “matter of fact,” though one that is “the object of feeling, not of reason,” and that “lies in yourself, not in the object”; and he says that in calling the action vicious one states nothing but that matter of fact (T 468–9). This can look inconsistent, since it allows that a moral conclusion is not just derivable from, but is actually equivalent to, a statement of fact. But there is no contradiction. To see why not, we need only be as careful in determining what Hume understands by an *is*-statement as commentators usually are in determining what he counts as an *ought*-statement. For no one takes Hume to mean that an *ought*-statement is simply one expressed using the word “ought,” even though this quite literal interpretation is certainly suggested by his own description, in the *is-ought* paragraph, of the transition that concerns him. The

surprise he has encountered in every system of morality he has hitherto read occurs “of a sudden” when

instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is* and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. (T 469)

Now if this really did express the limits of Hume’s concern there would of course be no contradiction between the paragraphs we are considering: for “Wilful murder is vicious” does not contain the words “ought” or “ought not.” (Nor, to anticipate an only slightly less literal proposal, does Hume ever suggest that attributions of virtue and vice are equivalent to statements “connected” by these expressions.) But no one seriously supposes that the apparent contradiction can be eluded so easily. Nor should they, for the context of Hume’s remarks on *is* and *ought* shows quite clearly that he intends to include as *ought*-statements all judgments of virtue and vice, however worded. His concern throughout most of this section, under the heading, “Moral distinctions not deriv’d from Reason,” is with the question whether “moral distinctions”—including, variously, those concerning virtue and vice, right and wrong (T 463), moral good and evil (T 464, 466), and duty and obligation (T 468)—can be established by reason, by “thought and understanding” (T 463). The *is-ought* paragraph comes at the conclusion of a sustained argument that they cannot (T 463–9). So it would be most surprising if Hume, when he speaks suddenly of the transition from *is* to *ought*, did not have in mind the transition to *any* conclusion expressing a “moral distinction,” whether or not expressed with an “ought.”¹² This interpretation is confirmed, moreover, by his remark within the *is-ought* paragraph that a “small attention” to the difficulty of passing from *is* to *ought*

wou’d subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see, that the distinction of *vice* and *virtue* is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceived by reason. (T 470, my emphasis)

So commentators are right to think that “Wilful murder is vicious” counts, in Hume’s view, as an *ought*-statement, and hence that when Hume, in the matter-of-fact paragraph, equates this statement with one about our own feelings, he does explicitly equate an *ought*-statement with a statement of fact.

But does he thereby equate it with an *is*-statement? That depends on what counts as an *is*-statement, and this issue deserves more attention than it usually receives. If “Wilful murder is vicious” is an *ought*-statement, then

is-statements can no more be identified just by their “copula” than *ought*-statements can. This much almost all interpreters get right. But what they usually appear to assume instead, without argument, is that *is*-statements include all claims about matters of fact. This assumption makes Hume inconsistent, however, and there is also strong independent evidence against it. This evidence is found in the larger argument to which the *is-ought* paragraph is attached as a conclusion, the same argument to which I have just appealed in defending the usual view of what counts as an *ought*-statement. What a careful reading of this larger argument shows is that *is*-statements do not include every kind of statement about matters of fact and, in particular, that they do not include the kind with which Hume equates an *ought*-statement.

For what Hume has emphasized throughout this preceding argument is a contrast between (a) “moral distinctions,” on the one hand, and (b) what he calls “objects of reason” (or, equivalently, of “thought and understanding”) on the other: his conclusion, in fact, is just that these categories do not overlap, that “morality is not an object of reason” (T 469). We have noted that this provides reasonable grounds for taking *ought*-statements just to be those, however worded, that concern moral distinctions; so it surely provides equally good grounds for taking *is*-statements to be any, however worded, that are about objects of reason. But then we need to note carefully what these objects are. They come, Hume says in his initial characterization of them, in two varieties, corresponding to the two “operations of human understanding,” “the comparing of ideas” and—more important for our purposes—“the *inferring* of matter of fact.” So if moral distinctions are to be objects of reason, he says,

the character of virtuous either must lie in some relations of objects, or must be a matter of fact, *which is discovered by our reasoning*. (T 463, my emphasis throughout)

He then argues in turn against each alternative: first (T 463–8) that morality does not consist in any relations “susceptible of certainty and demonstration” (T 463), and then, in what I have called the matter-of-fact paragraph, that it does not consist in the other sort of objects of reason either. This latter argument, brief as it is, is notable for our purposes for including, within the space of three sentences, two careful statements of Hume’s intended conclusion. This is that morality does not consist “in any *matter of fact, which can be discover’d by the understanding*” (T 468; emphasis after the comma mine). And again:

But can there be any difficulty in proving, that vice and virtue are not matters of fact, *whose existence we can infer by reason?* (T 468; emphasis again mine)

So *is*-statements are statements about objects of reason; and, as these quoted passages show, objects of reason clearly do not include all matters of fact. They include all “demonstrable relations,” and they include all those matters of fact, as Hume carefully emphasizes, that are discoverable by the appropriate operation of the understanding—that is, *inference*.¹³ As he is quick and equally careful to emphasize, however, the matter of fact in which the vice of willful murder consists is not one of these: “’tis the object of feeling, not of reason” (T 468). It is not a matter of fact that we do or can discover by inference. A description of it, therefore, is not an *is*-statement; and so when Hume equates an *ought*-statement with such a description, he *is* equating an *ought*-statement with a statement of fact, but he is not equating an *ought* with an *is*.¹⁴

The *is-ought* paragraph looks like a concluding restatement of Hume’s attack on rationalist moral epistemology. The standard view I have been criticizing gets this right, making the central claim of the *is-ought* paragraph a consequence of the arguments that precede it. But my reading, while saving Hume from inconsistency, also preserves this relation, displaying in an especially straightforward way, in fact, just how the only part of the *is-ought* thesis that matters to his argument follows from what he has already said. He has denied that moral distinctions are objects of reason. Since objects of reason are just conclusions discoverable by an operation of reason, however, and since inference from what we have already discovered is one such operation, the set of objects of reason is subject to an obvious closure condition: any conclusion derivable from objects of reason is itself an object of reason. In holding that moral distinctions are *not* objects of reason, therefore, Hume has committed himself also to the claim that they cannot be inferred from any objects of reason. And on my reading of the *is-ought* paragraph, of course (with *ought*-statements about moral distinctions and *is*-statements about objects of reason), that is what it says.¹⁵

It might seem a problem for my reading, however, that it also leaves Hume committed to an even stronger claim than this: not just that moral distinctions are not discoverable by inference from objects of reason (that is, from true *is*-statements), but that they are not discoverable by inference from any truths whatever.¹⁶ This is a stronger claim because, as we have just seen, there are matters of fact about our own sentiments that are *not* objects of reason, and Hume must hold that moral conclusions cannot be inferred from *them*,

either. But then it may seem that I have just relocated, rather than removed, the inconsistency in Hume's remarks. For he does equate "Wilful murder is vicious" with a claim about one's own sentiments: and even if this does not equate it with an *is*-statement, it does equate it with a statement of fact. So doesn't it still imply that it *can* be inferred from a matter of fact and so be discovered by inference?

The answer to this question, however, is that Hume explicitly denies that a transition of this sort, from the right sort of claim about one's sentiments to an attribution of virtue or vice, is an inference:

We do not infer a character to be virtuous, because it pleases: But in feeling that it pleases after such a particular manner, we in effect feel that it is virtuous.¹⁷ (T 471; my emphasis)

What we have, in Hume's view, are two linguistic vehicles (for example, "This character pleases after such a particular manner" and "This character is virtuous") for expressing the same thought; and though neither uses the word "ought," *both* presumably make an *ought*-statement—indeed, we should probably say, the same *ought*-statement. All Hume is committed to holding is that this *ought*-statement, however expressed, cannot be inferred from anything *else* we know. This is a remarkable view, and we shall have to consider at length what reasons he might have for holding it. But it involves him, so far, in no inconsistency.

My suggestion about what Hume means to count as an *is*-statement enjoys a number of striking advantages, then, over the standard view, according to which *is*-statements include all statements of fact. (1) It makes the distinction between *is*-statements and *ought*-statements a straightforward development of one between two corresponding sorts of truths, on which Hume has just been insisting; (2) it removes entirely the apparent contradiction between the *is-ought* paragraph and the preceding matter-of-fact paragraph; and (3) it nevertheless leaves the heart of Hume's claim about *is* and *ought* a straightforward consequence of what he has said in the preceding paragraphs. (4) It accomplishes all this, moreover, without questioning what I have called the natural readings of these two passages. Hume does, on my reading, identify virtue and vice with certain matters of fact about our sentiments, ones which he says are "the object of feeling, not of reason." And he does assert, immediately thereafter, without contradicting himself, that there is a logical gap between *is* and *ought* (that is, between all objects of reason and these particular objects of feeling), attention to which would "subvert all the vulgar systems of morality."

Although I know of no other way of reading Hume that shares all these advantages, my interpretation does also leave some obvious questions. Two in particular require discussion. Hume takes assessments of virtue and vice to state certain matters of fact about one's own sentiments which (1) are *not* objects of reason, but (2) *are* objects of feeling. So one question is: (1) Why does he think that these matters of fact are not objects of reason? More especially, why does he think that they cannot be inferred from any other matter of fact? More especially still: since he has general and well-known skeptical doubts about the possibility of reason's inferring any matter of fact from any other (for they have "no discoverable connexion together" (T 103)), why does he think, as he appears to, that there is a *distinctive* problem about inferring these matters of fact, one that would remain even if that more general skeptical difficulty were set aside? And the second question is: (2) What does he mean in calling these matters of fact objects of feeling? And is this something he can consistently maintain?

Answering the first of these questions is my central aim in this paper, and I shall focus on it in great detail, beginning in Section IV. But it will prove easier to introduce some needed preliminary points, and also to explain why I am less attracted than many interpreters of Hume have been to one familiar answer to the first question, if I deal with the second first. So that is where I shall start.

Section III

What, then, does Hume mean in calling these matters of fact about our sentiments objects of feeling rather than of reason? Primarily, I think, just that our knowledge of them is immediate, not based on inference.¹⁸ He could not allow that our knowledge of them was inferential without admitting that they "can be discover'd by the understanding," something he has explicitly denied; so all that might be in question is whether he thinks we have knowledge of them at all. But surely he does, for he describes these facts as ones we "find" (that is, discover) in ourselves. Nor is this passage the only one in which he attributes our noninferential knowledge of our "perceptions" in our own mind to "feeling."¹⁹

But then there is a problem, given Hume's characterization of these facts, on the one hand, and some of his best-known views about knowledge, on the other. For consider again the matter of fact one is said to state in calling an action or character vicious: "that *from* the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame *from* the contemplation of it" (T 469; my emphasis). Hume surely means both these occurrences of "from" to be

causal. So this is a claim not just about the existence of a sentiment but about its causes. Nor is this reference to causation a mere slip on Hume's part: for even if he were willing to set aside the requirement that the feeling come "from the constitution of your nature,"²⁰ he could not drop the reference to a causal relation between the feeling and some associated impression or idea without dropping all reference to (what we would call) the sentiment's *content*. His emphatic view is that passions and sentiments have, intrinsically, no reference beyond themselves:

A passion is an original existence, or, if you will, modification of existence, and contains not any representative quality, which renders it a copy of any other existence or modification. (T 415)

Passions therefore owe the content we and Hume normally ascribe to them—for example, being a disapprobation of *willful murder*—entirely to a *causal* relation to some associated perception, just as his formulation suggests: disapprobation of willful murder is blame you feel "from the contemplation of it" (T 469).²¹ All Hume can allow we might know or say about our feelings without importing the concept of causation, therefore, is that we are feeling blame, not that the blame is directed at anything; but no statement about our feeling of blame that fails to mention that it is blame *at willful murder* could look even remotely plausible as an account—even a deflationary account—of what anyone is saying in assessing *that action*.

So Hume is committed to holding both that our knowledge of these matters of fact about our sentiments is noninferential, and that the knowledge in question is causal. And the obvious question is: how can Hume, in consistency, claim that we have any causal knowledge not based on inference? The answer, I believe, is that he cannot, and that because he cannot he is doomed in his attempt to represent our knowledge of the relevant facts about our sentiments, and consequently our moral knowledge, as noninferential. I believe that what it is more instructive to notice, however, is that there is an important reason why he fails to see that he cannot. For this failure is plausibly seen as a direct consequence of a more general inconsistency which, on anyone's reading, is clearly present in his views anyway.

Hume's explicit intention, in the matter-of-fact paragraph, as many readers have noticed, is to draw an analogy between moral qualities and *secondary* qualities, as the latter are understood in the "modern" (and mainly, as we shall see, Locke's) philosophy.

Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compar'd to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind: . . . (T 469)

But in working out this analogy, Hume follows alternately two very different, indeed incompatible, thoughts about just what, according to modern philosophy, sounds, colors, heat and cold are supposed to be. One of these, invoked in the passage just quoted, embodies a wild but, by the time Hume wrote, quite standard misrepresentation of Locke, a misrepresentation Hume helps to perpetuate each time he summarizes the “modern” view (T 226; EHU 154). On this understanding, Locke identifies secondary qualities with certain ideas (Hume’s “perceptions”) that bodies produce in the mind of a perceiver.²² Now, despite notorious vagaries in his formulations, this is something Locke never does. If he *had* done so, however, his views would make colors and sounds promising candidates for noninferential knowledge, and an analogous account of moral qualities could be expected to do the same for them. Perceptions in the mind are just the sort of thing of which we are supposed to have intuitive knowledge, on either Locke’s or Hume’s epistemological views. At least, this is so if the mind the relevant perceptions are in is one’s *own*. But the matter-of-fact paragraph shows that that is precisely what Hume is assuming. For his comparison of virtue and vice to secondary qualities comes hard on the heels of his claim that *ascriptions* of virtue and vice are to be understood as claims about the contents of one’s own mind; so that is presumably how he thinks ascriptions of secondary qualities are to be understood as well, according to “modern philosophy.”²³ I suggest that it is largely Hume’s complicity in this standard misrepresentation of Locke on secondary qualities, therefore, which explains his confidence that, by modeling virtue and vice on secondary qualities, he has made our knowledge of them noninferential and even (as he at one point explicitly says (T 546–7)) infallible.

But not all of Locke’s influence on Hume is channeled through this misrepresentation. What Locke actually says about secondary qualities, of course, is that they are *powers* in objects, in virtue of their real or primary qualities, to produce certain sensations in us.²⁴ His conception of a secondary quality is thus a thoroughly *causal* one, and secondary qualities as he understands them are not the sort of thing of which Hume could think we have noninferential knowledge. Although this causal aspect of secondary qualities makes no appearance in Hume’s capsule summaries of Locke’s view, moreover, it shows up prominently once we turn to the details of his account of moral qualities—as, for example, in the claim we have already noted, which immediately precedes in the text his careless summary characterization of

vice and virtue as “perceptions in the mind.” According to this more careful formulation, moral facts are facts not just about our *having* certain sentiments, but about the causation of those sentiments; and willful murder is vicious precisely because it is exercising the *power* it has, when contemplated, to produce a certain feeling in us (T 469).²⁵ So Hume is in detail more faithful to his Lockean model than his summary misrepresentations would indicate; though the result, since he does base epistemological claims on the misrepresentation, is an inconsistency in his views.

Moral facts become even less promising candidates for noninferential knowledge, moreover, when Hume elaborates and modifies his account to make them not only causal but dispositional. His formula in the matter-of-fact paragraph makes one’s thought that willful murder is vicious true, strictly speaking, only if one has at that moment the right feeling, properly caused, about that action; but later in Book III he alters this requirement, to make the truth of a moral judgment depend only on what feelings one would be caused to have, under the right conditions, whether or not one now is (or even could be) in those conditions. Thus we know “*Marcus Brutus*, as represented in history” to be a more laudable character than our faithful servant, despite our stronger feelings for the latter, because we know a certain counterfactual to be true:

that were we to approach equally near to that renown’d patriot, he wou’d command a much higher degree of affection and admiration.
(T 582)

Indeed, Hume says, we must correct not only for “distance” (which seems to mean lack of familiarity) but, where necessary, for the influence of our own self-interest. The truth of our moral assessment thus depends on what we would feel if we adopted a “*steady and general*” point of view, something he recognizes we may find it quite difficult to do (T 581–3). He adds that “such corrections are common with regard to all the senses” (T 582), so the intended analogy with the perception of secondary qualities (among others) is again clear.²⁶ Counterfactual truths about what we *would* feel under the right conditions, however, are obviously not ones of which Hume can allow us immediate knowledge; nor are those to which he turns in the *Enquiry concerning Morals* about what would be felt, not by us in particular, but simply by a properly situated “spectator” (EPM 289). As he points out himself, it is *experience* which “soon teaches” us to compensate in our judgments for deviations from such standards (T 582); and if we know how to make the corrections, we will know this by inference from experience.

So Hume is mistaken to think that his account of virtue and vice makes our knowledge of these moral qualities noninferential. But we have seen why the mistake is an understandable one. I believe, furthermore, that this same mistake not only explains why Hume supposes that he can avoid moral skepticism, despite his skepticism about the ability of reason to discover moral truths, but also helps to explain another anomaly that has puzzled interpreters. (And if the mistake *does* help explain this anomaly, of course, that is further evidence that Hume made it.) The problem comes in accommodating to the rest of Hume's doctrines what many regard as his most important argument that reason does not discover moral distinctions. This argument ascribes a special motivating power to our moral views, alleging that they "excite passions and produce or prevent actions" in a way that reason alone never does: people are, he says, "deter'd from some actions by the opinion of injustice, and impell'd to others by that of obligation" (T 457). Interpreters have standardly taken Hume to mean, by the claim that *reason* alone never does these things, that *beliefs* or *judgments* alone never do—that beliefs or judgments motivate, of course, but only when conjoined with appropriate passions or sentiments. If all moral "opinions" have this special motivating power that beliefs by themselves lack, however, then it appears impossible to identify moral opinions with beliefs of any sort, even beliefs about our own sentiments. So Hume, since he does identify moral beliefs with beliefs about our own sentiments, seems caught in an inconsistency.

I believe that we can largely resolve this difficulty, however, in two steps, first by drawing on my conclusions from the previous section, then by relying on the points we have just been considering. So, first: when Hume denies that reason can motivate, he is *not* denying a special motivating role to all beliefs, but only to beliefs in "objects of reason," beliefs that have been or could have been arrived at by an "operation of reason."²⁷ And—as we have seen, though we have not yet explored the reasons for his doing so—he explicitly excludes from this category beliefs concerning those matters of fact in which virtue and vice consist. These matters of fact are *not* discoverable by reason. That is enough to remove the apparent inconsistency. When Hume denies that reason can motivate, he has not denied special motivating power to the sort of beliefs he thinks moral beliefs are.

Of course, this resolution of the inconsistency still leaves a puzzling question: just why should these beliefs about our own sentiments differ from other beliefs in their power to motivate? But here the answer depends partly, I think, on the assumption of Hume's on which I have been focusing in this section, that the beliefs he is talking about are noninferential. For Hume takes feelings or sentiments to be just a species of impression (T 7-8, 275-7); and, on

his view, the noninferential belief that one has a certain impression, and the impression itself, are not distinct states of mind. Hume is driven to this view by his remarkable account of belief, according to which a belief is just any sufficiently lively and forceful perception (T 94–8): for a consequence of this account is that impressions, since they are distinguished from ideas *only* by being the liveliest and most forceful perceptions of all (T 1–2), must all count as beliefs. Beliefs, one is sure to wonder, in what? Though Hume’s views on the content of belief (e.g., at T 96–7n) are too crude to dictate an answer, he appears to take them simply to be beliefs in whatever it is that we know noninferentially in virtue of having those impressions; and when he is being careful about what that is, it turns out that they are beliefs—noninferential beliefs—in their own occurrence.²⁸ And so, to return to the question at hand: the reason why one’s noninferential knowledge that one has a certain sentiment can have a motivating power which most beliefs lack, but which sentiments have, is that that piece of knowledge *is*—among other things—a sentiment.²⁹

Now, it is not news that Hume can be read as endorsing a variety of apparently conflicting views on the metaphysics and epistemology of morals.³⁰ What should be more interesting, however, is the degree of order—and, up to a point, consistency—that can be found in the apparent chaos. I showed in the preceding section that there is no contradiction between his identification of moral facts with facts about one’s own feelings, on the one hand, and his assertion of a logical gap between *is* and *ought*, on the other. And what we have seen in this section is that *if* Hume were right in supposing his account to allow our knowledge of these facts to be noninferential, there would be no inconsistency in his combining that account of moral judgments with all the following views as well: (a) that reason is entirely incapable of discovering moral truths, (b) that making a moral judgment simply consists in having a particular kind of feeling, but (c) that we nevertheless possess a fund of genuine moral knowledge, knowledge on the same footing as our knowledge of “sounds, colours, heat and cold” (T 469). My suggestion, moreover, is that Hume, intent on modeling moral qualities after secondary qualities and misled by his own and others’ standard characterization of secondary qualities as “perceptions in the mind,” *does* think—at least when it suits his purpose—that he has rendered moral knowledge noninferential; and that this is why he is able to overlook the inconsistency of his account with the views just cited.³¹

An understandable mistake is still a mistake, however. The beliefs about our sentiments with which Hume equates moral beliefs could not, by his own standards, be noninferential; so he is inconsistent, and something will have

to give if we are to extract a consistent position from his views. Although there is room for controversy about which changes would best preserve the main structure of his thought, moreover, two points seem clear at the outset.

(1) The more general, and more basic, is that a consistent Hume will have to be either more skeptical about morals or else less skeptical about reason than, in the *Treatise*, he initially intends to be. On his official view, as I have emphasized, his skepticism about the capacity of reason to discover moral facts is in no way a skepticism about our knowledge of such facts: for although moral distinctions are not “deriv’d from reason,” they are supposed to be “deriv’d from a moral sense” (from the titles of Book III, part 1, sections 1 and 2). Hume does not make much of this talk of a “moral sense,” but in one respect at least it clearly fits what I have been arguing is his official view in the *Treatise*: that we have immediate, noninferential knowledge of quite specific moral facts. On his own doctrines about knowledge, however, no *sense* could establish the causal (and, eventually, dispositional) facts in which he takes virtue and vice to consist. So he will have to be precisely as skeptical about the existence of moral knowledge as he is about the possibility that reason should provide it. (As we shall see in the following sections, it is a nontrivial task to say exactly how skeptical that is.)

(2) The second obvious conclusion is that we should release Hume from the very implausible analysis of moral judgments, as descriptions of our own, current sentiments, that he advances in the matter-of-fact paragraph. For, if I am right, his only immediate object in making those sentiments the relevant ones is to render our moral knowledge noninferential: but that attempt fails even by his own standards. So we do him no disservice if we discard that suggestion in favor of some of his more plausible ones.

But then there seem two familiar but divergent directions we might go. If we take our clue from Hume’s comparison of moral to secondary qualities, we should probably ascribe to him some version of his dispositional account, as found either in the *Treatise* (T 580–4) or the second *Enquiry* (EPM 289, 227–8), according to which an act or character is (for example) virtuous just in case contemplation of it would arouse approbation in us under appropriately standardized or idealized conditions.³² This reading of Hume as a reductive naturalist (variety: subjectivist) respects his repeated suggestions that morality is an empirical, factual matter about our sentiments; it appears to represent his considered view about what moral qualities are, except in those passages (such as the matter-of-fact paragraph) in which it matters most to his argument to represent our moral knowledge as noninferential; and it takes him in a direction (toward an ideal observer view, for example) that many philosophers have thought deserved serious consideration.

Despite the central role it accords our sentiments in the constitution of moral facts, however, this naturalistic reading does not accommodate so well Hume's insistence on the special relation of moral judgments to *motivation*. On the assumption that sentiments motivate in a way in which beliefs (unless they are also sentiments) do not, it does insure this much: that if we typically arrive at moral judgments by approximating the standard conditions referred to in this account and seeing what our feelings are, then we will also typically have some motivation to act in accord with those judgments. But it cannot guarantee that what is typical will always be so; still less does it leave Hume room to ascribe a special motivating power to moral judgments *themselves*, as he appears to want to do. Philosophers who view this latter point as Hume's key insight, therefore, will understandably be tempted to dismiss the analogy with secondary qualities as largely a mistake. They will be inclined to take the central strand in Hume's thought, the one worth salvaging, to be a noncognitivist view that simply identifies moral opinions (as we may perhaps call them, using Hume's term (T 457)) with certain moral sentiments or feelings.³³

Of these two readings I take the naturalistic, subjectivist alternative to fasten on by far the more important aspect of Hume's thought, though I am sure that since the noncognitivist alternative handles better one view that appears to be genuinely Hume's—his ascription of a special motivating power to moral judgments—there can be no case for dismissing it entirely. What I am equally sure of, however, is that none of the several considerations *beyond* this one, that interpreters have often taken either significantly to support a noncognitivist reading of Hume or to conflict with a naturalistic one, actually does so. Thus, there is one much-remarked passage in which Hume appears not merely to affirm that our moral views are sentiments, but to deny that they are beliefs; but that is not what the passage, on its most plausible reading, says.³⁴ More importantly, the naturalistic interpretation has been thought to conflict with the *is-ought* paragraph, by equating moral judgments with statements of fact, and more generally to conflict with Hume's denial that reason can discover moral truths. Even if it could somehow avoid *conflicting* with these doctrines, moreover, it has been taken to offer them no support; whereas the noncognitivist reading by contrast has been thought to provide a clear rationale, in fact Hume's own rationale, for denying that an *ought* can follow from an *is*—namely, that “an active principle can never be founded on an inactive” (T 457).³⁵ But I shall challenge all of these common assumptions.³⁶

Even if these assumptions were correct, they would mean only that these two alternative readings, the naturalistic and the noncognitivist, had split

between them the two interpretive options I noted above. We saw that a consistent Hume will have to be either more skeptical about morality, or else less skeptical about the power of reason to discover moral truths, than he set out to be: and the noncognitivist reading, on these assumptions, would have taken the former of these options, the naturalistic reading the latter. We would still need to decide which alternative better fits Hume's intentions on balance.³⁷ But in fact these assumptions say highly questionable things about both alternatives. There are reasons for doubting that noncognitivism does capture the basis for Hume's denial that reason can discover moral truths. And even if it captures one such ground, I shall suggest in the following section that it overlooks another—a basis for denying that an *ought* can be derived from an *is* which is not only consistent with, but actually depends on, a naturalistic reading of his views.

Interpreters are right that Hume certainly appears to rest his denial that reason can discover moral truths on the special motivating power of moral judgments.

Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason of itself is utterly impotent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason. (T 457)

Despite the prominence he accords this brisk argument, however, there are serious puzzles about how we can suppose Hume to understand it, and about its intended place in his larger argument. One important difficulty, not often noticed is that, in the *Treatise*, he appears either not to believe the argument's second premise—that reason alone is powerless to produce or prevent actions—or, at the very least, nowhere defends a version of it that means what this argument requires.³⁸ We have already noted one often-overlooked point about his denial that reason can motivate “of itself”: namely, that he does not mean that no beliefs can motivate as sentiments do, for he takes some beliefs to *be* sentiments. But that is not the problem here. The problem, rather, is that every time he summarizes his motivational theory in the *Treatise*, Hume clearly accords a special motivating power, the power to “prompt” rather than merely to “direct” passions, to another sort of belief as well, a sort that he could not possibly mean to identify with any sentiments. As I have argued in detail elsewhere,³⁹ he consistently allows that any belief in a “prospect” of pleasure or pain may motivate “of itself,” without the cooperation of any antecedent desire; but these beliefs are clearly ones that will require in Hume's view to be justified by inference, and are not themselves sentiments. What this means, however, is that if the second premise in the

argument just displayed is meant to *deny* a special motivating power to beliefs of this sort, then Hume does not believe it; and if it is instead to be understood so as to *allow* this power to them, then we need to be told—as nothing in this argument tells us, and as Hume nowhere makes any attempt to tell us—why it does not allow this special motivating power to moral beliefs, also, even if they are beliefs that would require to be justified by inference, and are not themselves sentiments. Either way, we are left with (a) a considerable puzzle about how Hume, in light of the views about motivation he repeatedly states in the *Treatise*, could have found this argument convincing as it stands, and with (b) a clear motive for caution—far more caution than interpreters usually display—in taking it to state his only or even his central reason for denying that reasoning can discover moral facts, or for denying that an *ought* can be derived from an *is*. Certainly, any reading of Hume would be more attractive if it could either fill in the gaps in this argument, or else suggest some different argument on which he meant to rely. I do not see how to fill in this argument; but in the next section, as I have said, I shall explore the evidence that he also had a quite different argument in mind.

It is far from clear, then, that a noncognitivist reading of Hume enjoys even the limited advantage often claimed for it, of preserving Hume's own skeptical argument. What about the alleged defects of the dispositional, naturalistic reading? Does this interpretation, in equating moral judgments with certain statements of fact, conflict with the *is-ought* paragraph? We already know from the preceding section that *is*-statements do not include all statements of fact, but only those that are about "objects of reason," about matters of fact that are discoverable by inference. So there will be no conflict unless the relevant dispositional facts about our sentiments are discoverable by inference. Are they? Surprising as it may seem, I believe that Hume has in mind an argument that—even by the standards he is employing in Book III, rather than Book I—they are not: at least, that they are not discoverable by inference from anything that he would could as an *is*-statement. This argument, which I shall explore in the next section, says nothing about moral motivation, but instead makes Hume's *is-ought* gap depend entirely on his comparison between moral qualities and secondary qualities—just what the naturalistic reconstruction of his views takes as central. Unlike the argument from moral motivation, moreover, this argument is unaffected if we understand these qualities—as we should, and as Hume himself implicitly does—as causal and dispositional, and hence not as mere "perceptions in the mind." His view, I shall suggest, is that moral conclusions cannot be derived from any amount of information about matters of fact "in the object," for the same

reason that Locke thought that conclusions about secondary qualities could not be derived from any amount of information about primary qualities. If this is what Hume means, then the comparison with secondary qualities, as spelled out in the naturalistic reading of his views, is clearly central to his moral theory. And, more cautiously, if I am right that this is even a possible understanding of the *is-ought* paragraph, then, just as we should not too quickly assume that a noncognitivist reading will preserve Hume's skeptical argument, so we should not take for granted that a naturalistic reading will undermine it. The subjectivist, naturalistic interpretation, too, may require him to be more of a skeptic than he set out to be.

Section IV

This returns us, then, to the search for a more satisfactory answer to the first of the two questions I raised at the end of Section II—really a group of related questions. Why does Hume think that these matters of fact about our sentiments, in which virtue and vice⁴⁰ consist, are not objects of reason: that is, that they cannot be discovered by any operation of reason? Why, in particular, does he think that they cannot be inferred from any truths expressed by *is*-statements, including any matters of fact discoverable by inference? And why does he think there is a *special* skeptical problem about inferring these matters of fact about our sentiments? We have just seen how, if we were to allow Hume his assumption that the judgments he has in mind about our sentiments are noninferential, and are identical with the sentiments themselves, the argument from moral motivation might be pressed into service to provide an answer to all these questions. But we have also seen reasons (beyond the incompatibility of that assumption with some of his central views about knowledge) for doubting that, in the *Treatise*, it is Hume's answer, or all of his answer. So what other answer might he have in mind?

(1) I mention, to put aside, one possible answer to the most general of these questions. If one's attention were confined entirely to the matter-of-fact paragraph, it might seem just conceivable that when Hume says that these matters of fact about our sentiments cannot be "discover'd by the understanding," all he means is that one cannot *discover* what one already *knows*. (Since he says that the existence of these facts cannot be inferred by reason, he would also have to mean that one cannot *infer* what one already knows.) These facts are already known because they are facts about one's own feelings, that one can't help knowing—even if one makes no inferences. So this reading would make the incapacity of reason to discover these facts depend on their being the sort that are known immediately, with all the problems we have just seen

the latter thesis to involve for Hume; but, as we have seen, it is a thesis he does hold.

But this suggestion loses all plausibility if we once suppose that there is any coherence between the adjoining matter-of-fact and *is-ought* paragraphs. For Hume's complaint in the latter passage, about the transition from *is* to *ought*, is clearly not just that the conclusion (if true) is something we already know. There is supposed to be a problem with the transition itself, with the derivation of the conclusion from the premises: an explanation is needed "for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it" (T 469). So it would be very implausible to suppose that it is merely a fact about the epistemic status of the conclusion, and not a problem with the inference itself, that he has in mind in the preceding paragraph, when he says about these same moral conclusions that they concern matters of fact that cannot be discovered by the understanding or inferred by reason. What he means, pretty clearly, is that if we didn't already know them they could not be discovered by inference from anything else we know.

(2) But why not? I shall concentrate on the (only) part of this question to which I think Hume attempts a direct answer, which is: why are these facts not inferable from any truths discoverable by reason—that is, from any objects of reason? According to my argument in Section II, of course, this is the same as the question: why is no *ought* derivable from true *is*-statements? (Hume's failure, on the reading I am suggesting, to address himself directly to the more general question of why no *ought* is derivable from *anything* else we know, is of course significant; I shall return to it in Section V.)

Why, then, are these matters of fact about our sentiments not derivable from truths about objects of reason? Part of the answer is easy. One large class of objects of reason consists of "relations susceptible of certainty and demonstration" (T 463). Hume's complex argument (T 463–8) that no moral truths fall in this class relies on some dubious assumptions (for example, on a largely undefended claim about just which relations do admit of demonstration). But for his thesis that no conclusion about the matters of fact he appeals to in the matter-of-fact paragraph can be *derived* from any truths in this class, he can offer a simpler, decisive argument. This argument is just that these conclusions *are* about matters of fact; that any conclusion derivable from demonstrable truths is itself demonstrable;⁴¹ and that "'tis allowed on all hands, that no matter of fact is capable of being demonstrated" (T 463). Given what Hume understands by demonstration, and by a matter of fact, he is right about this last point. For he requires of a demonstration that it be a deduction from *necessary* truths, but takes it to be definitive of matters of

fact that they are contingent: and he is right that from necessary premises no contingent conclusion follows.⁴²

(3) This leaves us with the harder part of the question. The other class of objects of reason, besides “relations, that are the objects of science,” consists of “matters of fact, whose existence we can infer by reason” (T 468). So: why does Hume think that those matters of fact about our feelings, in which he takes virtue and vice to consist, cannot be inferred from any of these?

Or, more precisely: why does he think there is a special problem about this inference? For it is clear enough why there will be, in his view, a general problem. This inference concerns a matter of fact—indeed, as we have seen (though Hume sometimes contrives to overlook the point), a causal matter of fact. But all inferences to such conclusions rest on experience (T 86–7); and even with experience taken into account, it is still not reason that engages us to make the inferences, but instead certain principles of the imagination (T 91–2). In short (and in our terminology, not his), inferences concerning matters of fact, and especially causal matters of fact, are at best inductive, and Hume is an inductive skeptic.

But it is equally clear that in his discussion of the foundation of morals Hume has put this more general skepticism to one side, at least for the sake of argument. He straightforwardly includes “the inferring of matter of fact” as one of the two operations of reason,⁴³ for example, though the upshot of the inductive skepticism is that this is something reason *never* does. His examples, moreover, of matters of fact reason is supposed to discover “in the object,” even when it is unable to locate virtue and vice, include obviously causal facts: that an act of “wilful murder” resulted from certain “passions, motives, volitions and thoughts,” for example (T 468). So his general inductive skepticism (as well as skepticism about the existence of a public world in which these transactions take place) must be in abeyance here, and Hume’s skepticism about the capacity of reason to discover the particular sort of facts in which virtue and vice consist must rest on more special grounds.

Up to a point this is how Hume is usually read: the problem in inferring an *ought* from an *is*, whatever it may be, is taken to be of a different order from, and independent of, any which could arise equally well for inferences to *is*-statements about “the being of a God” or “concerning human affairs” (T 469). This understanding of the *is-ought* paragraph has been crucial to its role as inspiration for recent moral skeptics, moreover, who have typically not shared Hume’s sweeping doubts about inferences to *is*-statements, and have in any case not wanted their moral skepticism to depend on such doubts: hence the attraction to them of a noncognitivist reading of Hume, which preserves this feature. On the reading of that paragraph that I am pursuing

here, however, it is less clear how useful Hume's doubts about *is* and *ought* will be to recent moral skeptics: for, on this understanding, although the problem Hume sees is not simply an application of his more general skepticism, it is still about an inference to a matter of fact. What Hume must think, on my view, is that some matters of fact are, in principle, even farther beyond the reach of rational inference than others. His skeptical thesis about reason in ethics is a conditional and, in his own view, a counterfactual one: that *even if* reason could discover some matters of fact, it still could not infer from them those matters of fact about our own feelings in which virtue and vice consist.

We can be more precise, moreover. Because of the conditional nature of Hume's skeptical view, we need to refine our account of what is to be included as an *is*-statement. It turns out we can do so in an informative way. On the evidence I examined in Section II, from T 463–8, I have taken *is*-statements to include, not *all* statements about matters of fact, but only some: those about matters of fact which are “discoverable by inference.” What we have now noted, though, is Hume's more basic skeptical view from Book I that, strictly speaking, there *are* no matters of fact of this latter sort. Presumably we do not want him committed to the consequence that (statements about relations of ideas aside) there are, strictly speaking, no *is*-statements. (This would appear to exclude his own example (T 469) of “observations concerning human affairs.”) One fairly mechanical way to avoid this consequence would merely have us be more roundabout in specifying the relevant matters of fact: just take *is*-statements to include any about whatever matters of fact Hume is here *allowing*, for the sake of argument, that reason might discover. But examination of the text shows that we can easily be more informative than this, in a way that it is important to notice. For Hume's discussion makes clear that the matters of fact that meet this condition, which are here granted without argument the status of “objects of reason,” are just those that are “in the object.” (Thus, for example, his only explicit *argument* that the vice in an act of willful murder is *not* a matter of fact discoverable by inference, is his assertion that it “entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object.” And of that sentiment of blame you eventually find in your own breast, he says of course—note the parallel claims—that “’tis the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not in the object” (T 468–9).)⁴⁴ We can thus offer a fuller and more careful formulation of Hume's conditional skeptical thesis. His basic skeptical view is that no matters of fact can be discovered by inference. But he also thinks that even if *some* matters of fact could be discovered by rational inference, these would include only matters of fact “in the object,” and that by no similar rational inference from these facts could we hope to establish those facts about our own feelings in which virtue and vice consist.

I have been resting my argument almost entirely on the text of the *Treatise*, since it is the doctrines of that work that I mean to be interpreting. But, with this much of the case made, it is worth noting that in section 1 of the *Enquiry concerning Morals* Hume clearly commits himself to the general view I have just ascribed to him about why reason cannot discover moral distinctions: that even if reason could discover some matters of fact, it still could not discover, by inference, the right sorts of facts about our sentiments. He there surveys several “specious arguments” (in the old nonpejorative sense of *plausible* arguments) concerning the respective roles of reason and sentiment in establishing moral conclusions. His concessions to reason are large: it is by its means that nice distinctions are made,

just conclusions drawn, distant comparisons formed, complicated relations examined, and general facts fixed and ascertained. (EPM 173)

So it is clear, from this and much other evidence, that here, as in Book III of the *Treatise*, Hume has put aside his general doubts about the capacity of reason to do these things. (Indeed, nowhere in the second *Enquiry* is there the hint of a doubt about the capacity of reason, in principle, to discover the utility of acts and characters, which of course requires determining their consequences.) But even on this generous understanding of the powers of reason there remain, in Hume’s view, inferences it is unable to make. For among the arguments he declares to be “solid and satisfactory” (EPM 172), these concessions to reason notwithstanding, is the following.

[T]hose who would resolve all moral determinations into sentiment, may endeavour to show, that it is impossible for reason ever to draw conclusions of this nature. To virtue, say they, it belongs to be amiable, and vice odious. This forms their very nature or essence. But can reason or argumentation distribute these different epithets to any subjects, and pronounce beforehand, that this must produce love, and that hatred? Or what other reason can we ever assign for these affections, but the original fabric and formation of the human mind, which is naturally adapted to receive them? (EPM 171–2)

So here again the problem in reason’s inferring moral conclusions from the sort of facts it is granted, at least for the sake of argument, that it *might* discover (that is: the problem in its inferring an *ought* from an *is*) is not only consistent with Hume’s identification of moral facts with certain facts about our sentiments, but is actually supposed to *depend* on that identification. For

there is something about these facts that makes reason impotent to “pronounce beforehand” about them, and which would keep it from ascertaining them even if it were capable of discovering all those facts that are “in the object.”

(4) But why? Any answer has to be a bit speculative, since Hume does not give us much to go on. But at just the point in the text where one would expect to find an argument for this view, if he had an argument to offer—that is, immediately after his identification of moral facts with facts about our sentiments, and immediately before his claim that this makes it impossible to derive an *ought* from an *is*—Hume says that moral qualities are like secondary qualities (T 469). I suggest that he expects us to recognize this as the argument we are looking for.

We have seen that Hume is not entirely consistent in spelling out this comparison. His suggestion, for example, that it leaves virtue and vice “not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind” (T 469), though convenient for his attempt to display moral knowledge as noninferential, is a misrepresentation not only of what Locke says about secondary qualities but also of what he himself has just said (and, even more, of what he goes on to say) about virtue and vice. Still, two important features of the intended analogy are clear, and if my suggestion is right they will be enough for Hume’s argument that there is an *is-ought* gap; his vacillation among conflicting accounts of secondary qualities will not matter here. For on the one hand our moral *sentiments*, our feelings of approbation and disapprobation, are clearly being compared to *sensations* of secondary qualities; and on the other, as we are now in position to see, matters of fact “in the object” are being compared to those “*real Original, or primary Qualities*” of bodies that, as Locke repeatedly says, “are in the things themselves, whether they are perceived or no,” and on which their secondary qualities depend.⁴⁵ And it is not hard to work out what Hume would have to believe, in order for these comparisons to support his doubts about the transition from *is* to *ought*. Putting “demonstrable relations” to one side as (for our purposes) the easy case, we have distilled the remainder of his denial that one can derive an *ought* from an *is* to the following thesis: that from no amount of knowledge of matters of fact “in the object”—supposing that we had it, and supposing even that we could make rational inferences to many of these matters of fact—could we infer anything about what effects contemplation of those facts would have on our moral sentiments. So for the comparison to be useful he would have to believe that there is some similarly deep problem about the relation of primary qualities to secondary-quality sensations: for example, that from no amount of information about an object’s primary qualities—supposing we had it, and supposing even that this allowed us to infer *a priori* many of the object’s

typical effects—could we infer what secondary-quality sensations it would under any conditions cause in us. (And notice that this problem, if it exists, will create a barrier to inferring conclusions about secondary *qualities* from primary-quality premises, *no matter* whether we identify secondary qualities with secondary-quality sensations—Hume’s “perceptions in the mind”—or with powers bodies are actually exercising to produce such sensations, or with powers bodies possess to produce such sensations under standard conditions. That is why Hume’s vacillation among these conflicting accounts of secondary qualities, and by analogy of moral qualities, will not matter for *this* argument.) Since Hume does not bother to spell out this point, moreover, he could hardly be relying on a view of this sort unless he not only believed it but also expected his readers already to be familiar with it.

Begin with this latter point: could Hume have expected his readers to be familiar with such a view? The answer is that he could, for Locke’s well-known and widely cited discussions of primary and secondary qualities are permeated by a skepticism of just this structure. The parallel between Locke’s doubts and Hume’s is in fact remarkably close, especially if we are careful to focus on the primary qualities in which Locke is mainly interested. For primary qualities have macroscopic as well as microscopic instances, and Locke never doubts that we can know the former (as Hume does at one level doubt that we can know any objective matters of fact). He does not doubt, for example, that we can discern an object’s macroscopic size and shape just by looking at it or feeling it. The main focus of his attention, however, in most of the passages in which he discusses the relation of primary to secondary qualities, is not on macroscopic instances of primary qualities but on microscopic ones, those of a body’s “minute and insensible parts.”⁴⁶ It is on these, for example, that its secondary qualities are supposed to depend.⁴⁷ But of these microstructural primary qualities Locke believes we are doomed by the grossness of our senses to remain ignorant. So it is natural to assume that when Hume compares matters of fact “in the object” to primary qualities, he too has mainly these “insensible” primary qualities in mind.⁴⁸

Although Locke expects these microstructural primary qualities to remain hidden from us, he nevertheless speculates in well-known ways about what it would be like to gain knowledge of them. Two claims that he advances matter for our purposes. (a) The first, in the spirit of the new “mechanical philosophy,” is that knowledge of these qualities would enable us to predict without experiment many of the effects of bodies on one another. He bases this counterfactual claim, about what we could infer if we had knowledge we now lack, partly on the observation that even without such knowledge we *seem* to perceive “some connexion”—he means some necessary connection—in such

transactions as “the separation of the Parts of one Body, upon the intrusion of another; and the change from rest to motion, upon impulse.”⁴⁹ So, he suggests,

if we knew these primary Qualities of Bodies [that is, those of their insensible parts], we might have reason to hope, we might be able to know a great deal more of these Operations of them one upon another.⁵⁰

And more emphatically, in a famous passage:

I doubt not but if we could discover the Figure, Size, Texture, and Motion of the minute Constituent parts of any two Bodies, we should know without Trial several of their Operations one upon another, as we do now the Properties of a Square, or a Triangle.⁵¹

(b) Locke’s second claim is that, by contrast, knowledge of these *same* primary qualities would be of no help *at all* in predicting what secondary-quality sensations an object would cause in us, and hence no help either in inferring its secondary qualities (which are just powers to cause those sensations). Here we do not even *seem* to perceive any connection, and there is no reason to suppose that knowledge of a body’s microstructure would improve the situation. It would be difficult for a reader to miss this point, about which Locke is emphatic in a number of passages. Here is a typical one:

[O]ur minds not being able to discover any *connexion* betwixt these primary qualities of Bodies, and the sensations that are produced in us by them, we can never be able to establish certain and undoubted Rules, of the Consequence or *Co-existence* of any secondary Qualities, though we could discover the size, figure or motion of those invisible parts, which immediately produce them. We are so far from knowing what figure, size, or motion of parts produce a yellow Colour, a sweet Taste, or a sharp Sound, that we can by no means conceive how any *size, figure or motion* of any Particles, can possibly produce in us the *Idea* of any *Colour, Taste, or Sound* whatsoever; there is no conceivable *connexion* betwixt the one and the other.⁵²

So Hume could easily have expected his readers to be familiar with a view with the right structure.⁵³ Is this view his own? More fully, might he have held it *and* thought that the similarity of moral feelings to secondary-quality sensations, and of objective matters of fact to primary qualities, was of the

right sort to explain why there is a similar difficulty in inferring facts about our moral sentiments from matters of fact “in the object”? My case for thinking so, now almost entirely in view, is of course circumstantial, but I believe it is strong. In brief: (a) Once he has denied that moral distinctions are objects of reason, while nevertheless equating judgments of virtue and vice with judgments about our feelings, he is committed to the existence of a special logical gap between two sorts of matters of fact. (And in the passage I have quoted from the second *Enquiry* he in fact *says* that there is such a special gap: that reason, even on an understanding on which it *can* predict the morally relevant consequences of actions, nevertheless *cannot* “pronounce beforehand” about which will produce love, which hatred.) (b) Just where one would expect to see his explanation, if he had one, of *why* there is this extraordinary gap, he compares virtue and vice to secondary qualities. And (c) a familiar view of Locke’s about the relation of primary to secondary qualities appears to fill out the analogy in just the way required. So if Hume accepts this view and thinks it can be extended to the moral case, much is explained, whereas if he doesn’t we are left with a number of puzzles. That is a case for supposing him to accept it.

Still, my proposal clearly faces some objections, and I shall deal with several of the more important in the next section. Before I turn to them, however, we should note the point we have reached. I showed in Section II that there is no inconsistency when Hume equates a moral judgment with a statement of fact about our sentiments, in the matter-of-fact paragraph, and then declares in the following paragraph that there is a special logical gap between *is* and *ought*. In this section I have taken the argument a step further. I have defended an understanding of Hume’s views on which the *is-ought* gap is not merely consistent with a naturalistic reduction for moral judgments, but actually *depends* on such a reduction. It does not depend on the particular analysis offered in the matter-of-fact paragraph, according to which our judgments of virtue and vice are about our own, current sentiments. But it does depend on their being about an observer’s moral sentiments, in some way that preserves the analogy of moral to secondary qualities. We have thus arrived at the understanding of the relation of the *is-ought* thesis to Hume’s subjectivist naturalism that I promised in Section I to defend; and it is, of course, an understanding that differs sharply from almost every other that has been proposed.⁵⁴

Section V

One might have any of several reasons for doubting that Hume could, or at any rate should, be relying on the argument I have just extracted from his texts. In this section I discuss five important objections.

(1) My suggestion that Hume is relying on this thesis of Locke's would be implausible if it were obvious that Locke's *reason* for holding the thesis was one that would be inapplicable to the sort of case Hume has in mind. And Locke sometimes advances a reason for his thesis that would clearly be irrelevant in this way. What he suggests is that the difficulty in predicting, from a thorough knowledge of a object's primary qualities, what secondary-quality sensations it would produce in a perceiver, is due to the transaction's being a mind-body one: the causes are corporeal, but the effect is mental.⁵⁵ This reason would be inapplicable to the issue with which Hume is concerned, because the causal transaction that he has to find especially opaque is not a mind-body one. Whether willful murder is vicious depends on whether contemplation of this act will produce a certain feeling in us: but, as commentators have noted, "contemplation" here has to mean thinking about the action, not perceiving it.⁵⁶ Hume is raising no question here about how we obtain accurate ideas of those matters of fact "in" an act which make it one of willful murder; the question instead is whether we can predict what feelings will result from entertaining these ideas. So doubts about the possibility of predicting mental effects from bodily causes do not apply.

Now of course one possibility is that Hume did not notice this difficulty, either because he did not see that Locke's worry was about mind-body interactions or because he failed to see that his own worry could not be. I might be right about Hume even if Hume is wrong about Locke, or about his own position. But a better defense of my suggestion lies in the clear textual evidence that even if Locke's doubts derive *partly* from the mysterious character of mind-body interactions, this cannot be their whole or even their main source. For, if it were, the production in us of perceptions of *primary* qualities would be as mysterious as that of sensations of secondary qualities, and Locke clearly does not believe that this is so. He never cites the production of the former sort of ideas, as he frequently does that of the latter, as anything extraordinary.⁵⁷ In sections 11–13 of Book II, chapter viii of the *Essay*, moreover, where he maintains that bodies produce ideas in us "*by Impulse*, the only way which we can conceive Bodies operate in," he clearly supposes that the only doubts about this thesis, in regard to ideas of primary qualities, will concern whether it is by impulse that bodies perceived at a distance affect our *brains*.⁵⁸ As applied to ideas of secondary qualities, however, the thesis turns out to

require much more special comment, including a defensive reference to the will of a Deity able to produce effects beyond our comprehension:

It being no more impossible, to conceive, that God should annex such *Ideas* to such Motions, with which they have no similitude; than that he should annex the *Idea* of Pain to the motion of a piece of Steel dividing our Flesh, with which that *Idea* hath no resemblance.⁵⁹

Thus, the central mystery *here* about the causation of secondary-quality sensations is not that they are mental and their causes physical. It lies, rather, in a well-known feature of Locke's view about secondary-quality "ideas" that I have not yet mentioned: namely, that, unlike perceptions of primary qualities, they do not *resemble* ("have no similitude" with) the bodies that produce them by impulse. That this is the main difficulty is re-emphasized, moreover, in Locke's attempted explanation, at the conclusion of this famous chapter introducing the primary-secondary quality distinction, of why we are inclined mistakenly to *believe* these sensations "resemblances of something really existing in the Objects themselves." We do so because we find their production by the primary qualities of bodies incomprehensible: "we are not apt to think them the Effects of these primary Qualities . . . with which, they have not any apparent Congruity, or conceivable Connexion."⁶⁰ This explanation is incomplete unless Locke supposes, as he clearly does, that we would not, and do not, find a similar lack of congruity and connection in the production of ideas in us by bodies that *do* resemble them.

Locke's doubts, then, are not just about mind-body interactions; they are also, and especially, about cases (which do not include all mind-body interactions) in which effects do not resemble their causes. Though it is difficult to know just what Locke means by "resemblance," moreover, the passages just cited show at least this: that it is a relation whose presence, if we detect it, allows us to perceive, or to seem to perceive, a "congruity" or "connexion" between cause and effect of which we discern no hint when it is absent. And Hume certainly need not have misunderstood Locke in order to think that this crucial relation (whether or not called "resemblance") might be missing not only between the primary qualities of bodies and our sensations of secondary qualities, but also between our *idea* of, for example, the act of willful murder and that moral sentiment of disapprobation we find this idea to arouse in us.⁶¹

(2) It is not, I think, a serious objection to my interpretation that it has Hume according importance in his moral theory to a distinction between primary and secondary qualities that he regards as illusory when he addresses

it in its own right (T 225–31; EHU 154–5). For although I have advanced a novel account of the *role* Hume assigns this comparison of moral to secondary qualities, it is clear on almost anyone's view that he thinks the comparison important, so this is a problem, I believe, for any reasonable interpretation, not just for mine.⁶² In any case, Hume clearly does not have to believe everything Locke and others maintain about this distinction in order to extract from their views the thesis I claim he accepts. He need not believe, for example, that insensible primary qualities are really in bodies in a way secondary qualities are not, in order to think Locke right that *if* they were, and if we were able to know about them by inference, there would still be other things—such as what secondary-quality sensations they would cause—that we could not infer from that information.

My interpretation does have one striking implication about Hume's views on *causation*, however. For it probably does require Hume to believe, as Locke appears to, that inferences to secondary qualities *differ* in this respect from others that we could make, under these hypothetical conditions. And even if he means to employ only some analogue to Locke's division (a question I come to below), rather than accepting Locke's view as it stands, any analogue that can serve his purpose will commit him to regarding some causal connections as in principle less opaque than others.

Some may find this result surprising. In an exposition of Hume's views on causation, G. J. Warnock even takes the view about causation I have ascribed to Locke as a foil with which to *contrast* Hume's doctrines.⁶³ Locke thinks that there are many effects of bodies, on one another and on us, that we can in fact neither predict nor understand, but he speculates that our lack of understanding and our inability to predict are *remediable*, in principle if not in practice, in some of these cases, though not in others. Hume's main point about causation, according to Warnock, consists in dismissing this distinction of Locke's as illusory. Some causal connections may *seem* more intelligible than others, and may tempt us to suppose that a better knowledge of the cause would have allowed us to predict the effect; but they are at bottom just as unintelligible, even in principle, as Locke takes the causation of secondary-quality sensations to be. In Hume's view, "all cases of causal connexion are ultimately just like the connexion between a brain stimulus and the seeing of a blue flash,"⁶⁴ and no additional knowledge of the cause—for example, of its microstructure—would make any difference.

But even leaving my suggestions about Hume on *is* and *ought* to one side, I think we should be cautious about accepting this account of his views on causation. For, first, it is not at all foreign to Hume's outlook to hold in general, as I claimed in Section III that he must, that some matters of fact are

even further beyond the reach of rational inference than others. For he argues in Book I that inductive inferences are not rational, and then (T 212) that even if they *were* rational, inferences to the existence of body, from the evidence of our senses, still would not be.⁶⁵ And, more importantly, he appears carefully to refrain, throughout his discussion of causal inference and his search for an impression of necessary connection (an impression that would give us the kind of knowledge from which we *could* predict an object's effects "without trial" (T 161–2; EHU 63)), from taking the stand Warnock attributes to him (T 86–94, 155–62; EHU 25–39, 60–73). He cheerfully concedes that there may be "powers and principles on which the influence of . . . objects entirely depends" (EHU 33). He insists only that—as he assumes Locke would agree—"the power or force, which actuates the whole machine, is entirely concealed from us, and never discovers itself in any of the sensible qualities of body" (EHU 63–4), in "any of the known qualities of matter" (T 158, 161), and that our knowledge and ideas must be derived from what we do perceive, not from what we do not.⁶⁶ He is thus silent on the question of what we might perceive, and might be able to understand or infer, were our senses differently constituted.⁶⁷

It may be tempting to suppose that Hume could not intend his views on causal inference to depend on anything so contingent as this limitation of our senses: that he must believe that such inferences could not be *a priori* no matter what our experience was like. But there is a tension throughout Hume's philosophical writings between an "analytic" strain, according to which his results are got by analyzing ideas, and so represent necessary truths, and a more "naturalistic" strain, reflecting his project of introducing "the experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects" (T xi) and grounding all the branches of philosophy on an account of human nature (T xiii–xix).⁶⁸ So the question is disputable: and if the interpretation I have suggested for the *is-ought* paragraph inclines us to one side of it rather than the other, that looks like an interesting result, not a serious objection.⁶⁹

(3) A different problem is one I mentioned in Section IV, that although my account reconstructs an argument for Hume's view that *no ought* can be derived from an *is*—from "demonstrable relations" and from matters of fact discoverable "in the object"—it does not so obviously show why he should think that conclusions about moral distinctions cannot be inferred from *anything* else we know. And he must think this to maintain that they are not "objects of reason."⁷⁰ In this respect my account may appear to suffer in comparison with a noncognitivist reading of Hume, since a noncognitivist view will take the special motivating force of moral opinions to explain why those opinions cannot be derived from *any* premises lacking that force, whether or not those premises are *is*-statements.

But I believe that although this point is important, it is not a serious difficulty for my view. For one thing, I shall make a suggestion in the next section about how a position very much in the spirit of Hume's view might accommodate, in an interesting way, something very much in the spirit of his thesis that moral distinctions are not objects of reason. I save it for there, rather than here, because, as the qualifications indicate, it requires us to move further from the letter of Hume's text than I have done in the preceding section or intend to in my replies in this section. (For example, what I shall suggest can plausibly be accommodated is not really the view that there is *no* sort of rational inference to any moral conclusion.) The distinction between interpreting a position and taking inspiration from it is not a sharp one, however, and any reader who thinks that it would count against my interpretation if it could not in any way accommodate this thesis should postpone judgment until the following section.

What I shall point out here is that, because of a complication we noted in Section III, it is not clear anyway that an interpretation of Hume that allowed him to endorse a more literal version of this thesis would enjoy a net advantage over an interpretation that required him to put it aside. For, if we accommodate this thesis, we thereby save one prominent feature of Hume's views, but at the expense of another. As we saw, Hume wants to combine the skeptical thesis that (a) we cannot infer moral facts from anything else we know, with the non-skeptical view that (b) they are nevertheless facts about our sentiments that we can know. He believes that he can do this without inconsistency, because he thinks that our knowledge of the moral facts—that is, of the right facts about our sentiments—can be noninferential. But on his own principles it cannot be. Any consistent interpretation of his moral theory will therefore require him to reject either (a) or (b). That is why an interpretation that preserved (a), his complete skepticism about the power of reason to discover moral facts, would have to abandon (b), his view that we have moral knowledge.⁷¹ It would certainly require further argument to show that this would leave it the more faithful interpretation on the whole.

Of course, if my interpretation deprives Hume of (a) (as it appears to have to), that too is an interpretive cost: it deprives Hume of his total skepticism about reason in ethics. But, unlike any other reading I know of that respects Hume's reductive, naturalistic account of moral facts, it will nevertheless have preserved a major and prominent part of that skepticism, his view that there is an *is-ought* gap. And if it turns out to allow that even though moral facts cannot be inferred merely from facts "in the object," they *can* be inferred from other things we know—partly from other facts about our own sentiments, for example—then it will *also* have saved (b), Hume's view that we

have moral knowledge that is about our sentiments.⁷² That would make it on balance, I think, quite an attractive interpretation. (And the attraction would become even greater, I suspect, if it also holds, as does the suggestion I shall put forward in the next section, that although there are rational inferences to moral conclusions from things we know about our sentiments, these inferences are rational only in a limited sense.)

(4) So far the objections have admitted of relatively straightforward replies. The next is more serious, because it addresses an absolutely central feature of my interpretation and is not so easily answered. It is that if Hume views his *is-ought* gap as a generalization of Locke's primary-secondary quality gap, as I have suggested, he will be unable to count the right sorts of facts as "in the object" and hence unable to count the right sorts of statements as *is*-statements. Locke treats feelings of pleasure and pain as importantly similar to secondary-quality sensations. He is fond in fact of the challenge: since no one thinks that feelings of pleasure and pain resemble anything in the objects that cause them, why do they think that their secondary-quality sensations resemble anything in those objects?⁷³ Hume is certainly aware of this view of Locke's (T 192). In one respect, moreover, that view suits his purpose, for when he follows Joseph Addison and Francis Hutcheson in modeling beauty on secondary qualities (T 299, 301), and follows Hutcheson in doing the same for virtue, he also joins these writers in assigning certain pleasant and unpleasant feelings the *role* of secondary-quality sensations: beauty and virtue (and, for Hume, wit (T 297)) are simply powers to please a beholder in the right way, just as redness is simply a power to cause sensations of red.⁷⁴

The difficulty, however, is that Hume also needs to treat facts about pleasure and pain as "in the object," and hence as a proper subject-matter for *is*-statements. *Is*-statements include "observations about human affairs" (T 469), and for Hume the observations about human affairs that matter most to the moral appraisal of acts and characters concern the tendency of those acts or characters to the benefit or detriment either of society or particular persons (T 577, 589–90, 618–19)—where benefit and detriment are measured by pleasure and pain. On the reading I have been defending, Hume's skeptical thesis is a conditional one: that *even if* we could discover by reasoning matters of fact that are "in the object," we still could not infer from *them* those matters of fact about our sentiments in which virtue and vice consist. But how can he think that if we could discover by inference facts that crucially *include* the tendencies of acts and characters to cause pleasure and pain, we still could not infer these further facts about our sentiments, which in his view simply are a species of pleasure and pain?

This objection encapsulates two distinct points. One, which should perhaps not be surprising, is that even if Hume finds promising Locke's view that there is a primary-secondary quality "gap," he cannot take over that view unamended. Matters of fact "in the object" have to include for Hume's moral theory more than ones about the primary-quality microstructure of objects; and even if (interesting question!) they need not include ones about Locke's standard list of secondary qualities, they certainly have to include ones about pleasure and pain, which Locke takes to be akin to secondary-quality sensations.⁷⁵ In ethics, we *do* know that pain is "annexed" to the motion of steel dividing flesh, and Hume allows that we do. That is one point. The other, however, is that in amending Locke's view, Hume cannot merely transfer facts about pleasure and pain, as a lot, into "the object." For some pleasures and pains are the ones that constitute our moral feelings. These are supposed to be "in us," not the object; and if there is to be an *is-ought* gap, facts about them must not even be derivable from facts in the object. The gap will have to come between different sorts of facts about pleasure and pain.

To have overlooked this difficulty Hume would have had to overlook a great deal: centrally, that although the distinction between what is "in us" and what is "in the object" may be clear enough in physics, Locke's main concern, it has to become much harder to draw in ethics, where we—collectively, and complete with our susceptibilities to pleasure and pain—are the object. Morality, especially on such a secular and broadly naturalistic understanding of it as Hume's, is about us. So it is not promising to suggest merely that he missed the problem. Since he does not address it explicitly, however, what we need to ask is whether he could reasonably have supposed himself possessed of a principled way of drawing the line he wants, in spite of the difficulty. I believe that the answer is that he could—even though I do not think that the principle is one he turns out to apply reasonably.

What we require is an account of what would make certain of our pleasures and pains (the ones that count as "in the object") intelligible, but others (our moral sentiments) not. So we should not be focusing on how pleasures and pains fit into the seventeenth- or eighteenth-century "mechanical philosophy"—Locke's primary concern—for presumably none of them fits well. Neither do any of them literally "resemble" their physical causes (though if I am right that when Locke asks about resemblance he is asking for a basis for intelligible explanation, then we might take him to be pursuing a version of our question). To take the first step toward a reasonable answer, I think, we should notice a respect, also noticed by Hume, in which pleasures and pains do differ from typical secondary-quality sensations. They play a systematic role in motivation. As I remarked above,⁷⁶ Hume signals this special role, in

the *Treatise*, by calling objects that produce pleasure and pain “proper objects” of desire and aversion: he allows that a prospect of pleasure or pain may “prompt” rather than merely “direct” our passions, and so motivate “of itself,” rather than merely in the service of an antecedent desire. So we should be able to find intelligible our being pleased by some objects and pained by others, if we can find it intelligible that we should be motivated to some activities or endeavors and not others.

There is, in the tradition of modeling the aesthetic and moral on the secondary qualities in which Hume is writing, a standard way of applying this strategy for explaining our proclivities to pleasure and pain. Addison, in his discussion of the pleasures of the imagination, says that since we are unable “to trace out the several necessary and efficient Causes from whence the Pleasure or Displeasure arises,” we should turn instead to “*Final Causes*,” which,

tho’ they are not altogether so satisfactory, are generally more useful than the other, as they give us greater Occasion of admiring the Goodness and Wisdom of the first Contriver.⁷⁷

Hutcheson’s view is similar. Like Addison, he thinks that although he can give a general account of the qualities that *do* arouse our aesthetic admiration (“regularity,” or “uniformity with variety,” in his view), this is not a satisfactory explanation in terms of efficient causes, for

there seems to be no necessary Connection of our pleasing Ideas of *Beauty* with the *Uniformity* or *Regularity* of the Objects, from the *Nature* of things, antecedent to some *Constitution* of the AUTHOR of our Nature, which has made such Forms pleasant to us.⁷⁸

But we can ask instead what aspect of our good the Author of our nature might be serving by making us pleased with such things.⁷⁹ Similarly for our moral sense. Hutcheson thinks he can establish a solid generalization about what our moral sense approves of (benevolence, as it turns out, the more the better), but admits that this leaves our “*natural Determination* to approve and admire, or hate and dislike Actions . . . an *occult Quality*.” That the “*Idea* of an Action should raise *Esteem*, or *Contempt*” is just as mysterious as (though, he insists, no *more* mysterious than) “that the motion, or tearing of *Flesh* should give *Pleasure*, or *Pain*; or the Act of Volition should move *Flesh* and *Bones*.”⁸⁰ God through his natural power could have constituted our moral sense differently. Still, we can see how it serves our interest, our good, to have our moral sense constituted as it is, and we can thus attribute its constitution to the benevolence of the Deity.⁸¹

Both of these authors appear to take for granted that we can explain bodily pleasures and pains in this manner,⁸² and they add a variety of suggestions about the special cases that interest them. Addison says that delight in grandeur makes pleasant the contemplation of God, “our last, adequate, and proper Happiness”; that pleasure in novelty encourages the pursuit of knowledge; that our enjoyment in comparing representations with originals, in the representational arts, solidifies our concern for truth; and that without the beauty all animals find in their own species, “Generation would be at an end, and the Earth unpeopled.”⁸³ Hutcheson thinks that our aesthetic pleasure in uniformity with variety spurs our search for simple laws covering diverse phenomena, our best route to knowledge, and that our moral pleasure in benevolence is an instinctive approval of what reason and self-interest would have led those capable of following the argument to favor anyway.⁸⁴

This is of course not the tenor of Hume’s own approach to these issues. But it is important to ask exactly why not. There is an official reason in his triumphant conclusion, from his discussion of the idea of necessary connection, that we have no conception of any but efficient causes (T 171); but I think we need to be cautious about taking this proclamation seriously, not least because of the famous instance⁸⁵ in which Hume appeals to final causes himself. It is custom, an operation of the imagination, and not reason, that leads us to form expectations from regularities in experience, and so “to adjust means to ends” and to “employ our natural powers, either to the producing of good, or avoiding of evil.” When Hume adds, in the first *Enquiry*, that “those, who delight in the discovery and contemplation of *final causes*, have here ample subject to employ their wonder and admiration” (EHU 55), it is natural to suspect that he is not referring to himself. But a rather different picture emerges in the *Treatise*, where it turns out that there are *other* operations of the imagination with which this one needs to be contrasted: besides operations such as “the customary transition from causes to effects, and from effects to causes,” which are “the foundations of all our thoughts and actions, so that upon their removal human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin,” there are others that are “changeable, weak, and irregular,” and are “neither unavoidable to mankind, nor necessary, or so much as useful in the conduct of life” (T 225). This distinction matters. It is only causal inferences, and none from the latter category, that explicitly receive in Book III the unheralded promotion to “operations of reason” that we have noted; I have argued that this means that Hume can envisage circumstances in which they *would* be rational, even if they in fact are not. And this line also turns out, in the *Treatise*, to be all that divides much Enlightenment good sense from Popish superstition. So it is hard to think that Hume attaches no importance

to the basis for the distinction, or that he could deny envisaging circumstances in which appeal to what is necessary lest human nature “immediately perish and go to ruin” is another form of argument that might be rational, even if in our actual circumstances it is not.

A different objection to these suggestions from Addison and Hutcheson is that many of them are either perfunctory or else almost desperately far-fetched. These authors appear to be assuming almost *a priori* that there must be some good for us (individually or collectively) served by every feature of our psychological makeup; indeed, that this must be so *because* we are the creatures of a benevolent Deity. Whatever he may think about the reasonableness of some explanations in terms of our good or benefit, Hume surely does not believe that we can assume before we look that every feature of our psychology must serve our interest. He *certainly* does not think that we may assume this because we have good reason, independently, to think ourselves the creatures of a powerful benevolent Deity.⁸⁶ So: even if he finds some of our pleasures and pains intelligible—or at least thinks he sees how better knowledge might render them intelligible—Hume may still think that others lie beyond hope of rational explanation. He may think this about our pleasures of aesthetic and moral reflection, moreover, even if he thinks he can offer some systematic account of how they arise (e.g., from sympathy) and of what unifies their objects: for Addison and Hutcheson both offer accounts of this sort, but *distinguish* such accounts both from an adequate explanation by efficient causes (which they think impossible) and from an explanation by final causes (which they offer, but about which Hume may have grave doubts).

I should emphasize how modest my suggestion is. I have made my case for thinking that Hume sees his *is-ought* gap as an extension or development of Locke’s views about the “gap” between primary and secondary qualities in Section IV, and to a lesser extent in the earlier responses to objections in this section. The case is strong enough to convince me that there must be something to it. But the objection I am now considering is very serious, and I concede that it is puzzling that Hume does not explicitly confront the problem. Against the objection that he *could not* find any pleasures and pains more intelligible than others, however, I have argued—by appealing to features of his own views, and to strategies of argument he was familiar with in his predecessors—that he could, and indeed that there is basically only one strategy for him to follow if he wishes to draw this distinction. But I have not displayed him applying this strategy.⁸⁷ In the next section, moreover, although I shall offer what I regard as further evidence that Hume views his *is-ought* gap in the way I have suggested, I shall also show that there are elements in

his moral theory that fit poorly with the position I have just constructed for him. I take this to show that there are elements in his moral theory that tend to undermine a defense of the *is-ought* gap to which he was strongly attracted, but a critic might of course reach a different conclusion. Any verdict on this issue will depend on weighing competing evidence; I say a bit more at the end of Section VI about why the weighing may still favor my reading.

(5) Before I leave this discussion, however, I should comment on one further problem it has brought to the fore. We have seen the problems that can arise for my reading from reflecting on what Hume has to include in one of his categories of *is*-statements, “observations concerning human affairs.” Hutcheson’s views illustrate the trouble we may encounter if Hume puts no limit on the other category, about “the being of a God.” The problem is this. If my reading of Hume is correct, then Hutcheson holds just the sort of view that ought to underwrite an *is-ought* gap as Hume understands it. Hutcheson treats our moral “ideas” on the model of secondary-quality sensations, and echoes Locke on the barriers this creates to predicting anything, simply from the nature of its objects, about how our moral sense will operate. We in fact approve of benevolence, but there is *nothing* we can see in the nature of benevolence to show us that this must have been so.⁸⁸ Even so, Hutcheson also appears to offer an argument for the goodness of benevolence—understanding goodness as the power of eliciting approval from our moral sense—that crosses the supposed gap. One premise is a causal hypothesis about human affairs: that a moral sense constituted to approve of benevolence would make us happier than would any alternative. The other premises are theological: that there is an all-powerful benevolent Deity, and that we are its creatures. The argument in Hutcheson’s statement of it is perfunctory and would require much filling in to be taken seriously; but isn’t he right that, even if moral qualities are like secondary qualities, and even if there is the sort of primary-secondary quality gap that Locke claims, we could still reasonably infer moral conclusions from premises of this *sort*, if only we knew them?

My answer is that although Hutcheson’s position illustrates this problem in a especially pointed way, it should have been clear anyway that if Hume’s *is-ought* gap is to be modeled on Locke’s “primary-secondary” gap, then the gap will be one that sufficient knowledge about the Deity—if there is a Deity—would enable us to bridge. For when Locke says for example that when we allow motion

to produce pleasure or pain, or the *Idea* of a Colour, or Sound, we are fain to quit our Reason, go beyond our *Ideas*, and attribute it wholly to the good Pleasure of our Maker,⁸⁹

I assume he is not *merely* throwing up his hands; he really is allowing, for what it is worth, that *if* we had adequate and accurate ideas not only of motions in bodies but *also* of God's will, then we could understand the production of pleasure and pain, or of sensations of color and sound. So too for any case in which God has "annexed" sensory experiences to "Motions, with which they have no similitude."⁹⁰

But Locke appears to think that even if we had the senses to provide us with adequate ideas of corpuscular motions, we would still lack the requisite knowledge of God. And that, I think, is also Hume's reason for believing in an *is-ought* gap despite the possibility of an argument like Hutcheson's. We should keep in mind what we learned in Section II, that *is*-statements have to be about objects of reason, about truths *discoverable* by reasoning—or, at least, as we saw in Section IV, about the sort of truths reason could discover if it were capable of discerning facts "in the object." On the most plausible understanding, although *is*-statements do not have to be true, they must be plausible *candidates* for being the sort of truths we could discover by reasoning.⁹¹ And Hume does not have to admit that the theological premises Hutcheson needs for his argument—quite special premises, if the argument is to be filled in—fall in this category. Indeed, one suspects he would deny that they do. If they do not, then they are not *is*-statements, and even if Hutcheson does succeed in deriving an *ought* from them, he has not derived an *ought* from an *is*.⁹² Hutcheson might of course disagree, claiming that his premises *are* ones we that can establish by inference from other things we know, or are at least reasonable pretenders to this status. What this possibility illustrates, however, is merely that philosophers who disagree about what we can discover about the world, through rational inference, are likely also to disagree about what qualifies as an *is*-statement, as Hume understands *is*-statements; and that in consequence they may disagree as well about whether the divide between *is* and *ought*, as Hume understands *that*, is one we can cross. This is of course not the common twentieth-century understanding of what is called the fact-value gap, which is supposed to cut moral conclusions as free from religious or theological premises as from any about the natural world. But it appears to be Hume's understanding of *his* gap, which, as I have already argued at length, is not the twentieth-century one in any case. So this implication of my interpretation, like several others I have noted in this section, seems to me an interesting feature of it—but no objection.

Section VI

Having said about as much as I can on behalf of my interpretation of Hume, I shall conclude by turning mainly to a different question. Suppose I am right about what Hume means about *is* and *ought*. What, then, are *his* chances of being right, or at least plausibly in the neighborhood of something right, about this topic? On my reading, is he onto anything promising? This is a different question from related ones that some others have asked. Noting Hume's comparison of moral qualities to secondary qualities, understood as powers to affect perceivers in specified ways, a number of writers have commented on respects in which this analogy might or might not be plausible.⁹³ Since they all take the suggested analogy to *conflict* with the assertion of an *is-ought* gap, however, they have not raised the specific question that interests me. On my account, Hume thinks that just as there is something about secondary qualities, as Locke understands them, that makes conclusions about them especially hard to infer from anything we know about primary qualities, so there is something about moral qualities, when they are understood on a secondary-quality analogy, that leaves conclusions about them especially hard to infer from anything we know about facts "in the object." And my question is: however the secondary-quality analogy may fare in other respects, is Hume right about *this* part of it? The answer I will defend is that he is not—that the analogy does not provide a good basis for believing in a special *is-ought* gap. I also believe, however, that the reasons why he is mistaken are philosophically interesting ones. These reasons are not original with me, for they are already in the critical literature on his moral psychology; but they have not been thought relevant to his *is-ought* thesis. I shall also argue that they are reasons that Hume, given other of his views about morality, ought to have been in position to see. Of course, if I say that, then I obviously must concede that even if my interpretation of the *is-ought* thesis fits nicely with some aspects of Hume's moral thought, there are others that are in tension with it. Returning one last time to the defense of my interpretation, I shall argue that this concession creates no serious difficulty for my view. For, I shall argue, the tension I am required to find in Hume's views about morality (and, specifically, about the moral sentiments) is no more than a special instance of a tension that can be discerned in his treatment of a wide variety of mental states.

(1) A first question is whether anything plausible can be made of Locke's worries about the special status of secondary-quality sensations. Contemporary philosophers are unlikely to think these sensations arbitrary and unexplainable simply because they do not resemble their causes, or because they could not be fitted (even if we knew the primary-quality microstructure

of those causes) into a demonstrative science of nature that would allow us to predict them "without trial." But on a sympathetic reading Locke can nevertheless be understood to be raising a concern that is still of philosophical interest. This is a worry about the "qualitative" character of certain mental states—paradigmatically, of secondary-quality sensations and pleasures and pains. As I noted above, Locke's complaints about the "gap" between primary and secondary qualities sometimes occur as part of a more general lament about the puzzling relation of mind to body. But, as I also pointed out, his complaints make clear that, whatever his other doubts about this relation, it is one he finds far more mysterious when what are involved from the mental side are secondary-quality sensations or pleasures and pains, rather than "ideas" of any other sort. Here it is natural to see him anticipating a challenge that many still find intuitively plausible, that the qualitative character of these states renders them especially difficult, even uniquely difficult, to fit into a physicalist explanatory picture of the world: a picture which, even though it does *not* provide either for demonstration or for a *a priori* prediction of the sort Locke and Hume appear to have in mind, does nevertheless provide an illuminating and theoretically satisfying basis for understanding and predicting clearly physical events. This difficulty is often taken to extend, moreover, to any functionalist account of mental states that is compatible with physicalism: no such account, it is charged, can capture this distinctive phenomenal or qualitative character.⁹⁴ Thus, on purely physical grounds, or on grounds drawn from any functionalist theory compatible with physicalism, we have not only (as Locke claims) no *a priori* way of predicting where these qualitative states will appear in our mental life; we also lack (this more up-to-date view claims) any *a posteriori* but nevertheless illuminating or theoretically satisfying way of doing so. Whatever one may think of the merits of this view, it is one that many contemporary philosophers have taken seriously. So, even if he sets the standards of intelligibility higher than would any philosopher now advocating this view, it does Locke no discredit to see him as anticipating this concern about the explanatory reach of physicalism and of functionalist theories compatible with physicalism.

It is worth pausing to consider the consequences of this view. One implication, presumably, would be that we have no way at all of predicting what secondary-quality sensations someone will experience without relying at least partly on premises that are also about secondary-quality sensations—for example, about past correlations between various circumstances of perception and the kinds of sensations experienced. The view would not imply that we have no way at all of making such predictions, for it would allow that we can reasonably do so in just this way, by relying on experienced correlations.

However, it would imply, crucially, that in projecting these correlations we would lack any satisfactory theoretical understanding of *why* the correlation will continue to hold, even when we expect it to do so: our inference, and the conclusion we draw by way of it, would thus have a “brute” character, even in our own eyes, especially when contrasted with predictive inferences we are able to make about purely physical matters. It would see this limitation on our understanding of these inferences as a matter of principle, moreover, due to something special about the subject matter, secondary-quality sensations, rather than just to some temporary and remediable gap in our knowledge.

A parallel position concerning moral sentiments would presumably include analogues of these same two claims. The overall position could not be precisely parallel, because its defense of these parallel conclusions would have to say something extra to deal with a difference between moral sentiments and secondary-quality sensations that I mentioned in the preceding section, and that I take Hume to recognize himself. This difference is that moral sentiments, which Hume identifies with certain pleasures and displeasures, play a systematic role in motivation, one that is (I suggested on Hume’s behalf) essential to them. They are not identified simply by their qualitative feel, but by that plus a certain motivational role. This was intended as a helpful suggestion on Hume’s behalf, because it leaves open a way in which some pleasures and pains, those “in the object,” could turn out, thanks to the good served by this associated motivation, to be intelligible in a way that the pleasures and displeasures that constitute our moral feelings and are “in us,” are not. (Call the motivational role of one of these pleasures or displeasures, when it contributes nothing to the intelligibility of that pleasure or displeasure, an *opaque* motivational role.) Whether this contrast—that the motivational role of the moral sentiments is always opaque, while that of some other pleasures and pains is not—turns out to be plausible, or to be one that Hume should find plausible, is a question I return to below. All that matters here is that so long as his position does take the motivational role of the moral sentiments to be opaque, then the fact that they differ from secondary-quality sensations in having such a role should not make them look any more intelligible to Hume than secondary-quality sensations do to Locke. So the implications of the two positions should be similar.

Of course, I am not quite attributing the parallel view I now describe to Hume himself. But since it is supposed to be anticipated and inspired by his actual view, much as Locke’s view can be seen as anticipating contemporary concerns about qualia, I will call it “Hume-inspired.” (And in the remainder of this discussion I will refer both to Hume’s own view and this Hume-inspired position as Humean.) This Hume-inspired view would say, first, that we have

no basis for making any predictions about what moral sentiments someone will feel except partly on the basis of other information about moral sentiments, such as, again, past correlations. Like the position on secondary-quality sensations I have just described, and on which I am modeling it, it would not say that we have no way at all of making such predictions, for it would allow that there is some rationality in projecting such correlations. But it would add—the second claim—that even when we do make such inferences, we should be aware that they do not involve any satisfactory theoretical understanding of *why* the correlations will continue to hold—and that this limitation on our understanding is a matter of principle, due to something special about moral sentiments—to their brute qualitative character, which they share with secondary-quality sensations, and to their opaque motivational role—rather than to any temporary and remediable gap in our knowledge.

I call attention to these implications more because of the second than the first. The first is certainly interesting enough. Married to an account of moral qualities as consisting in our dispositions to approve or disapprove under the right conditions, it promises to underwrite the familiar idea normally associated with an *is-ought* gap, that to infer a conclusion about moral qualities you need at least some premises that are also about moral qualities—and it promises to do this, as I have argued that Hume's own argument attempts to do, on the basis of a reductive naturalistic account of moral qualities, rather than by rejecting all such accounts.⁹⁵ What makes the second implication even more interesting, however, is that it promises to make at least some sense of Hume's more radical skeptical thesis, which is not just that conclusions about moral qualities cannot be inferred from *is*-statements alone, but that, because they are not objects of reason, they cannot be inferred from anything else that we know. (Here, then, is the suggestion about that topic that I alluded to in the preceding section.) Strictly speaking, of course, the Hume-inspired position I have described does not imply anything so extreme: it does allow a kind of reasonable inference to moral conclusions, for example by the projection of experienced correlations. But it maintains that these inferences are of a minimally rational sort, by contrast with others we might make, because we are barred by the nature of their subject matter from any theoretical insight into *why* the conclusion should be true. This would allow, I think, at least a respectable grain of truth to Hume's own view: conclusions about moral "distinctions" would turn out, like conclusions about secondary-quality sensations (and hence like conclusions about secondary qualities), to be accessible to reason only in a most minimal and disappointing sense.

(2) It seems an interesting question, therefore, whether any reasonable analogy between secondary qualities and moral qualities could provide a reasonable basis for such a Hume-inspired view. As I have suggested, I believe that the answer is that it could not. If what I have described is, as I believe, the most favorable understanding of Locke's view that there is a "gap" between primary and secondary qualities, and if we take Hume to hold, as I have argued that we should, that there will be a gap between *is* and *ought* for similar reasons, then any Humean view appears to be subject to serious criticisms that are already in the critical literature on Hume's moral theory. The problem is not the one I put aside at the beginning of Section V, that Hume's concern is not exclusively about a mind-body interaction; for once Locke's worry is updated to cover the relation between those mental states (or aspects of mental states) that are functionally characterizable and those that are not, neither is his concern limited in this way. The difficulty is instead with the specific parallel any Humean argument would need to insist on between secondary-quality sensations and our moral sentiments. Locke's argument, as reconstructed, depends on the claim that secondary-quality sensations are identified simply by their qualitative character, their phenomenal "feel"; and about these sensations that is at least a plausible claim. The Humean argument, if it is intended to parallel that one, will have to say a similar thing about our moral sentiments, moral approbation and disapprobation: that since they are identified simply by their qualitative character (plus their motivational role, but an opaque one), we have not only no *a priori* grounds but also not even the beginnings of an illuminating or theoretically satisfying basis for predicting where they will turn up in our mental life, for predicting which objects will arouse them when contemplated.

But this seems wrong about moral sentiments—as, indeed, it seems wrong about many emotions. They are not identified just by their qualitative feel—or, as a Humean might allow, by that plus their connection to motivation—but also by the sorts of reasons for which they are held. This is a familiar point. As Philippa Foot writes, in accusing Hume of making a similar mistake about pride,

a feeling of pride is not identified like a tickle, but requires a special kind of thought about the thing of which one feels proud. Now I should say . . . that it is just as bad to try to identify a feeling as a feeling of approval, whether moral approval or any other, without its particular objects as it is to try to identify pride without talking about the only kinds of things about which one can *logically* feel proud.⁹⁶

Thus, in Foot's view, there would be two important things wrong with the argument I am claiming Hume (and, on this topic, any Humean) is committed to. Because moral approval is not identified just by its qualitative feel ("like a tickle"), or by its feel plus its motivational role, the argument has a false premise. And because our understanding of the nature of moral approval, of what state it is, incorporates among other things its relation to (thoughts of) its appropriate range of objects, the argument also has a false conclusion. Our understanding of this mental state does provide, in the terms I have been using, at least the beginnings of an illuminating and theoretically satisfying understanding of why some things can be objects of moral approval and others cannot. For these same reasons, moreover, moral sentiments and other emotions are also unlike secondary quality sensations in looking much more like possible candidates for capture in the functionalist "net."⁹⁷

Note that Foot's criticism tells clearly against Hume's account of the nature of virtue and vice, and thus (on my interpretation of it) against a Humean attempt to establish an *is-ought* gap, only so long as the Humean takes virtue and vice to be powers to elicit the sentiments of approval and disapproval, respectively, when contemplated. Her point would be irrelevant against a view which said merely that virtue was a power to produce a certain sort of pleasure, as vice is to produce a certain sort of pain, in an observer: for, I am granting, it is at least plausible that pleasures and pains are identified, like tickles and secondary-quality sensations, simply by their felt qualities (plus, again, a motivational role). This point is worth mentioning, because there are a number of passages (as I have several times noted) in which Hume could appear to be affirming no more than a view of this latter sort. In a typical formulation, for example, he says that

whatever mental quality in ourselves or others gives us a satisfaction, by the survey or reflexion, is of course virtuous; as everything of this nature, that gives uneasiness, is vicious. (T 574-5)

However, I doubt that these passages succeed in moving him out of Foot's sights (and, by extension, out of mine). For comparison with other, similar, passages shows him speaking interchangeably of pleasure or satisfaction and approbation in this role, on the one hand, and of pain or uneasiness and disapprobation, on the other. In the matter-of-fact paragraph, for example, he is explicit that it is a sentiment of disapprobation or blame in one's own breast that constitutes the vice of the action one is examining (T 468-9); but two pages later, he refers to this sentiment simply as a special sort of pain or uneasiness (T 470-1).⁹⁸ What this strongly suggests is that, despite formulations

like the one just quoted, Hume does mean to identify virtue with what we feel approval of under the right conditions, and vice with what we disapprove of, just as Foot supposes.⁹⁹ What makes him happy to speak in some places of merely of satisfaction and uneasiness instead, is his view that that is all these moral sentiments *are*: a view which Foot is of course prepared to challenge, in my view correctly.

In her discussion of Hume, Foot declines to detail exactly what restrictions she thinks there are on what we can approve, beyond asking the reader to consider

what it would be to have *this* feeling when contemplating an object one did not see as useful, beautiful, efficient or anything like that.¹⁰⁰

Elsewhere she argues that no feeling would be recognizable as moral approval of an action if it did not involve seeing the action as somehow constituting or promoting some human good; and she also makes a compelling case that no feeling could count as nonmoral approval or disapproval unless felt for the right sorts of reasons—the required sort varying with the kind of approval in question.¹⁰¹ These proposed restrictions, especially on what can count as moral approval, may seem disappointingly vague (even if at the same time not beyond controversy). But it is worth keeping in mind two points. One is that Foot's point against Hume and Humeans (and my extension of it to criticize Humean views on *is* and *ought*) holds if there are *any* restrictions of this kind—even though the criticism will of course be more interesting if there are more extensive restrictions that can be spelled out more precisely. The other is that Foot's account of these restrictions may suffer from a methodological limitation she imposes on herself, that the correct account of the restrictions must be a conceptual truth—that failure to recognize the relevant restrictions must betoken plain incompetence with the concept “moral attitude.” That is one perspective from which to criticize Hume; it is one that might appeal not just to a conceptual ethical naturalist like Foot but to an analytic functionalist in the philosophy of mind, looking for analytic functional definitions of the moral attitudes.¹⁰² But I think it important to note that, just as one might share Locke's concern about the intelligibility of the connection between secondary-quality sensations and their causes, without adopting *his* standards for intelligibility (“resemblance,” or possible inclusion in a demonstrative science of nature), so one might agree with Foot that it belongs to the very nature of moral sentiments to be felt for certain morally relevant reasons, without agreeing that these reasons are to be uncovered merely by conceptual analysis. One could simply hold, against Hume, that

we have a plausible and intelligible theory of what morality is about, and of how moral feelings relate to what it is about, in the light of which it is clear why moral sentiments should be identified in Foot's manner rather than his; and one could hold this without claiming that this theory is conceptually true or immune from empirical revision. It is an interesting lesson of reading Hume's *is-ought* thesis in the way I have suggested, I think, that one might challenge it, in its best version, without having to claim that there is an analytic or conceptual connection between what he counts as *is*'s and what he counts as *ought*'s.¹⁰³

(3) I believe, therefore, that the Humean case for an *is-ought* gap is mistaken, but mistaken for philosophically interesting reasons. I also believe that, if I am right about the rationale for his *is-ought* thesis, one might have expected Hume to be in position to appreciate some of the difficulties with his position. For Hume's own account of the virtues, and especially of justice and the other artificial virtues, appears to provide fuel not only for the criticism I have just mentioned—that morality has a unified subject matter and that moral sentiments can be identified by their relation to that subject matter, not just by their “feel” and their role in motivation—but for another as well. If his account of the virtues made them otherwise wildly disparate, then there might be some plausibility to the idea that all they had in common was a subjective reaction they aroused in an appropriate observer. But, of course, he does not find them very disparate: they all turn out to be either useful or directly agreeable, either to their possessor or to others (T 590–1). Thus, Hume does not suggest that we in fact ever feel the right sort of approval towards traits that we do not see as, in Foot's words, “useful, beautiful, efficient or anything like that.” This result is most striking in the case of the artificial virtues, moreover, just because, as subsequent intuitionists from Price through Ross and beyond have reminded us,¹⁰⁴ it is so tempting to see here a number of mutually irreducible virtues and duties; but Hume's account of the merit of justice, fidelity to promises, political allegiance and the like is resolutely consequentialist. We approve of these virtues, he says, because of our sense of their contribution, when they prevail generally, to the public good (T 499–500, 579–80). His account certainly leaves room, therefore, for the question why, if morality exhibits so much fundamental unity in its objects, moral sentiments should not be identified at least in part by their relation to those objects, rather than by their distinctive feel and their motivational role.

Hume's account of the virtues, and especially of the artificial virtues, also creates a further problem. As I pointed out in Section V, and have mentioned again in this section, if I am right about why Hume believes in an *is-ought*

gap, then he needs some way of explaining why the pleasures and pains that constitute our moral sentiments should count as arbitrary facts about which reason cannot “pronounce beforehand”—at least not in the same intelligible way in which it *can* pronounce beforehand about all those other pleasures and pains that are “in the object,” and which fall on the *is* side of the divide. My suggestion on his behalf was that, since pleasures and pains play a systematic role in motivation, he might count as intelligible, understandable and in the proper sense predictable those pleasures and pains whose motivational role serves a recognizable good, and by contrast count as arbitrary and less intelligible those pleasures and pains whose motivational role was opaque, in that it serves no such good. For this suggestion to help, of course, pleasures and pains that occur “in the object” will have to fall in the first of these classes, the intelligible one, and our moral sentiments in the second, the arbitrary one. But on Hume’s account of many of the natural virtues (the “useful” ones) and of all of the artificial virtues, the sentiments we feel toward these virtues seem, by the teleological standard that my suggestion invokes, to be anything but arbitrary. Taking pleasure in these virtues “on the survey” will tend to motivate us to acquire and act on them;¹⁰⁵ and that, in turn, according to Hume, will tend at least in general to promote either private or public good.¹⁰⁶ So the suggestion fails: on his own account of these virtues, the motivational role of our approval of them does not seem opaque.

(4) Someone might now ask, of course, whether these objections are a problem for Hume or instead for my interpretation of him. In reply, and as my final gesture in defense of my interpretation, I offer two points. The first is that if the thesis I attribute to Hume fits uneasily with some of his views, there are other passages with which it fits better. I will mention two. Consider Hume’s initial reply to the objection that on his own view, as much as on that of the rationalists he has been criticizing, it could turn out that inanimate matter “might become morally good or evil, provided it can excite a satisfaction or uneasiness” (T 471). In response, he does not say anything to suggest that reason could “pronounce beforehand” that we could not feel moral approbation towards an inanimate object. His reply instead is that it just turns out that we do not. Pleasures differ, and they fall where we find them. The character and sentiments of a person, and some inanimate object (such as, in his example, a good wine) may both give satisfaction; “but as the satisfaction is different, this keeps our sentiments concerning them from being confounded, and makes us ascribe virtue to the one, and not to the other.” He adds,

Nor is every sentiment of pleasure or pain, which arises from characters and actions, of that *peculiar* kind, which makes us praise or condemn. . . . 'Tis only when a character is considered in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil. (T 472)

Hume thus represents it as thoroughly contingent not merely that our moral sentiments do not attach to inanimate things, but also that the right sorts of sentiment, the ones that pick out moral virtue and vice, are felt only on the "general survey." This is a surprising view: so surprising that many subsequent commentators have ignored it and have, for example, credited Hume, on the basis of this last sentence, with the insight that, as a conceptual or at least a deeply theoretical matter, nothing could count as *moral* approval or disapproval unless it at least pretended to be what one would feel from an impartial standpoint. But—even apart from the switch to "at least pretended to be," which seems more plausibly to capture the relevant restriction—that is not what Hume says. What he says instead is what one would expect if he thought that what crucially disables reason from discovering moral facts is its inability to predict in any theoretically satisfying way when or on what grounds moral approval and disapproval will be felt. So he has to represent these apparently deep restrictions as just brute facts.¹⁰⁷

Or consider a second example. If Hume held the version of the *is-ought* thesis I have attributed to him, one would expect him to apply it—not, perhaps, to state it, but at least to appeal to its distinctive implications—in arguing for any unconventional views about what to count as a virtue, and especially in objecting to any attempt to settle such a question just on the basis of facts "in the object," in the trait in question. That is what appears to happen in his discussion of natural abilities. He does not actually say that the natural abilities are virtues. But he does claim that they are enough like virtues that the choice of whether to apply the term to them is a purely verbal one—a controversial thesis, as he is aware. His main argument for his view, as one would expect on any reading that takes his subjectivist, naturalistic account of virtue seriously, is that natural abilities and what are called moral virtues "equally produce pleasure" when contemplated (T 606). He anticipates an objection that appeals simply to a fact about the natural abilities, that they are not voluntary, as virtues must be. To this, a key element of his response is that he would

have any one give a reason, why virtue and vice may not be involuntary, as well as beauty and deformity. These moral distinctions arise

from the natural distinctions of pain and pleasure; and when we receive those feelings from the general consideration of any quality or character, we denominate it vicious or virtuous. Now I believe no one will assert, that a quality can never produce pleasure or pain to the person who considers it, unless it be perfectly voluntary in the person who possesses it. (T 609)

That is: there is no predicting this, just from considering what voluntariness is; one can only look and see. To this extent, then, his argument is what one would expect on my reading of him.

I have to admit, however, that even in this latter example Hume's commitment to my version of the *is-ought* principle, if he is committed to it, begins to fray at the edges. It is perhaps not an insuperable problem that, in addition to offering the argument I have quoted, he also defends his assimilation of natural abilities to virtues on other grounds, ones that advert simply to what is "in" these objects.¹⁰⁸ That might simply be a way of getting straight about what *is* in the objects, so that our sentiment of approval or disapproval will occur in the right conditions.¹⁰⁹ But it is more of an embarrassment that Hume also appears to waver in this discussion on whether there is after all a "peculiar" sort of reflective pleasure that picks out the virtues. For he not only concedes that we do not feel about the natural abilities quite as we do about the recognized virtues; he freely adds that this should not be surprising, since "each of the virtues, even benevolence, justice, gratitude, integrity, excites a different sentiment or feeling in the spectator" (T 607). Now, strictly speaking, even this admission could be accommodated if it meant only that there was a peculiar *range* of pleasures in a spectator, recognizable just by how they feel, that marks off the virtues. But a reader could be excused for thinking that this is now becoming a rather desperate claim, and that what really must unite these various pleasures, even in Hume's eyes, is their subject matter: for example, as he emphasizes himself, that the natural abilities resemble many acknowledged virtues in pleasing us because they are traits that benefit their possessors (T 610–11).

(5) Here it is useful for me to turn the second part of my reply. For I agree entirely that the strand in Hume's thought about moral approval and disapproval that I have identified—the one which, combined with a subjectivist, naturalistic account of virtue, leads him according to me to his *is-ought* thesis—is not his only way of thinking about those sentiments. It is, rather, a line of thought that conflicts with some other ideas he is attracted to, and that appears only intermittently. I do not believe that this concession marks a weakness in my interpretation, however; for I believe that this tension in

Hume's thought about the moral sentiments is only one instance of a larger tension in his thought between two ways of thinking about a number of mental states, a difficulty in which he is arguably involved whatever one makes of his views on *is* and *ought*. Indeed, I think that we can throw some interesting light both on Hume's treatment of the moral sentiments and on the larger problem if we compare his apparent vacillation on this topic with his treatment of some other issues.

Consider, for one comparison, his account of belief—that is, of the difference between believing something and merely entertaining an idea of it (T 86, 94–8, 118–23, 623–9). His official theory, as we noted in Section III, is that a belief is distinguished merely by the way it feels: by what he often calls its superior “vivacity,” though he apologizes for the inadequacy of this and other terms, noting that when he attempts an explanation

I scarce find any word that fully answers the case, but am oblig'd to have recourse to every one's feeling, in order to give him a perfect notion of this operation of the mind. (T 629)

Belief, then, is to this extent like that peculiar feeling that constitutes approbation, and that is distinguished from other pleasures just by its subjective feel. It would appear to follow that any connection belief bears to, say, action, must be entirely contingent. But, as David Armstrong has noted, this is a topic on which Hume wavers. For when he is not theorizing, he standardly treats the typical causal role of belief as more central to it than that. Indeed, in the paragraph from which I have just quoted, in which he *is* theorizing, he repeats once more that belief consists merely in a feeling or manner of conception that “'tis impossible to explain.” But then he concludes by describing, in one sentence, what this feeling does to the ideas it turns into beliefs:

It gives them more force and influence; makes them appear of greater importance; infixes them in the mind; and renders them the governing principles of all our actions. (T 629)

Armstrong's seems a fair comment: “His philosophical approach inclines him to look for the internal difference, his acumen to look for the effect of beliefs on behavior.”¹¹⁰

Or consider Hume's often-criticized account of another pair of passions, pride and humility. His official line is very similar to what he says about the peculiar pleasure we take in virtue and the special feeling that constitutes belief:

The passions of PRIDE and HUMILITY being simple and uniform impressions, 'tis impossible we can ever, by a multitude of words, give a just definition of them, or indeed of any of the passions. (T 277)

All that is left to us, he says, is “an enumeration of such circumstances, as attend” these passions. The first such circumstance that Hume notices is that pride and humility are always attended by the idea of oneself. Numerous critics have objected that representing this connection as contingent is a mistake, that some reference to oneself is constitutive of these emotions and not just an attendant circumstance.¹¹¹ Yet, perhaps again because of his “acumen,” Hume also seems in a way to honor his critics’ view. He never claims to find pride or humility in fact occurring without the idea of self. And if one reads beyond his initial remark that this connection is merely “evident” (T 277), one finds him saying, without elaboration, something that seems much stronger, that it is “in a manner self-evident” (T 295); and, again, though with less elaboration than a reader might hope,¹¹² that “’tis absolutely impossible, from the primary constitution of the mind, that these passions [of pride and humility] should ever look beyond self . . .” (T 286). So in the course of his discussion the connection of pride to the idea of self comes to be seen as a more obvious fact, and perhaps as at least a deeper one, than Hume’s simpler initial account might suggest.

I am not suggesting that Hume’s treatments of these three topics—moral approval and disapproval, belief, and pride and humility—are exactly the same in every important way. What I believe, rather, is that there are parallels extensive enough (a) to make it relatively unsurprising that he should be torn, as my interpretation requires me to say that he is, between two different ways of understanding the moral sentiments; and (b) at the same time, to make one distinctive feature of his treatment of approval and disapproval stand out in an interesting way. The similarities are clear enough. In each case, Hume’s official account says that all that is essential to the mental state in question is a distinctive intrinsic feel that can be recognized by those who experience it.¹¹³ Everything else about the state, such as its relation to its typical causes or effects, which we might hope to capture adequately in language, counts merely as “circumstances that attend it.” With no greater claim to historical accuracy than is implied in noting that it is Hume who offers these accounts, I shall call this an *empiricist* account of such states.¹¹⁴ In each case, however, Hume’s discussion also shows the pull on him of a rival (and in the view of his critics, more reasonable) account of these states, a more relational account that incorporates some of these supposedly attendant circumstances into the very nature of the state. About moral approval, such an account

would require, as Foot puts it, that the approval not be directed at something seen as in no way “useful, beautiful, efficient, or anything like that”; and perhaps also that it be felt (or pretend to be felt) from an impersonal point of view. About belief, it would require that this state play its typical causal role in governing our passions and actions; about pride, that it be felt only towards things seen as reflecting in some way on oneself. One way of putting my claim would be this. Asked to characterize “Hume’s view” on moral approval or belief or pride, I believe that someone would seriously mislead if she mentioned only the official, empiricist account; any fair or helpful answer would also have to mention the complications I have alluded to. And if that is right, then it does not seem a weighty objection to my interpretation of the *is-ought* thesis, that it relies on Hume’s more empiricist account of the moral sentiments, while forcing me to admit that that is not always how he thinks of them.

Thus the similarities. There is also, I believe, one interesting and distinctive feature of Hume’s treatment of moral approval and disapproval that we are now in position to notice. This is that it is only in this case, of the three, that he actually draws out some of the apparently radical implications of his official, empiricist account of these mental states. Nowhere in his discussion of belief or pride does he appeal to his official empiricist account to defend his finding these states where his opponents would deny their existence, as he does appeal to his account of moral approval to argue that it¹¹⁵ can be directed at natural abilities as easily as at recognized virtues. Nor does he ever suggest that there is a gap between premises about attendant circumstances, on the one hand, and conclusions about belief or pride, on the other. But it appears that if his reasons for believing in an *is-ought* gap are anything like what I have suggested, he should believe in similar gaps in these other cases. And he should hold that facts about what is or is not a belief, or about what is or is not pride, are not objects of reason. To put this latter point in terms of the Hume-inspired view that that I drew out earlier in this section, he (or, at any rate, a Humean) could allow that there are rational inferences of a sort, from past correlations plus the information that some state is playing the causal role characteristic of beliefs, to the conclusion that it really is a belief: but he (or the Humean) would have to hold that any such inference is no more than minimally rational, because we are barred by the nature of its subject matter from any theoretical insight into *why* the conclusion should, in these circumstances, be true. So, too, for an inference from past correlations plus the information, for example, that a given state involves no reference to oneself, to the conclusion that it is not pride. But Hume does not say this, nor does he say anything (beyond offering the bare empiricist accounts themselves)

that could inspire it. It is only about moral approval and disapproval that he draws such conclusions.

I accept that a determined critic might draw one last line, and cite this fact as evidence against my reading of Hume. If the line of thought I claim led Hume to an *is-ought* gap would equally lead, given his other views, to a gap concerning belief or pride, but Hume mentions no gap in the latter cases, might that not indicate that I am wrong about the reasoning that led him to assert an *is-ought* gap? My case in reply is the cumulative one that I presented in the first five sections of this paper, supplemented by the further parallels to which I have just drawn attention. Assuming that that case is at least a reasonable one, I will simply concede that I do not know why Hume draws out the skeptical implications of his empiricist account of the passions and other mental states in the moral case but not in the others. But I believe that that is what he has done, and I certainly believe that the question of why he might have done it is one that is worth thinking about.

NOTES

Earlier versions of some of the material included here—Section II and some of the points in Sections IV and VI—were presented to a conference on the Scottish Enlightenment at Cornell University's Society for the Humanities in 1976, and to the Philosophy Department at the University of Pittsburgh in 1980. A version much closer to this one was presented to a workshop on Hume's Ethics at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1993. I am grateful for discussion on those occasions. I have also benefited from specific comments by Stephen Ferg, Richard W. Miller, and Kenneth Winkler, and from more extensive discussion of earlier drafts with John Carriero, Michael Condylis, Paul Hoffman, Terence Irwin, and Abe Roth. I have learned most from conversations with Elizabeth Radcliffe.

1 References in the text prefaced by "T" 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). References prefaced by "EHU" are to *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, and those prefaced by "EPM" are to *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, as they appear in David Hume, *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).

2 Barry Stroud, *Hume* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 265 (n. 7 to p. 187).

3 A point first noted in recent discussion, so far as I am aware, by Geoffrey Hunter in "Hume on Is and Ought," *Philosophy* 37 (1962), repr. in *The Is-Ought Question*, ed. W. D. Hudson (London: St. Martin's, 1969), 59–63.

4 As pointed out by A. C. MacIntyre, "Hume on 'Is' and 'Ought'," *The Philosophical Review* 68 (1959), repr. in Hudson, 42-3; by Hunter, 60-1; and more recently by Annette Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 176-7.

5 As Jonathan Harrison notes in *Hume's Moral Epistemology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 69-70.

6 In section 1 (EPM 169-75) and Appendix 1 (EPM 285-94), especially the latter, of the *Enquiry concerning Morals*.

7 E.g., T 296, 300-1, 475-6, 546-7, 574-5, 614; EPM 289; and see also, in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. T. H. Green and T. H. Grose, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1889), 2: 173, the note concerning the wording of section 1 of the *Enquiry concerning Morals* in editions G through N. *On whose feelings*: In the matter-of-fact paragraph and in the text at T 546-7 they appear simply to be the assessor's current feelings, whatever her circumstances. But other passages (T 372, 472, 536, 581-5, 593; and see 547n) offer grounds for discounting some actual feelings as a ground for evaluation: that one lacks the appropriate (and equal) "distance" from the objects judged, that one is influenced by "comparison," that one's imagination is not influenced by the right "general rules." And at T 581-5 and 603 (and at EPM 227-8) Hume is explicit that the relevant feelings need not even be actual: they are the ones one *would* have under conditions idealized by the removal of these distortions. In the *Enquiry* the relevant sentiments are those of "a spectator" (EPM 289) or of the generality of mankind (in editions G through N of section 1). I discuss the importance of these differences in Section III. *On which feelings*: In the matter-of-fact paragraph it is disapprobation or blame (for vice; and so, surely, approbation, for virtue) that matter. Hume more often says, however, simply that the relevant feelings are a particular kind of pleasure and pain (T 470-3, 575-6). I return to issues about moral feelings in Section VI.

8 For noncognitivist suggestions, see for example A. G. N. Flew, "On the Interpretation of Hume," *Philosophy* 38 (1963), repr. in Hudson, 68-9; W. D. Hudson, "Hume on Is and Ought," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1964), repr. in Hudson, 73-6; and J. L. Mackie, *Hume's Moral Theory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 70.

These noncognitivist proposals are all interpretations of the matter-of-fact paragraph, a passage which on any understanding conflicts with most of the others listed in footnote 7. But on what I am calling the natural reading, the conflict between the matter-of-fact paragraph and those other passages is merely about *which* feelings we are talking about in making moral pronouncements, a point on which the other passages also conflict among themselves; a noncognitivist reading, by contrast, makes the passage much more of an anomaly.

9 See, besides the items cited in note 8, Stroud, *Hume*, who doubts on general interpretive grounds that Hume actually holds any of the reductive analyses he appears to endorse (184, 246, 265 [n. 9 to p. 191]). (I agree with Stroud that Hume may not accept all of them: see Section V.)

10 *Hume's Moral Theory*, 58. For illustrations of the longstanding vacillation within the empiricist tradition about whether empiricist analyses intend to capture what speakers actually have in mind, or should instead be regarded as epistemologically motivated "reforming" definitions, see 390–3 in my "Brandt's Moral Empiricism," *The Philosophical Review* 91 (1982): 389–422.

11 So I reject what I take to be Mackie's implicit suggestion in this passage, that we square the matter-of-fact paragraph with the *is-ought* paragraph simply by taking the latter to concern what we *do* mean by moral judgments—something no reductive naturalistic analysis could capture—while taking the former to tell us, instead, what we *should* mean by them. My thesis is that it is, in Hume's view, precisely when we see what we *should* mean by these judgments that we also see why there must be, on this reductive and deflationary understanding of them, an *is-ought* gap.

12 And it would be equally remarkable if he were concerned, as both Harrison (*Hume's Moral Epistemology*, 72) and Mackie (*Hume's Moral Theory*, 62) appear to think he might be, about the derivation of any conclusion containing only a nonmoral "ought."

13 Comments on two points of interpretation:

(1) Despite his punctuation, I am taking Hume's relative clauses ("matter of fact, which is discovered by our reasoning"; "*matter of fact*, which can be discover'd by the understanding"; "matters of fact, whose existence we can infer by reason") to be restrictive. Hume punctuates more heavily than any writer of English now would, and frequently sets off with commas what are clearly restrictive clauses. (Examples: "We may make use of words, that express something near it" (T 629); and, from the *is-ought* paragraph itself, "In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with . . ." (T 469). Nor does he consistently reserve "which" for nonrestrictive clauses: a point illustrated by the latter of these examples, and also by the fact that in the first *Enquiry* the "that" in the former of these sentences becomes a "which." See *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Green and Grose, 2: 42, where the comma remains; Selby-Bigge, at EHU 49, edits it out.)

More important, if these clauses are *not* restrictive then there is an obvious contradiction, not merely between the *is-ought* and matter-of-fact paragraphs, but within the matter-of-fact paragraph itself: for Hume will have to be read as saying (twice) that morality does not consist in any matter of fact and then, immediately thereafter, that it does. The only writer I have found willing explicitly to accuse Hume of this much confusion is Harrison: "It is extremely puzzling that Hume says that he is going to show that morality is *not* a matter of fact, but ends up concluding that it *is* a *matter of fact about our sentiments*" (*Hume's Moral Epistemology*, 62; emphasis in original). On my reading, no passage in the *Treatise* says that morality is not a matter of fact. In Appendix 1 to the second *Enquiry*, Hume does say "that the crime of ingratitude is not any particular individual fact" (EPM 287), and there is no relative clause, however punctuated. But since the structure of this

passage closely parallels that of the matter-of-fact paragraph in the *Treatise*—it is part of an argument that reason does not discover moral distinctions, and is followed shortly by the identification of virtue and vice with a “plain matter of fact” (EPM 289) about our sentiments—it seems reasonable exegesis to save him from contradiction by supplying the express qualification from his earlier and more careful exposition. The relative clause reappears, furthermore, when Hume returns to the point a few pages later: we must acknowledge, he says, “that the crime or immorality is no particular fact or relation, *which can be the object of the understanding . . .*” (EPM 292–3, my emphasis).

(It is interesting that Selby-Bigge, in his analytical index to the *Treatise*, omits the relative clause entirely in his paraphrase of T 463, and so has Hume saying that morality is not any sort of matter of fact; but includes it *without* the comma in his paraphrase of T 468, thereby at least avoiding a contradiction *within* the matter-of-fact paragraph. See T 711, under “Moral §1.”)

(2) I have fastened on Hume’s *modal* characterization of matters of fact which are objects of reason, that they are ones that *can* be discovered by inference (T 468), rather than on his initial nonmodal characterization, which would make them the ones that *are* discovered by inference (T 463). That is why I take his claim that our feeling of disapprobation is not an object of reason to mean not just that it is not, but also that it *cannot* be, discovered by inference. The modal characterization is the one he uses, twice, in the paragraph in which he actually argues his point, where one would expect him to exercise most care. It is also required to make his account of objects of reason among matters of fact parallel to his account of objects of reason among relations of objects (or ideas). For he always takes the latter to include all demonstrable relations, not just those which have been or will be demonstrated; and his argument against Locke and Clarke (T 463–8) is explicitly that moral truths *cannot* be demonstrated. It would be odd if he were for no reason to take objects of reason to include all demonstrable relations, but not all inferable matters of fact.

It will also support this interpretation, of course, if Hume turns out to have a *reason* for thinking that these truths about our sentiments cannot be inferred from other things we know. I argue in Section IV that he does.

14 Jonathan Bennett notes an important tendency in Hume’s writings on the understanding to identify matters of fact simply with what in the first *Enquiry* (EHU 26) he calls “*absent*” matters of fact, i.e., those matters of fact that are discoverable (if at all) by inference (*Locke, Berkeley, Hume* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971], 244–7). This tendency is clearest when Hume uses the expression “matters of fact and real existence” (as apparently, e.g., at T 458) as if it were a redundancy; for he usually thinks of *real* existence as requiring mind-independence, and so as discoverable only by inference. On *this* understanding of matters of fact, of course, no contradiction would arise from taking *is*-statements to include all statements about matters of fact. What the matter-of-fact paragraph shows, however, is that the tendency

Bennett identifies is not exceptionless: for Hume here denies that vice is a “matter of fact, or real existence” in the act of willful murder (T 468), but then immediately identifies it with what he still calls a “matter of fact,” about one’s own current inner state. As I shall argue in the next section, moreover, he takes our knowledge of this matter of fact to be noninferential; it is not “absent.”

15 Strictly, it says more—but what it adds plays no role in Hume’s argument about moral epistemology. It says more because the *is-ought* paragraph, unlike the argument that precedes it, makes an assertion about two classes of *statements*—whether true or false—rather than just two classes of *truths*. Hume’s denial, before he reaches the *is-ought* paragraph, that any truth about morals is discoverable by reason commits him, on my construal of *is-* and *ought*-statements, to the conclusion (a) that no *ought*-statement can be derived from true *is*-statements. What the *is-ought* paragraph then adds is (b) that none can be derived from *false is*-statements, either. Whatever the interest of this additional claim, however, it obviously provides no independent support, beyond that already provided by (a), for Hume’s denial that reason can produce moral knowledge. For valid derivations from *false* premises do not yield knowledge.

There are different ways to understand how a false statement might be “about objects of reason,” and so count as an *is*-statement. We have seen that, despite Hume’s talk of “copulations,” vocabulary is not the test. We could take statements about objects of reason to be ones addressing *issues* settleable by reason. Alternatively, we could take them to be statements that could plausibly be put forward as truths discoverable by reason (even if they turn out not to be). These two understandings yield different results: on the first, a claim that has been proven false could be an *is*-statement, for example, but on the second not. The first fits better with twentieth-century discussions of “fact and value,” though the second may better capture Hume’s intent, a point I return to briefly at the end of Section V.

16 On the view I have been criticizing, according to which *all* statements of fact are *is*-statements, it is *this* claim that will be equivalent to the denial that any *ought* follows from an *is* (or, at least, from any *true is*-statement: see preceding note). That is why the standard view, too, makes the heart of the *is-ought* thesis a consequence of what precedes it.

17 Might one argue from *this* point that *even if* all statements about matters of fact (including ones about our own sentiments) were *is*-statements there would be no contradiction between the matter-of-fact and *is-ought* paragraphs? (Hunter mentions but does not pursue this possibility: “Hume on *Is* and *Ought*,” 61.) Only at the cost of abandoning the natural understanding of the *is-ought* paragraph: for on this suggestion, though there need be no inference from *is* to *ought*, there would also of course be no logical gap between them—and so no hint as to why anything about the relation of *is-* to *ought*-statements should threaten any vulgar system of morality.

18 In fact, in my view, he means something more than this: see note 29, below. But he clearly means at least this.

19 "Every thing that enters the mind, being in *reality* a perception, 'tis impossible any thing shou'd to *feeling* appear different. This were to suppose, that even where we are most intimately conscious, we might be mistaken" (T 190; emphasis in original).

20 As on reflection he might not, since it helps preserve the idea (which also appears to lie behind his "dispositional" account, to which I shall turn shortly) that we would not base a moral assessment on what we ourselves regarded as a purely whimsical feeling.

21 Hume does distinguish what he calls the "object" of some passions, the indirect passions, from their cause (T 277-8); and since there are some passages (e.g., T 614) in which he appears to identify moral approbation as a form of love, one of the indirect passions—although there are other passages that appear to count against this identification—the distinction might apply to the moral sentiments. But the relation of a passion to its "object," even when the object is not its cause, still involves causation. About pride, for example, one of the indirect passions, whose object is self, Hume says:

Here then is a passion plac'd betwixt two ideas, of which the one produces it, and the other is produc'd by it. The first idea, therefore, represents the *cause*, the second the *object* of the passion. (T 278)

As I shall explain shortly (note 28, below), I think that Hume's declaration that a passion, intrinsically, "contains not any representative quality," does not rule out quite as much as is sometimes supposed; but my qualification will not affect the present point, that a passion could not be disapprobation of willful murder unless it bore a causal relation to the idea of willful murder.

22 Joseph Addison, in *Spectator* 412 and 413 (June 23 and 24, 1712), explains beauty as a secondary quality (without using the terminology), and then adds that he supposes his "Reader acquainted with that great Modern Discovery . . . : Namely, that Light and Colours, as apprehended by the Imagination, are only Ideas in the Mind, and not Qualities that have any Existence in Matter"; he refers his reader to Locke's *Essay*, II viii, for an explanation (*The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965], 3: 547). (As Stephen Ferg has pointed out to me, we know that Hume was familiar with this part of the *Spectator*—numbers 411-21 form a famous connected essay on the "pleasures of the imagination"—since he quotes from *Spectator* 412, at T 284.) And, according to Berkeley, "they who assert that figure, motion, and the rest of the primary or original qualities do exist without the mind, in an unthinking substance, do at the same time acknowledge that colours, sounds, heat, cold and such-like secondary qualities do not; which they tell us are sensations, existing in the mind alone, that depend on and are occasioned by the different size, texture, and motion of the minute particles of matter" (*The Principles of Human Knowledge*, §10; see also §§14, 15, and *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, in *Berkeley's Philosophical Writings*, ed. David M. Armstrong [London: Collier, 1965], 151). Although he is typically more careful on this issue than either of these authors, moreover, Francis Hutcheson writes at one point (in developing the same analogy as Addison) that "Beauty, like other Names of sensible Ideas, properly de-

notes the Perception of some Mind; so Cold, Hot, Sweet, Bitter, denote the Sensations in our Minds, to which perhaps there is no resemblance in the Objects, which excite these Ideas in us . . ." (*An Inquiry Into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, 2nd ed. [London, 1726; facsimile repr. New York: Garland Publishing Co., 1971], 14; for explicit acknowledgement to Locke, see 6, and for a reference to *Spectator* 412, see 86).

In his essay, "The Sceptic," Hume, like Addison, reminds his reader "of that famous doctrine, supposed to be fully proved in modern times, 'That tastes and colours, and all other sensible qualities, lie not in the bodies, but merely in the senses'," adding that "the case is the same with beauty and deformity, virtue and vice"; he paraphrases part of this latter claim moreover by saying that "the beauty, properly speaking, lies not in the poem, but in the sentiment or taste of the reader" (*Essays Moral, Political and Literary* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963], 168).

23 For Hume on knowledge of our own perceptions, see note 19. Though it is a mistake to think that Locke identifies secondary qualities with ideas in anyone's mind (let alone in "one's own"), moreover, Hume is right to see in Locke the suggestion (e.g., at II xxx 2, II xxxi 2, II xxxii 14, in John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975]) that if we carefully ascribe to objects only those secondary qualities they appear to us to have (and so, to that extent, base these ascriptions only on facts about our own sensory "ideas"), we cannot be mistaken. At IV iv 4, Locke even offers this point as his first response to radical skepticism. For a suggestion about how Locke could have come to think that his view had this implication, see note 26, below.

24 *Essay* II viii 10.

25 Elsewhere in the *Treatise* Hume offers within the space of four pages what are clearly secondary-quality accounts of virtue and vice (on what he calls the "most probable hypothesis," T 296), true and false wit (T 297) and beauty and deformity (T 299). True wit is distinguished by causing a sensation of pleasure, false wit by causing one of uneasiness: "the *power* of bestowing these sensations is, therefore, the very essence of true and false wit" (T 297, my emphasis); and his account of beauty, he says one page following a combined reference to "natural and moral beauty," identifies it explicitly as "the *power* of producing pleasure" in a beholder (T 301, emphasis again mine). Later (T 575), he draws on his moral psychology to elaborate further on the sort of power moral goodness or virtue is. Since qualities in a person that please "by their survey or reflexion" also cause pride or love, whereas those that displease cause humility or hatred,

it follows, 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 all of these cases, an act, character or natural object clearly causes the relevant sentiment *by* producing a "perception" representing that act, character or object, which in turn causes the sentiment; and in the moral case (perhaps in con-

trast to the others), feeling a sentiment “from the contemplation” of willful murder appears to include having the feeling simply from thinking of the act. If so, then, strictly speaking, willful murder will be vicious, according to the matter-of-fact paragraph, because the idea of it (rather than the act itself) is exercising the power to cause a certain feeling.

This disanalogy (which others, too, have noticed: for example, Harrison, *Hume's Moral Epistemology*, 63–4) between moral qualities, as Hume conceives them, and secondary qualities, does not of course affect the current point, that Hume makes moral facts *causal* facts. I consider in Sections V and VI whether it might matter to his argument in other ways.

26 It is less clear, on the other hand, that this could again be the direct influence of Locke, who appears never to have got a firm grip on the role that standard conditions might play in the definition of secondary qualities. One has to hunt for the occasional reference to such conditions (e.g., “a due light,” *Essay* II xxiii 10; a perceiver “whose Eyes can discover ordinary Objects,” III viii 1), and Locke often appears to think himself committed to holding that an object has at any time whatever color (for example) it appears to anyone to have at that time: what need otherwise to insist, in defense of the “incompatibility of colors,” that it will not be exactly the *same* part of a body that appears at once yellow to one perceiver, azure to another (IV iii 15)? And he seems to think an object has *only* the color it appears to someone to have: that is why porphyry “has no colour in the dark” (II viii 19).

It is very likely these views that underlie Locke's suggestion (in the passages cited in note 23) that his account renders our ascriptions of secondary qualities to objects, when those ascriptions are carefully based on the way the object appears to us, immune to skeptical doubt. (Notice, though, that Hume still should not take this account to render any of our knowledge of an object's secondary qualities noninferential, if knowledge of how an object appears to us is *causal* knowledge; and Locke surely does think of it as knowledge of a causal process.)

27 One would expect this, given what we have seen him to mean by “reason” and “object of reason” at T 463–8; but it is confirmed independently by his well-known argument at T 413–18 that reason alone does not motivate, for he there maintains only that *reasoning*, whether about relations of ideas or matters of fact, does not by itself motivate (T 413–14). Harrison, to his credit, at least notices that Hume's words invite this reading, but he dismisses it as an interpretation because “it is most implausible to suggest that how a belief is arrived at makes any difference to whether or not it moves us to action” (*Hume's Moral Epistemology*, 12; cf. 6, 10, 111). I agree that it is implausible, but I shall explain why I think Hume found it plausible.

I return below to evidence that, in the *Treatise*, Hume does not deny motivating power even to all beliefs that are objects of reason; but what matters here is merely that he denies it to no beliefs *other* than these.

28 That Hume's theory of belief allows him to identify the belief that one is having a moral feeling with the feeling itself was first suggested, to my knowledge, by Arthur N. Prior, *Logic and the Basis of Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), 67. Prior fails to note the point I am emphasizing, however, that this identification is possible only if

the belief that one is having the moral feeling is noninferential. Nor does he pause to defend this claim about Hume's theory of belief—though it needs some defense, for it requires discounting two features of Hume's official definition of belief in the *Treatise*, as a "LIVELY IDEA RELATED TO OR ASSOCIATED WITH A PRESENT IMPRESSION" (T 96). But (a) it becomes clear in subsequent discussions (T 119–20; 623–7; 628–9; 653–4 [in the "Abstract"]; EHU 47–50) that the "relation to a present impression," though important for the production of the sort of belief in which Hume is here most interested, is in his view extraneous to the *nature* of belief. Thus he writes that a belief "is nothing but a *more vivid and intense conception of any idea*" (T 119–20, emphasis in original) and, again, "that an opinion or belief is nothing but an idea, that is different from a fiction, not in the nature, or the order of its parts, but in the *manner* of its being conceived" (T 628). And (b) there are equally good grounds—for example, in this last-quoted passage—for not taking only *ideas* to be beliefs. Idea-beliefs differ from mere imaginings only in their manner of conception, by being (Hume usually says) *more forceful and vivacious*; but impressions differ from ideas only by being more forceful, vivid and lively still. So Hume should obviously count them as even more confident beliefs; and it is clear, for example in the following passage, that he does.

Thus it appears, that the *belief* or *assent*, which always attends the memory and senses, is nothing but the vivacity of those perceptions they present; and that this alone distinguishes them from the imagination. To believe is in this case to feel an immediate impression of the senses, or a repetition of that impression in the memory. (T 86)

It is because he treats the belief constituted by an impression as entirely self-referential, moreover, as the belief that one is having that very impression, that Hume can write that "a passion is an original existence . . . and contains not any representative quality, which renders it a copy of *any other* existence or modification" (T 415, my emphasis), and is thus in no danger of being false. (On the other hand, if I am right, he should not conclude, as he does when he expands this argument at T 458, that passions are incapable of *truth*. He can serve his purpose there—to establish that they "can never be an object to our reason"—by arguing instead, as he does ten pages later, that the knowledge they constitute is noninferential, and that it could not be acquired by inference.)

In *Hume's System* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), David Pears notes that for Hume, sense-impressions are "self-intimating" (11), in that they represent their own existence. Because he honors Hume's official insistence that all *beliefs* are inferential, Pears refuses to conclude that impressions are all beliefs, but he does take them to be instances of "immediate judgment" (46–7), and of noninferential knowledge.

29 Thus the further respect, promised in note 18, in which our feelings are also "objects of feeling": they are not merely objects of noninferential knowledge, but of noninferential knowledge which *consists* just in our having them.

30 Harrison includes a section called, "Five Views That Might Have Been Hume's" (*Hume's Moral Epistemology*, 110–24). There are similar catalogues in Mackie (*Hume's Moral Theory*, 64–75) and Stroud (*Hume*, 180–92).

31 So, for those fond of philosophical taxonomy: if moral intuitionism is the view that we have noninferential moral knowledge, Hume is an intuitionist. If I am right about what he means in denying that moral truths are objects of reason, moreover, he remains an intuitionist even if we define intuitionism as G. E. Moore does (*Principia Ethica* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903], viii, x), as the view that we have moral knowledge that *could not* be secured by inference from anything else we know. At the same time, if reductive ethical naturalism is the view that moral assertions are equivalent to claims about the natural world that can be stated using no moral terminology, he is clearly a reductive naturalist; and if emotivism is the doctrine that holding a moral view consists in nothing but having a certain sentiment, then he is an emotivist.

Of course, there are also ways of restricting some of these categories to exclude Hume. If intuitionists must hold—as they standardly have—that our noninferential moral knowledge is of *mind-independent* moral facts, Hume is no intuitionist. If emotivism is taken by definition to be a version of *noncognitivism*, moreover, then he is no emotivist, since he thinks moral judgments are beliefs as well as sentiments.

32 There is room for controversy about exactly what Hume takes these conditions to be. Since it does not matter to my discussion exactly what they are (except perhaps at one point, as I explain: see note 109, below), at least so long as they are something like what I suggest in text above, and because it is awkward to keep repeating “appropriately standardized or idealized conditions,” I shall simply refer to these conditions, whatever they may be, as the “right conditions.” Hume’s dispositional view thus becomes the view that an act or character is virtuous just in case contemplation of it would produce approval in the right conditions, vicious just in case contemplation of it would produce disapproval in those conditions.

33 On Hume’s account of belief, as we have seen, these sentiments, since they are impressions, will also be beliefs. But the content of these beliefs, for the reasons explained above, will not make them even remotely plausible as accounts of the content of moral judgments. So I am supposing that this reading will ignore Hume’s identification of sentiments with beliefs in their own occurrence, and will thus leave him with a purely noncognitivist view.

These are not the only two alternatives. A third that has recently found favor from Stroud (*Hume*, 184–6) and Mackie (*Hume’s Moral Theory*, 71–2, 74) would have it, against noncognitivism, that moral opinions are genuinely beliefs, but beliefs that “project” our sentiments (or, as Mackie says, an “image” of our sentiments) onto the world, and so are all *false*; it thus agrees with noncognitivism, against any reductive naturalism, that there are no moral facts, and so of course preserves Hume’s denial that reason discovers such facts. Despite its rejection of naturalism, moreover, Mackie sees it as supported by one understanding of Hume’s analogy between moral and secondary qualities, one which takes us to “project” secondary qualities onto the world, in response to our subjective experience, and to be massively mistaken in so doing.

I have two reasons for not delaying to consider this view in the text. (1) It seems largely to consolidate the disadvantages, rather than the advantages, of the two views I have described. It has as much difficulty as the noncognitivist interpretation with Hume’s many suggestions that moral facts are facts about our

sentiments; and it appears at the same time to have just as much trouble as the naturalistic view in accommodating his insistence that moral judgments themselves motivate. For moral judgments are on this view genuine beliefs. Admittedly, they are not beliefs in “objects of reason”—they would need to be the sort of belief we might discover to be true to fall in that category—so they could motivate without, strictly, falsifying Hume’s thesis that reason does not motivate. But neither are they sentiments; and how, according to Hume, are beliefs that are not sentiments supposed to motivate? (There are, I concede, mysteries surrounding Hume’s views on this question: see below). (2) Like the noncognitivist reading, this interpretation gains much of its plausibility from the assumption that no reductive naturalistic reading can accommodate Hume’s *is-ought* thesis. Like the noncognitivist reading, therefore, it will be undermined if I can show, as I intend to, that the naturalistic reading provides as plausible an account as any other of his belief in that thesis.

34 The passage in question is his remark, which to Mackie “seems explicitly emotivist” (*Hume’s Moral Theory*, 70), that “morality . . . is more properly felt than judg’d of” (T 470). It is no problem for a reductive naturalistic reading that Hume speaks here of morality’s being “felt,” since we have seen that he can take feelings to be beliefs, and we have also seen that he standardly (as at T 190, 468, 471) speaks of feeling as a source of noninferential factual *knowledge*. But what of morality’s not being “judg’d of”? Here we need to recall that Hume, unlike his interpreters (including me), almost never speaks of moral “judgments,” even when he appears clearly to be speaking of moral beliefs, capable of truth and falsity. (Stroud notices this: *Hume*, 264 [n. 1 to p. 172].) He typically reserves the term “judgment” for what he also calls judgments of the understanding, all of which (if they concern matters of fact) are arrived at by *inference*: so his denial that morality is “judg’d of” is plausibly no more than a repetition of his denial that our knowledge of it is inferential. His remark means that our moral knowledge is more properly noninferential than based on inference; and if twentieth-century labels are to be imported, the remark could as well be called “explicitly intuitionist” as explicitly emotivist.

It is well to keep in mind: a philosopher who can write that morality is more properly felt than judged of, and *mean* that moral knowledge is noninferential rather than based on inference, is one who could easily be taken for more of a noncognitivist than he is.

35 For noncognitivist arguments that it is the special motivating power of moral judgments (and the correlative “action guiding” function of moral language) that underlies the fact-value gap, see Charles Stevenson, “The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms,” in *Facts and Values* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 30; A. J. Ayer, “The Analysis of Moral Judgements,” in *Philosophical Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1965), 240–2; and R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), chapter 5. In chapter 3, Hare credits Hume’s *is-ought* thesis (which he dubs “Hume’s Law”) with this noncognitivist insight.

36 Stroud is typical on these issues. He argues that no reductive naturalistic analysis, such as the ideal observer theory, “could be acceptable to Hume, since it would commit him to the view that moral judgments, so understood, can be arrived at by reasoning alone” (*Hume*, 265 [n. 9 to p. 191]; see 183–4). And he takes the *is-ought*

gap to be due to the special motivational force of moral judgments, a force conclusions of reason lack (187).

37 So Stroud is not quite right to say that an interpretation on which “we could arrive at moral judgments by reason and observation alone . . . would destroy the whole point of [Hume’s] moral theory” (*Hume*, 183). It would, by making moral facts discoverable by reasoning, destroy *one* main point of his theory. But its *other* main point, I have claimed, is to identify moral facts with facts about our sentiments that we can know. The two points are supposed to be consistent, because this knowledge of our sentiments is supposed to be noninferential, and so not to require the use of reason. But they are not consistent, so we may need to decide *which* main point we want a reading of Hume to preserve. On the assumptions mentioned here, my naturalistic reading destroys one main point of Hume’s theory, by making moral facts objects of reason, but it preserves the other, by making them facts about our sentiments that we can know. The noncognitivist reading preserves the skepticism about reason, on the other hand, but at the cost of leaving us no moral facts to know. Neither provides all that Hume wants.

38 A further important difficulty, which has been noticed in recent discussion, is that even if we were to concede to Hume his second premise—understood to mean that beliefs arrived at by reasoning never motivate “of themselves”—it is not clear, from the details of his account of our moral sentiments, how he can ascribe to *them* a power to motivate “of themselves” that would distinguish them from reason in this regard. In the well-known passages I have quoted in the text he certainly appears to want to do so; but the details of his moral psychology appear nevertheless to block his way. Here see Charlotte Brown, “Is Hume an Internalist?,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 26 (1988): 69–87.

39 In “Hume on Reason and Passion,” to appear in a volume edited by Donald Ainslie. Hume says on T 414 that the “prospect”—that is, the expectation—of pleasure or pain is sufficient to give rise to an aversion or propensity. And in each of his subsequent summaries of the role of judgments—especially false judgments—in motivation, he carefully leaves room for two cases: one (which he is *supposed* to believe in) in which beliefs about cause and effect *extend* passions one already has to new objects—as when a desire for an end gives rise to a desire or choice for what one takes to be a means; and the other in which an expectation of pleasure or pain from an object *gives rise* to a desire for or a choice of the object, without extending any antecedent desire. At T 416–17, this second case is the one in which (if the judgment is false) the passion is “founded on false suppositions”; at T 459 it is the case in which reason “excites a passion by informing us of the existence of something which is a proper object of it”; at T 462 it is the case in which reason “prompts” rather than “directs” a passion. In each of these summaries this case is *contrasted* with the only sort of case Hume is usually thought to admit, in which a belief about causes and effects motivates by combining with an already existing sentiment or passion to give rise to a new one. See the above-cited paper for a full examination of the relevant passages. I have found most of the same evidence noted by Rachael M. Kydd, *Reason and Conduct in Hume’s Treatise* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), 103–10, but I find little help in her suggestions about how Hume’s views on the motivating influence of belief can all be rendered consistent.

40 As well as other moral qualities, of course—but I stick to the example of virtue and vice, since Hume does. For an account of the facts about our sentiments that constitute the obligatoriness of acts or omissions, see T 517. He surely intends a similar account for all other moral qualities.

41 The clearest explanation of these points is in the first *Enquiry*, 20–1, though the distinction between “matters of fact” and “relations of ideas,” without the terminology, is anticipated in the *Treatise*, T 69–73. Hume does not really begin using the terminology until Book III of the *Treatise*: as one can see, for example, from the entry for “Fact” in Selby-Bigge’s analytical index (T 695).

42 This argument assumes that the only sort of derivation Hume has in mind is deduction. If he believes that reason would also engage us to make some nondeductive inferences, then he owes us a further argument here, to rule out the possibility of such an inference from demonstrable premises to a conclusion about a matter of fact. (It is controversial whether Hume should be read, in his skeptical arguments about inferences from experience, as a “deductivist” who believes that only deductive inferences are reasonable. That he offers no separate argument here to rule out rational but nondeductive inferences may be some evidence that he is—at least in this passage—a deductivist.)

43 He includes this as a separate operation of the understanding not only in the passage we are considering (T 463–8), but also in his discussion in Book II of reason and motivation (T 413–14). Admittedly, he does not mention it separately in his first statement of his question about the role of reason in morals (T 456–7), or in his summary at the conclusion of the discussion: in this latter passage, he says that what he has shown is just that “vice and virtue are not discoverable merely by reason, or the comparison of ideas” (T 470). But his omitting to mention inferences concerning matters of fact is likely due here, as also at T 496 and 517n, not to his having suddenly retreated to a narrower notion of reason, but to his focusing on his *opponents*, such as Locke and Clarke, whose view was that moral conclusions *could* be demonstrated simply by comparison of ideas: that, as Locke was “bold to think . . . *Morality is capable of Demonstration, as well as Mathematicks*” (*Essay*, III xi 16).

There is more room for suspicion about why Hume should recapitulate at T 581 by saying merely that “the approbation of moral qualities most certainly is not deriv’d from reason, or any comparison of ideas.” For this remark introduces his admission that we correct our moral judgments to take account of the distortion of our sentiments by nonstandard circumstances; and this undoubtedly means that we *infer* these judgments from our sentiments together with other facts we know—which should in turn mean that, by the standards employed at T 463–70, the judgments are about objects of reason. He appears conveniently to have forgotten what those standards were. (He concedes in this passage that the correction of our judgment requires an operation of reason on the *passions*, for it requires us to decide what would constitute “a general calm determination of the passions, founded on some distant view or reflexion” [T 583]; but this understanding of what it would take to make our passions reasonable is one he denigrates elsewhere in Book III as an unphilosophical mistake [T 417–18, 437–8, 536]. What he fails to point out is that, however that may be, the correction also

involves an operation of reason in arriving at belief—inference from experience—on an understanding of reason which, at least in Book III, he is not treating as mistaken.) I return to this point in Section V.

44 Strictly speaking, these *arguments* (assuming, in the second quotation, that the second sentence is intended to support the first) assume only that all matters of fact discoverable by reason are in the object, not the converse. So we should probably take Hume, strictly, to count as an *is*-statement any that is about facts “in the object” and discoverable by reason (by whatever standards he is assuming here). Of course, if he thinks he has an argument against the possibility of deriving conclusions about our sentiments from *any* facts in the object—and I shall suggest how he might have thought this—that will also insure, on this assumption, that these conclusions also cannot be derived from any in the subset that are also objects of reason.

45 *Essay*, II viii 23.

46 *Essay*, IV iii 11.

47 So he means that a body’s color and taste, for example, depend on its primary-quality microstructure, not (implausibly) that they depend on its macroscopic shape or size. See *Essay*, II viii 10, 23.

Locke clearly does recognize macroscopic instances of primary qualities—the shape and motion of the manna (II viii 18), the shape of the snowball (II viii 8), the solidity, extension, shape, and mobility of *visible* pieces of wheat (II viii 9). His focus on *microscopic* instances of these qualities nevertheless verges on preoccupation. Macroscopic primary qualities are not so much as mentioned when, after introducing the primary-secondary quality distinction in II viii, he returns to it at II xxiii 10–11, IV iii 11–14, IV vi 7 and IV vi 14. And even in II viii his attention is mainly on microphysical properties, as one can see (a) from the existence of passages which, taken in isolation, would appear to *identify* primary qualities with properties of insensible corpuscles, as for example in the initial characterization of secondary qualities at II viii 10; and (b) from cases in which the primary quality he ascribes to a macroscopic body is the property of *having insensible parts* in some fashion. (This latter point is transparent for “motion of parts,” which occurs at the end of many lists [II viii 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18], where the parts meant must be insensible, since not all bodies have perceivable moving parts. I would claim on the basis of II viii 9 that the same is true for “Number,” but the required defense is complex.) So Locke’s attention is obviously heavily focused on these microscopic qualities, with their explanatory potential; and it would thus not be surprising if Hume, comparing moral to secondary qualities, and contrasting them with matters of fact “in the object,” should think of the latter as corresponding to Locke’s *hidden* primary qualities.

48 This assumption reflects the emphasis of Locke’s discussion and makes the parallel between Hume’s and Locke’s questions even closer—see note 53 below—but it is not actually *required* to support my suggestion that Hume models his *is-ought* gap on Locke’s primary-secondary quality gap. For Locke clearly does not think we can infer an object’s secondary qualities from its macroscopic primary qualities any more than we can from its microscopic ones.

49 This is one strand in Locke's thought, prominent in his discussions of primary and secondary qualities; but it should be noted that there are passages elsewhere in which the connection of cause to effect in even these cases strikes him as opaque. See, for example, *Essay*, II xxiii 28. For a helpful discussion of the extent of the doubts Locke was willing to entertain about mechanistic explanations, see Margaret Wilson, "Superadded Properties: The Limits of Mechanism in Locke," in her *Ideas and Mechanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 196–208.

50 *Essay*, IV iii 11.

51 *Essay*, IV iii 25.

52 *Essay*, IV iii 13; cf. IV iii 6, 11–14, 28; IV vi 7, 14.

53 Thus, (1) in asking what we could infer from a body's "insensible" primary qualities, or from matters of fact "in the object," Locke and Hume are both asking about inferences from premises of which they take us in fact to have no knowledge; (2) Locke answers that we could infer nothing about secondary qualities, Hume that we could infer nothing about moral qualities; but (3) in neither case is this skepticism about these inferences (or about their premises) made the ground for a general skepticism about the conclusions. For Locke thinks we know the secondary qualities of many bodies by observation, just as we know their macroscopic primary qualities; and Hume, as we saw at length in Section III, holds officially to the view—however untenable by even his own standards—that we have noninferential knowledge of moral qualities. (If Hume meant to compare matters of fact "in the object" to primary qualities generally, and not just to the insensible ones, we would lose the first of these three comparisons, but the others would remain intact.)

54 As we shall see in Section VI, elements of it can be found in Philippa Foot's "Hume on Moral Judgement," in *Virtues and Vices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 74–80. But she does not herself assemble these elements.

55 For example:

As the *Ideas* of sensible secondary Qualities, which we have in our Minds, can, by us, be no way deduced from bodily Causes, nor any correspondence or connexion be found between them and those primary Qualities which (Experience shows us) produce them in us; so on the other side, the operation of our Minds upon our Bodies is as unconceivable. How any thought should produce a motion in Body is as remote from the nature of our *Ideas*, as how any Body should produce any Thought in the Mind. (*Essay*, IV iii 28)

56 For example, Harrison, *Hume's Moral Epistemology*, 63–4. Hume needn't exclude the case in which witnessing an act of willful murder causes us to disapprove of it, but (1) he is clearly not talking only about such cases, and (2) he is likely committed to partially discounting our reaction in such cases if we lack the proper "distance" from what we are reacting to.

57 It is striking that even when Locke says that his puzzlement is over the general relation of thought to matter—as at *Essay*, IV iii 28, quoted in note 55, and also IV iii 6—his *examples* of the incomprehensible production of ideas by matter are always of secondary-quality ideas (or of pleasure and pain), never of primary-quality ones.

58 *Essay*, II viii 12.

59 *Essay*, II viii 13.

60 *Essay*, II viii 25. We would accept the production of secondary-quality sensations by primary qualities, Locke says, the inconceivability notwithstanding, if we *observed* them to come about in this way, but we do not: the primary qualities “appear not to our Senses to operate in their Production.” (This latter claim appears to need reconciling with the one quoted in note 55, from IV iii 28, that “Experience shows us” that sensations of secondary qualities are produced by primary qualities.)

61 That Hume conceived of the issue in terms of resemblance or allied notions seems especially likely, moreover, in view of the use of Locke’s views made by Francis Hutcheson, whose influence on Hume’s ethical writings is generally acknowledged. Hume credits Hutcheson with having established the essential similarity of moral and secondary qualities (see the note to section 1 of the first *Enquiry*, in editions E and F [*Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. Grene and Grose, 2: 10]); but Hutcheson’s emphasis, unlike Hume’s, when he invokes Locke’s views for comparison, is entirely on the point that just as “purely sensible” ideas “are allowed to be only perceptions in our minds, and not images of any like external quality, as colors, sounds, tastes, smells, pleasure, pain,” so the “approbation or disapprobation arising in the observer” from consideration of an agent’s motives and character “cannot be supposed an image of any thing external, more than the pleasures of harmony, of taste, of smell” (Francis Hutcheson, *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, ed. Bernard Peach [Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1971], 163–4). Hutcheson does not here use Locke’s term “resemblance”; but Locke offers the claim that ideas of secondary qualities are not “Images, or Representations” of their causes as one paraphrase of the thesis that they do not resemble them, at *Essay*, II xxx 2.

62 Hume appeals to the comparison explicitly not only in the matter-of-fact paragraph, but also in his essay “The Sceptic” (quoted in note 22, above) and in a note that was appended to section 1 of the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* in editions E and F (see preceding note); it also appears clearly to guide his account at T 296–9 of virtue and vice, true and false wit, and beauty and deformity, as powers to produce certain sensations in a beholder (see note 25, above). In the course of this paper I mention many other passages in which Hume is plausibly seen as appealing to it: for example, the passage from the second *Enquiry* (EPM 171–2) that I cited in the previous section, and the passages from the *Treatise* that I discuss in Section VI, below.

A dissent here comes from Simon Blackburn, “Hume on the Mezzanine Level,” *Hume Studies* 19 (1993), who claims (273) “not only that Hume did not rely on the Comparison [with secondary qualities] in his ethics, but that he could not possibly have done so, for reasons lying deep within his philosophy.” In considering whether

Hume *did* rely on it, Blackburn addresses the first two of the passages I have mentioned but does not discuss any of the others. (To be sure, one issue is what, exactly, to count as an appeal to the secondary quality analogy; I have of course argued that Hume understands it in different and sometimes inconsistent ways, in different places.)

63 “Hume on Causation,” in *David Hume: a Symposium*, ed. D. F. Pears (London: Macmillan, 1963), 55–66. Warnock contrasts Locke and Hume on the question of what additional knowledge about a cause would allow us to understand, not on what it would allow us to predict “without Trial” (in Locke’s phrase); but Locke talks about both understanding and prediction, as my quotations show, and Hume of course makes the question of prediction central.

64 Warnock, “Hume on Causation,” 58.

65 In fact, he is not so explicit: the reader must simply make sense of his arguing, in order to show that the philosophical hypothesis of a separate existence of perceptions and objects does not recommend itself to reason, that no inductive, causal reasoning could yield this conclusion. It is not only in Book III that one finds Hume, in the midst of a skeptical argument, suddenly calling rational forms of inference that he has earlier argued are not.

66 What of his argument that since we have no impression of necessary connection, we have no idea of it; and that since we have no idea of it, we cannot conceive of it, and so cannot even understand Locke’s hypothesis, since “in all these expressions, *so apply’d*, we have really no distinct meaning, and make use only of common words, without any clear and determinate ideas” (T 162)? In light of this argument, must we not regard the concession that there might be such hidden powers (which is most prominent anyway in the first *Enquiry*, not the *Treatise*) as mere Humean irony? I do not deny that Hume argues in this way, but it seems worth noting (even in deciding where the irony lies) that this argument is on Hume’s own principles a terrible one. The absence of an impression of necessary connection would imply that we had no corresponding idea only if the idea had to be simple, but Hume forgets this both in the *Treatise* (157) and the *Enquiry* (62–3); and from his search for an impression of necessary connection one can easily tease out his quite complex conception of that quality (of the one he doesn’t find, not the substitute he eventually comes up with instead). Indeed, it is hard to see how he could be sure he had not found an impression of it, if he had no idea of what he was looking for.

67 The best textual evidence that he might intend to address this question indirectly is not found in the *Treatise*, but in the example of colliding billiard balls in the *Abstract* (T 649) and the first *Enquiry* (28–30); for isn’t this intended to be a model of what we *would* see (on an eighteenth-century conception) if we perceived the microstructure of matter? Hume’s thinking of the example in this light might also explain an odd mistake he makes about it, for he describes it as a case in which the effect “is supposed to depend on the simple qualities of objects, without any secret structure of parts” (EHU 28)—as if no one thought the effect would vary as the balls were made of china, or wood or cotton. But the remark would be in order

if he really had in mind what it would be like to perceive colliding *atoms*, for then there would presumably be no structure of simpler parts.

This remains speculation, however. All Hume says is that we perceive no necessary connection when we see billiard balls collide.

68 For a generally naturalistic reading, see Stroud, *Hume*. Notice that I am straddling this particular fence. Stroud argues, on naturalistic grounds, against taking literally *any* of Hume's proposed reductive definitions of philosophically controversial concepts (246). My reading of the *is-ought* paragraph requires, by contrast, that we take Hume quite literally in one or another of his reductive, subjectivist accounts of virtue and vice (though with the caution I mention at the end of Section I about what sort of analysis this is); but it appears at the same time to suggest a more naturalistic approach to his remarks on causation and necessary connection.

(The reader may sense a terminological problem here. I have called my own reading of Hume "naturalistic" because it attributes to him a reductive analysis of judgments of virtue and vice that is naturalistic [and subjectivist] in *content*; but according to the methodological division I am now addressing my reading is more "analytic" than naturalistic on that issue, just because it does attribute a reductive analysis to him. I have tried to keep this point in view by saying that my reading makes Hume a *reductive* naturalist about morality.)

69 The issues I have touched on here have been the subject of extensive recent debate. For an excellent overview, with references, see Kenneth Winkler, "The New Hume," *The Philosophical Review* 100 (1991): 541-79.

70 This might appear an odd worry if we stuck merely to the initial characterization of *is*-statements that I ferreted out of Hume's text in Section II, as any that are about "objects of reason." For on that characterization, if it turned out that facts about our sentiments could not be inferred from *is*-statements, but *could* be inferred from other things we know, this would make these facts about our sentiments themselves objects of reason, and statements about them would be *is*-statements.

But I take the argument of Section IV to have shown that Hume's *basic* idea about *is*-statements (at least concerning matters of fact) is that they are about matters of fact discoverable "in the object": for it is that characterization which makes them analogous to primary qualities, and so yields an *is-ought* gap. So I take it that if it turned out that some facts about our sentiments had to be, and could be, established by inference, that would make them "objects of reason," but would not make statements of them into *is*-statements, since they would still be facts in us, not "in the object."

71 As I noted in Section III, any noncognitivist reading of Hume faces this difficulty. What I add here is that it is also faced by any interpretation which preserves his naturalistic, subjectivist account of which facts the moral facts are, but which also retains his complete skepticism about the power of reason to discover moral facts.

72 That Hume might have been willing to think moral facts discoverable by inference so long as we rely partly on premises about our own sentiments is not a fanciful

suggestion. The inferences he takes moral judgments to be based on are those involved in the “correction” of our sentiments for peculiarities of our perspective, corrections such as “are common with regard to all the senses” (T 582; see EPM 227–8), and these inferences rely at least in part on information about patterns in our subjective experience (or in our sentiments). But he does not explicitly say whether he thinks these inferences reasonable, by the standards he is employing in Book III. Indeed, at just the point where the question would arise, he conveniently forgets what those standards are: see note 43.

73 *Essay*, II viii 16, 18.

74 For Addison and Hutcheson, and for further references to Hume, see note 22; see also the section of Hutcheson’s *Illustrations on the Moral Sense* cited in note 61 above.

75 It is clear even from the matter-of-fact paragraph that they will have to include facts about our passions: the facts you *do* find in the object, when you examine an act of willful murder, include “passions, motives, volitions and thoughts” (T 468)—a point impressed on me twenty-five years ago by Terence Irwin.

76 See note 39.

77 *Spectator* 413, in *The Spectator* 3: 545.

78 *Inquiry*, 47.

79. *Inquiry*, 99–105, on the “Final Cause of the internal Senses.”

80 *Inquiry*, 271–2. Hutcheson of course expects his readers to recognize the allusion to Locke’s example at *Essay*, II viii 13.

81 *Inquiry*, 302–3.

82 Addison does not mention them. Hutcheson merely says in passing that “as in our external Senses, so in our *internal* ones, the pleasant Sensations generally arise from those Objects which calm Reason would have recommended, had we understood their Use, and which might have engag’d our pursuits from *Self-Interest*” (*Inquiry*, 36–7; see also 271). Hutcheson assigns what Hume calls pleasures of reflection to “internal senses.”

83 *Spectator* 413 and 416, in *The Spectator* 3: 545–6, 559–60.

84 *Inquiry*, 99–105, 302–3.

85 Outside the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, which, except for one brief reference below, I put to one side; I find it too difficult in them to tell what Hume’s view is on the issues I am considering here.

86 This much *is* clear from the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*.

87 Indeed, I must point out that in one way my proposal is even more modest than I have said here, for there is one application in which it must fail. To apply the strategy, Hume would have to say that the kinds of pleasures and pains that we reflect on in coming to approve or disapprove of an act or character “on the

survey” are intelligible in a way that the pleasures and pains that constitute our moral approval and disapproval are not. But there obviously cannot be this difference in any case in which the moral sentiments are *themselves* the object of our moral approval and disapproval. In the *Treatise*, Hume does not make a great deal of this possibility, but he does mention it: he claims it as an advantage of his system, in fact, that according to it, “not only virtue must be approv’d of, but also the sense of virtue” (T 619). About this problem for my reading, I can only suggest that Hume may indeed have overlooked it, since it forms such a minor part of his discussion.

88 To this extent Richard Price seems largely right in lumping Hume with Hutcheson as thinking that our moral sense is to be considered

as the effect of a *positive constitution* of our minds, or as an *implanted and arbitrary* principle by which a relish is given us for certain moral objects and forms and aversion to others, similar to the relishes and aversions created by any of our other senses. (*A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*, ed. D. D. Raphael [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948], 14; emphasis in original.)

Price may be running together more points than one, but “arbitrary” seems accurately to capture the contingency Hutcheson concedes and (on my view) Hume insists on, in the relation (simply viewed) of our moral sense to its objects; and for “positive constitution,” see not only the matter-of-fact paragraph (“from the constitution of your nature”) but also Hume’s appeal, in the *Enquiry concerning Morals* (172, quoted above in Section IV), to “the original fabric and formation of the human mind” as the most basic reason we can offer for the behavior of our moral sentiments, when reason is unable to “pronounce beforehand” what objects they will take. “Implanted,” however, fits Hutcheson’s view rather than Hume’s, assuming it is a reference to the choice of a Deity in so constituting us. Price, interestingly, seems to see this feature as making no difference: it will simply trace our moral responses to “the mere good pleasure of our Maker adapting the mind and its organs in a particular manner to certain objects” (*Review*, 15). But Hutcheson appears to think it will make the responses more understandable than that.

89 *Essay*, IV iii 6.

90 *Essay*, II viii 13.

91 On the other possibility I mentioned in note 15, about how false statements might be about objects of reason, any claim that addressed a settleable *issue* would count as an *is*-statement. A consequence of this understanding, however, is that Hutcheson’s theological premises might count as *is*-statements merely in virtue of our being able to establish—if we could—that they are *false*; and that then the news that he could from them derive a moral conclusion, and so cross the *is-ought* gap, would be of no epistemological interest whatever. Hume could of course adopt this understanding, and simply point out its consequence. Since the understanding I mention in the text guarantees the epistemological interest of the question of whether an *ought* can be derived from an *is*, however it does seem preferable.

92 It is consistent with this suggestion that Hume should, at least for the sake of argument, regard his own example, of “the being of a God” (T 469), as an *is*-statement: for it will take premises far beyond *that* one to yield the sort of conclusion Hutcheson wants.

93 For example, Harrison, 63–6; Colin McGinn, *The Subjective View* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 145–55; Simon Blackburn, “Errors and the Phenomenology of Value,” in *Morality and Objectivity*, ed. Ted Honderich (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 13–15.

94. There is an enormous literature on this topic. Seminal contributions include Thomas Nagel, “What is it Like to be a Bat?” *The Philosophical Review* 83 (1974): 435–50; Sydney Shoemaker, “Functionalism and Qualia,” *Philosophical Studies* 27 (1975): 291–315; N. J. Block, “Troubles with Functionalism,” in *Perception and Cognition, Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, ed. C. W. Savage (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978), vol. 9, 261–325. (Block does not argue that this problem about “qualia” is the only serious difficulty for functionalism, but it seems safe to say that it has struck many thinkers as the most intuitive difficulty not only for functionalism but for any version of physicalism about the mental.) All of these articles are reprinted in *Readings in Philosophy of Psychology*, ed. Ned Block (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), vol. 1.

95 Though this principle will sound familiar, some of its implications may surprise a reader of much twentieth-century metaethics. For it relies on a distinction between moral and nonmoral properties, rather than, e.g., moral and nonmoral vocabulary; and we have arrived at it by assuming that “is morally good” and “would be approved in the right conditions” (where, as I explained in note 32, “right conditions” is simply a placeholder for some complex nonevaluative terminology) pick out the *same* property, a moral property. So the inference from “*x* would be approved in the right conditions” to “*x* is morally good” is no violation of it. (Recall from Section II that this same transition is also no violation of Hume’s own *is-ought* gap, because he does not count it an inference.)

I am also being deliberately careful when I say merely that this thesis about moral sentiments “promises to” underwrite a more familiar-sounding *is-ought* doctrine, because there may be obstacles to deriving a fully general version of the latter. If (a) conclusions about moral sentiments can only be inferred from premises of which some are already about moral sentiments, and (b) moral qualities are constituted by the dispositions of observers to have moral sentiments in the right conditions, it does follow that any inferences to conclusions about moral qualities will have to rest partly on premises that are already about moral sentiments. But it might not be true that conclusions about moral qualities will always have to rest on other premises about moral qualities—that is, about exactly which sentiments would, on other occasions, be felt toward objects in the right conditions.

96 Philippa Foot, “Hume on Moral Judgement,” 76.

97 I of course do not mean that anyone who accepts Foot’s point (including Foot herself) must accept functionalism: just that her point would give heart to someone attempting a functional account of the moral and other sentiments. Furthermore, I do not mean that Foot herself sees her criticism as applying to

Hume's assertion of an *is-ought* gap. When she turns to that passage ("Hume on Moral Judgement," 78–9), she relies on the more familiar interpretation I mentioned in Section III, that bases the gap on alleged special motivating power of moral judgments. It was reflecting on her suggestions about Hume's mistake about moral approval, however, that initially started me wondering whether there was a way of understanding his texts that would move his entire skepticism about reason in ethics, including the *is-ought* thesis, squarely into her sights. I take the interpretive sections of this paper to show that there is, and that this reading is independently plausible.

One obvious complication for functionalism also requires mention. Someone might grant that moral sentiments are not identified *merely* by their qualitative character, or by that plus their motivational role, and so agree to that extent with this criticism of Hume. But they might hold that although nothing counts as a moral sentiment unless it meets further conditions of the sort mentioned in the text, moral sentiments must also have a definite qualitative character. On this view, someone who thought that functionalist accounts cannot capture qualitative character could still hold that such accounts cannot (fully) capture moral sentiments, either.

Grant (what I am not sure is true) that there must always be some qualitative character to moral approval, for example that (as Hume holds [T 607–8]) approval is always a kind of felt pleasure, even if not quite the same pleasure in different cases. Even so, the intermediate view just described would still narrow considerably the gap between facts "in the object" and our moral sentiments. For, since it allows that nothing counts as moral approval unless one has the right sorts of beliefs about the object of the sentiment, it will allow us a principled basis for precluding some things as possible objects of approval and so (on a secondary-quality account of moral goodness) for excluding the possibility that they should be morally good. (And it is not clear that Foot in fact claims more than this, in the end.)

98 At T 300–1, 546–7, as well as 574–5 (quoted in the text), Hume describes virtue and vice as constituted simply by an observer's reaction (or perhaps disposition to a reaction) of pleasure or pain when contemplating them. But other passages suggest that that is because he takes the relevant sort of pleasure or satisfaction just to be approbation, and the relevant sort of pain or uneasiness to be disapprobation. This is so not only at T 468–76, discussed in the text, but at 296 and 580–7. In the former passage, Hume says that

the uneasiness and satisfaction [of an observer] are not only inseparable from vice and virtue, but constitute their very nature and essence. To approve of a character is to feel an original delight upon its appearance. To disapprove of it is to be sensible of an uneasiness.

(Hume is here describing a position that he is not necessarily endorsing; but his caution does not appear to be about this quoted equivalence.) In the latter passage, he also speaks interchangeably of pleasure and approval, pain and disapproval.

There is, however, one anomalous passage. At T 614, Hume repeats his usual formula, that “the pain or pleasure, which arises from the general survey or view, of any action or quality of the *mind*, constitutes its vice or virtue”; but he then immediately adds that this pain or pleasure “*gives rise to* our approbation or blame, which is nothing but a fainter and more imperceptible love or hatred.” (My emphasis.) It seems clear here that the pain and pleasure that constitute vice and virtue are distinct from approbation and blame, which are treated as separate reactions. Some writers, such as Páll Árdal (*Passion and Value in Hume’s Treatise*, 2nd ed. [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989], chapter 6) have taken this as a definitive statement of Hume’s view. But it appears to me to fit poorly with other things Hume says: for example, with the assertion, about the pleasure or uneasiness we feel in viewing an action or sentiment or character, that “the very *feeling* constitutes our praise or admiration” (T 471). For a helpful overview, see Donald Ainslie, “Scepticism About Persons in Book II of Hume’s *Treatise*,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 37 (1999): 469–92, on 472–6.

99 An additional consideration is that when Hume’s suggestion has seemed plausible to later writers—for example, as an inspiration to ideal observer theories—it has standardly been understood to require moral approval and disapproval as the dispositive reactions of the observer. See for example Roderick Firth, “Ethical Absolutism and the Ideal Observer,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 12 (1952): 317–45, and Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 41–52. This is of course not a textual point, but it seems relevant if our question is how Hume’s secondary-quality analogy should be understood if it is to be most plausible, and so to provide—if it can—a *plausible* basis for some sort of *is-ought* gap.

100 “Hume on Moral Judgement,” 76.

101 Her argument about moral approval is, in a bit more detail, that to approve morally of an action one must see it as fulfilling a duty or manifesting a virtue, that “moral virtues [and, she presumably means, duties] must be connected with human good and harm, and that it is quite impossible to call anything you like good or harm” (“Moral Beliefs,” in *Virtues and Vices*, 120). For her argument that nonmoral “approval and disapproval are possible attitudes only in one who has an opinion from a determinate range,” see “Approval and Disapproval,” in *Virtues and Vices*, 195. In the latter argument she also extends this thesis to moral approval and disapproval (204), though with no more detail than in her earlier discussions. She also argues, plausibly in my view, that anyone who approves or disapproves of anything must also live, and know that she lives, in a social setting in which there is at least tacit agreement that certain kinds of objections to behavior are at least in general “to be listened to.” I put this latter point aside here, however, since attending to it would complicate my discussion without adding to it.

102 See Block, “Troubles with Functionalism,” in *Readings in Philosophy of Psychology*, 1: 271–2, for the distinction between analytic functionalism (just “functionalism,” in Block’s terms) and psychofunctionalism.

103 Of course, anyone who objects to Hume's thesis on this ground will have to accept that Hume's "analysis" of goodness, as what one would approve on the general survey, may also be acceptable even if it is not an analytic or conceptual truth. But, as I indicated in Section I, I doubt in any case that that is how Hume thinks of it: despite Hume's saying of a character that "in feeling that it pleases after such a particular manner, we in effect feel that it is virtuous" (T 471), I agree with Mackie that this is most likely intended as a revisionist and deflationary account of what virtue amounts to. See note 10.

104 Price, *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*; W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930).

105 It does not matter for this point whether this motivation is of the "direct" sort that Hume claims that reason by contrast cannot provide (see note 38), or only of a more indirect sort deriving from the fact that the moral sentiments are themselves pleasures or displeasures, and so the objects of desire and aversion. (When I have spoken of the moral sentiments as having an essential motivating role, it is as I explained in Section V this latter sort of role I have had in mind.) It does however matter that our moral sentiments be capable of at least this indirect motivation. There are a couple of passages (T 670, manuscript note to 500; 586) in which Hume may appear to deny that our reflective preference for justice or any other virtue could accomplish even this much, but I believe that a careful reading suggests that he means only to warn about the limited extent of the motivation.

106 This objection will become even more apt if we read Hume on the artificial virtues in a way that he seems often to invite but never quite to spell out. Officially, it can appear that the artificial virtues involve participation in a purely conventional (and thus "artificial") *practice*, such as keeping to the rules of property or promise-keeping or allegiance, but involve no new motives or sentiments: we enter into the practice of justice from self-interest, he says, and approve it from sympathy with the public good (T 499–500), both sentiments which would have had plenty of application whether these conventions existed or not. Thus, as Hume puts it himself at one point, "tho' justice be artificial, the sense of its morality is natural" (T 619). But Hume sometimes by contrast appears to say—and appears to need to say—that these conventions create not only new practices but new sentiments, sentiments attached to the relevant rules for their own sake rather than just for the sake of private or public interest. This attachment seems to be needed because concern for the public good would be too weak to motivate the needed compliance, and also because mere concern for either the public good or one's own good would lead one to calculate in a case-by-case fashion and thus to make what could be seen (on a full view of the facts) to be mistakes both from the viewpoint of the general good and from that of one's own good (T 497–8, 579–80). If this is right, then the new moral sentiments created by these practices would seem an especially shining example of pleasures and pains, and of associated motivation, that are intelligible on teleological grounds. For these sentiments would not only *promote* individual and societal good, but they would have originated and been preserved—on Hume's own proto-game-theoretic account of them—precisely because they serve that function.

Here I have been helped by suggestions in Stephen Darwall's "Motive and Obligation in Hume's Ethics," *Noûs* 27 (1993): 415–48; see also his *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 284–318.

107 Hume's *second* response to this objection is that the pleasures and pains that distinguish virtue and vice also give rise to love and hatred, pride and humility, and that this can happen only if they are felt only towards "ourselves and others," rather than toward any inanimate objects (T 473). This could look like a different sort of response: that it is essential to moral sentiments, whatever they may feel like, to bear a certain relation to these paradigm indirect passions, which in turn can only be felt towards persons. That would certainly be the more charitable reading. But, in a similar way, it would be a more charitable reading of the preceding paragraph to have Hume maintaining that it is essential to the moral sentiments, whatever their feel or their motivational role, to aspire to impartiality. I do not believe that the preceding paragraph will bear that reading, however; so I think that, in context, this reply must be understood simply as recording some further brute facts about that peculiar kind of pleasure or pain "that makes us praise or condemn."

108 He notes that many recognized virtues (especially those recognized by "the antients") are not voluntary (T 608); and he appeals to his earlier discussion of freedom and necessity to argue that the voluntary-involuntary distinction in any case amounts to less than his opponents imagine (T 609; see 399–412).

109 As Hume says in the second *Enquiry*, "in moral deliberations we must be acquainted beforehand with all the objects, and all their relations to each other; and from a comparison of the whole, fix our choice or approbation" (290). This requirement of full nonmoral information has seemed to most interpreters a natural component of the "right conditions" for feeling the moral sentiment that determines virtue or vice; but it is not explicit in the *Treatise*.

110 D. M. Armstrong, *Belief, Truth and Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 71. Indeed, one might note that all of the expressions Hume uses to pick out, however inadequately, the peculiar feeling or manner of conception that constitutes belief—"a superior *force*, or *vivacity*, or *solidity*, or *firmness*, or *steadiness*"—are terms replete with causal connotations. At T 119, moreover, he is clear that the distinctive influence of belief is not just on our actions but on our passions.

111 Anthony Kenny, *Action, Emotion and Will* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), 22–5, 192–3; P. L. Gardiner, "Hume's Theory of the Passions," in *David Hume: a Symposium*, ed. D. F. Pears (London: MacMillan, 1963), 37–8. Foot applauds Gardiner's complaint in the passage quoted above, from "Hume on Moral Judgement," 76. J. R. S. Wilson, *Emotion and Object* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), develops a causal account of the emotions in opposition to Kenny, but agrees that the connection of pride with the idea of self is not a contingent fact; see 43–4.

112 One reason to wish for more elaboration is that, as Kenny points out (*Action, Emotion and Will*, 23–4) this latter passage can be read (and, by him, is read) as affirming the ultimate contingency of the connection, which depends only on “the primary constitution of the mind.” I am required to think that this may be right; compare my interpretation, in Section IV, of Hume’s assignment of the behavior of our moral sentiments to the “the constitution of our nature” (T 470, in the matter-of-fact paragraph) or to the “original fabric and formation of the human mind” (EPM 172).

113 Plus, in the case of approval and disapproval, a connection to motivation—though this is supposed to be opaque.

114 Someone might object that it could be called Cartesian; but all I need here is a label.

115 Or, at any rate, something so similar to it that it becomes merely a verbal issue whether to call it moral approval or not.