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A Symposium on Adam Potkay,
The Passion for Happiness: Samuel Johnson and David Hume

Hellenism, Freedom, and Morality in Hume and Johnson

PETER LOPTSON

Professor Adam Potkay's interesting, wide-ranging, and well-informed book makes a case for close commonalities between two Enlightenment writers and personalities who have been usually regarded as deeply contrary, indeed, oppositional—namely, David Hume and Samuel Johnson. At places Professor Potkay appears to argue that there is essentially a single broad philosophy discernible in Johnson and Hume; in other contexts a range of striking and hitherto unsuspected similarities, only, is proposed. Methodologically, Potkay seeks to denaturalize Hume, and to naturalize Johnson, at least relatively, in both instances; hence to split a difference, and find the two converging on a middle ground. His book argues that Hume and Johnson are essentially and primarily moralists, with similar analyses of human motivations and of what conduces to human flourishing. Common intellectual roots are seen, in ancient and early modern thought (particularly importantly, Cicero, Locke, and Addison), and a common range of intellectual adversaries, above all, Cartesian rationalism. A broad shared vision of human history also is argued to unite the two thinkers. While differences of view are not denied, especially on religion, Potkay sees more that is common than contrary.

A philosopher may note first that *any* two things have *some* things in common. And two British intellectuals born less than two years apart, living and working in a relatively small, relatively unitary cultural setting, indeed, reasonably well-known to each other, may be thought to be almost bound to

have quite a lot in common. It seems indeed antecedently not surprising that thorough investigation would show two such prominent figures of the British Enlightenment to have even a good deal more uniting them than anyone, or hardly anyone, had noticed. The issue is going to be, at the end of the day, whether that investigation should lead to fundamental revision of views of either thinker, or the identification of a single philosophy that each is advocating.

Both Hume and Johnson are clearly complex, sophisticated, variegated thinkers. Each also produced a large body of writing, over several decades. Each had a good deal to say about knowledge, morality, religion, history, literature, politics, and more. (Indeed, the sheer *range* of topics addressed, large and small, at length or in passing, makes it easy to find both Johnson and Hume with something to say about any given topic in their common culture, and good probability that there will often be overlap or similarity of view.) Each had a vivid personality, which impressed itself significantly on friends, admirers, adversaries, and other contemporaries. In each case a dominant persona came especially to the fore, a popular or semi-popular image fashioned during the middle and later decades of the eighteenth century and bequeathed thereafter to posterity. Hume is the freethinker and sceptic and empiricist, and the cool essayist and historian, of Tory proclivities. Johnson is the great conversationalist, and Londoner, of strong, individualist, Christian, conservative opinions. This is the Johnson encountered especially in Boswell's life. At least one identification of Johnson as a philosophical figure is certainly through the parallelism that suggests itself between Boswell's powerful, enthralling presentation of his senior friend, and that of Plato of Socrates.

Potkay argues (PFH 1f.) that the real Johnson, though, is somewhat misrepresented in Boswell, just as, he also argues, the real Hume is not adequately to be discovered in the *Treatise of Human Nature*.¹ For Potkay the entire textual corpus of both writers must be studied, synoptically, to reach plausible or sufficient measure of their ideas and their range and bases; and there are particular reasons to discount or underplay Boswell's *Life* and Hume's *Treatise*—Boswell's special focus on telling an entertaining tale of someone he probably did not know quite as well as he supposed, or claimed; and Hume's explicit disavowal of the *Treatise* of his (relative) youth.

This is at least partially persuasive. Boswell's *Life* is without question an enduring masterpiece, which will live and entertain for any foreseeable future. But in Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* one will find a much deeper and more impressive mind than encountered in the pages of Boswell. These biographies of fellow-writers show a rich, subtle understanding of human motivation, and of the human condition, at once searching, insightful, and humane.

Others of Johnson's own writings (in contrast to Boswell's reports of his conversation) also augment Johnson's intellectual stature. As for Hume, it is of course true that he made formal disavowal of the *Treatise*, and it is also true that it was a youthful work, bolder, and more insouciant, than his subsequent writing characteristically was. However, it is important to note that what Hume specially disowned was the manner, not the matter of the *Treatise*. (Hume says that in the *Enquiries* "some negligences in his former reasoning *and more in the expression* are, he hopes, corrected" [my emphasis].²) Further, insouciance was not exactly something that the more mature Hume left behind.

The general idea of searching through all of the oeuvre of these Enlightenment writers, when seeking to identify their philosophical views, and not just their explicitly philosophical work, has clearly very much to recommend it. Yet also it will be clear that the span of more than three decades, and distinct shifts of subject-matter, do really and reasonably make differences. It would be a dicey matter to try to extract conclusions about, say, Bertrand Russell's central stances in ontology and epistemic justification from his anti-nuclear-war tracts of the 1960s, or his popular essays on sex and marriage in the 1930s. It is, comparably, not obvious that Hume's passing asides in *A History of England*—or what Johnson may have slipped into a sermon written for someone else (another source upon which Potkay draws)—are reliable guides to either thinker's considered philosophical views or commitments.

One of the things that Potkay brings forward, which is particularly useful and persuasive, is a common rootedness of both Johnson and Hume in the philosophical legacy of the ancient world, especially of Hellenistic antiquity—the surviving philosophical work that appeared between the death of Alexander (323 B.C.E.) and the death of Cleopatra (30 B.C.E.). A central anchor of that formative legacy was clearly, for both men, Cicero. I have myself argued elsewhere, as have others, for the importance of Cicero for Hume.³ Cicero is a favorite author of Hume's. He also serves as a model for him for philosophical practice, and, in the persons of Cicero and his friends, for an ideal of membership of a circle of gentlemen of leisure and of letters, pursuing scientific, literary, and philosophical topics in a manner permitting the widest diversity of view and contestation but also, always, the deepest mutual respect.

Potkay shows (PFH 78n5, 79) that Johnson shared this grounding in Cicero. He adds to the base for both thinkers a claimed footing specifically in Roman Stoicism. This seems to me a good deal less plausible. I will address, particularly, Hume's case.

Contrary to Potkay's claims (PFH 77–9), Cicero was not in fact a Stoic. Stoicism was the most influential of the philosophical schools in the Roman

period,⁴ and Cicero was certainly well-read in the texts and traditions of that school. His own philosophical leanings are eclectic, with Stoic sympathies on some issues and antipathies on others. He sometimes identifies himself not with the Stoa, but with the Academy—especially the sceptical Academy of the third and second centuries B.C.E. More to the point, *Hume* identifies Cicero with the sceptical Academy—Academic scepticism—and, explicitly, not with Stoicism. In a letter from which Potkay himself quotes, Hume sets out his conception of the Ciceronian model he seeks and values, and Cicero's doctrinal place within it: "Let us," Hume says, "revive the happy times, when Atticus and Cassius the Epicureans, Cicero the Academic, and Brutus the Stoic, could, all of them, live in unreserved friendship together, and were insensible to all those distinctions, except so far as they furnished agreeable matter to discourse and conversation" (PFH 210f.)⁵

There were eighteenth-century debates about Cicero—freethinkers (among them Hume) and rival religious traditionalists each claiming him for their side, the former stressing the Academic skepticism, the latter the focus on virtue and reason in this honored master. (Details of these contestations are set out informatively in the recent second volume of Isabel Rivers's *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000], 29–31.) Save possibly Beattie, none of the parties to these debates identified Cicero literally as a Stoic; rather, either as a mitigated skeptic, or else as a sort of prefiguring proto-Christian. (Stoic *ethics* have of course often been seen as bearing significant similarity to Christian ones.)

Hellenistically speaking—so to speak—Hume has more usually been aligned with Epicureanism, as well as Academic skepticism, rather than with Stoicism. The Stoics believed in a cosmic and natural teleology in the scheme of things; the Epicureans, and Hume, did not. The Stoics believed in an inherent moral reality, independent of human desires and aversions (they were strong deontologists in ethics); the Epicureans, and Hume, did not believe this. The Stoics believed that the passions can and should be quelled, even eliminated, from human life, in favor of a supposed rational faculty, which, according to them can direct our behavior; the Epicureans, and Hume, while sharing with Stoicism the conviction that some modes of living conduce to happiness and well-being more successfully than others, nonetheless held that the foundation of our behavior can only be in the passions, which are in any case uneliminable from life (Hume famously denying that reason can be directive, or other than "the slave of the passions").

Potkay takes up and contests the latter cluster of standard interpretations. He argues that only early, Greek Stoicism, sought the elimination of the passions; later, Roman Stoicism (Panaetius's Stoicism) only the passions'

moderation. The issues of scholarship involved cannot be pursued in detail here. But there seems to be good reason to deny that Panaetius, or Roman Stoics who followed, were (or saw themselves as) so different from the prototypes of Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus. Early and late the school distinguished the life of the wise or virtuous man, who would be passionless, from the student of Stoicism, who would aspire only to "making progress," as they put it, in the direction of virtue, and for whom regular life and its attendant passions, if ideally in moderated and controlled form, would remain. Potkay also seeks (PFH 86–9) to revise or reverse the standard interpretive line that for Hume reason never guides or directs action. Even if, as he argues, the passions are partly cognitive, the Humean view remains that someone could want self- or world-destructive things. This view is persuasive.

All of the Hellenistic schools preached moderation and mildness, and aimed to provide a recipe for *ataraxia*, or tranquillity of mind. There is nothing specifically Stoic about this theme. The Epicureans and Stoics were both also materialists, as Hume may also have been. Both advocated something recognizable as empiricism in their theories of knowledge, and of perception. As for *happiness* as a human *telos*, understood broadly enough this characterizes more or less all of the ancient philosophies. Taken more narrowly it is an explicit and primary model for Aristotelianism and Epicureanism, not Stoicism. For Stoicism our *telos* is a life of reason in accordance with nature, which will offer no guarantees of happiness as a demographic majority of humanity would understand it. In brief, if Johnson and Hume *had* been Stoics, even "of a sort," their allegedly shared ethical advocacy would not be of a passion for happiness. The one view that Hume seems definitely to have shared with classical early Stoicism—and not shared with Epicureanism—is determinism. Hume was a determinist; moreover, a compatibilist, as the early Stoic polymath Chrysippus seems also to have been.

Potkay argues (PFH 121–4) that Johnson also was a compatibilist. This seems not at all convincing. There does not seem adequate evidence that he has *thought through* the free will/determinism issue and arrived at the compatibilist outcome.

It is salutary to recall that there are *several* positions in this area, logically quite distinct but often elided in the history of philosophy or more recent discussions. More than one has gone by the name of soft determinism, and more than one seems to have been held by the ancient Stoics. What is key, it is persuasive to hold, is whether causes are regarded as *coercive* of their effects. The options of course will be that all causes are coercive, or that none are, or that some are and some are not. The idea of a coercive cause, or of a cause operating coercively, clearly deserves extended analysis. It may suffice in the

present context to contrast the cases of two persons who both wash their hands with the belief that they are dirty and ought to be washed, one of whom has an obsessive-compulsive handwashing disorder, and the other of whom is normal. Causality operates coercively in the first case; the causal factors present *force* their outcome; the individual concerned has (it seems) no choice but to act as he/she does. But things are otherwise—noncoercive—in the second case. We may generalize to say that *C* causes *E* coercively where no participant in *E* has a power of behaving otherwise than *E*. Coercive causality and a power of behaving otherwise may only be interdefinable; that is, the preceding may only be illuminating if one component idea is taken to be more or less primitive. Another avenue to the idea is the Leibnizian formula of a cause that inclines without necessitating, where we are prepared to envisage the possibility (as of course Leibniz is) of a set of such causes being *sufficient* for the occurrence of their outcome.

One variety of soft determinism—Hobbes *may* have held this view—asserts that all causes coerce, but that an event involving an object may be called free if its coercing causes are all internal to that object. So, if nothing external to the object forces it to behave as it does, then it is free (even though internal causes have forced or compelled the behavior). If this is (more or less) what Hobbes thought, then he is a doubtful compatibilist. Hume is the genuine article. He has thought through the issue, and thinks that our actions are, typically, both free and caused (determined). What is not quite so clear is whether he thinks also that no causes, ever, coerce. His (apparently sceptical) doubts about objective natural necessities—in the world, independent of our projections into the world—certainly suggest the idea that no causes coerce. On the other hand, some passages suggest that the doubts indicated are just from sceptical moments, and arguments they occasion, and that Hume thinks that at least some causes coerce or compel their effects.

As mentioned earlier, the great ancient Stoic philosopher Chrysippus seems also to have been a genuine compatibilist—quite possibly the very first of the breed. The most fully formulated presentation of his views is from a hostile and, apparently, not fully comprehending source, namely, Cicero, in *De Fato*. It appears that Chrysippus held that all events are caused, or determined, including all of our actions and all of our mental states, among them our attitudes and responses to our experiences; further, that though all events are caused or determined, and some also coerced, some events are not coerced, and these include (perhaps, indeed, are equivalent to) those performed freely, by rational agents.

It is an independent matter just which ones of our acts are free, assuming indeed that any are. Some certainly are unfree, and probably some are

thought to be free (in some cases by their performers), but really are unfree, all of this compatibly with *others* of our actions or states genuinely being free. Some in the history of philosophy appear to have held that the set or circle of our freedom is very much smaller and narrower than commonly supposed, though nonetheless this set or circle does not shrink to nothing. Among those who appear to have thought this are *others* of the Stoics than Chrysippus, and also Spinoza (who may have been influenced by Stoicism in this regard). Zeno, the founder of the Stoic school, may have held the position I am referring to. The much later Epictetus fairly certainly did. "Some things [only] are in our power," Epictetus tells us, and these are limited to our attitudes and responses to what befalls us. The matter is not fully clear, but it seems that even our bodily actions are never within our power, for Epictetus. At any rate, only a very little is; and what that little includes is the attitude we take to what happens to us—whether to resist, accept, and otherwise how we will feel.

Formally, Epictetus and Spinoza also affirm exceptionless determinism, which will imply that our attitudes also are determined. If being determined did mean that we had no choice about what was determined, this would imply in turn that we have no choice about what our attitudes are. Thus, again, the importance of the coerced/uncoerced idea.

I have gone on at some length about this matter, and its distinctions, because this is complicated territory. A general conviction that events happen for reasons, that those reasons are sometimes unknown to us, and that this applies to the human just as to the nonhuman sphere is not enough to make someone a philosophical compatibilist; even if the conviction is accompanied by deep respect for the achievements of Newtonian science. It seems quite dubious whether Epictetus, Hobbes, or Spinoza were genuine compatibilists (the latter two, at least, appear to hold views of freedom such that the obsessive/compulsive pattern referred to earlier would count as free—because the causes are internal, and psychological, even if they "force"). Chrysippus, Leibniz, Hume, Mill, and many contemporary philosophers fairly certainly are. But in general the position is rare in the history of philosophy, and virtually unknown in the wider world (as anyone who has tried to teach or explain the view sympathetically to those unacquainted with it will attest).

Adding to complexity is what may be called meta-compatibilism. This is the position that freedom and determinism *are* compatible with each other, but we are unable to see how they are. For this view, our conceptions of freedom and determinism lead us ineluctably to see them as clashing, but we have independent, higher bases for confidence that, somehow, they converge or that in the deeper truth of things realities they only approximate obtain, and are compatible. Descartes and Kant were both, I would say, meta-compatibilists,

as have been many less illustrious *religious* thinkers, troubled by what they see as the infinite power and total creative foreknowledge of God, together with what they believe is our genuine free agency and moral responsibility. It seems to the meta-compatibilist like squaring a circle, but religious faith, or some other state, occasions the conviction that, somehow, in a manner we cannot fathom, the trick is pulled off. (For the genuine compatibilist, I remind you, there is no enigma involved; just a need for clear, careful thinking, especially clear, careful *modal* thinking.)

Johnson, on the evidence we have, is a psychologically very acute observer of human behavior, and human nature. He sees, or claims, mainsprings of action that for others are hidden or nonexistent. He is subtle, deep. This does not make him a determinist. (All compatibilists are of course determinists.) He is also, very clearly, a believer in genuine free agency. Johnson is also a committed Christian, and appears to have reflected a good deal, as have many other Christians, on what the relations may be between divine power, creation, and foreknowledge, and our free agency and moral responsibility, and indeed how the former might permit the latter. Johnson's idea (cited in PFH, 122f.) that God's foreknowledge of our actions is just like our own foreknowledge of human actions, only so well-grounded (as ours cannot be) as to achieve certainty, is, it seems to me, very acute, and a theologically very plausible stance to adopt.

Again, though, we are very well short of compatibilism; there seems in fact insufficient basis to attribute even meta-compatibilism to Johnson. He does seem to have thought about freedom and determinism a good deal, and he is obviously aware of and philosophically impressed by Newtonianism, which might be thought—as Potkay argues—to help lead to a compatibilist view. On the other hand, Newtonian physics prevailed unchallenged for two centuries alongside wide and general belief in free will, but without any general compatibilist understanding or commitments.

I want to shift to another central issue posed by Potkay's book and the interpretation of Hume that it involves. In this case there is no question that a number of other recent Hume scholars share his view, so I mean also to be addressing them. Potkay takes it that both Johnson and Hume are *moral objectivists* (with, indeed, a shared set of moral objectivist views). Moral objectivism is the position that there are things that are good, bad, right, wrong, obligatory, and permissible, morally.⁶

There is little doubt that Johnson is a moral objectivist. Many textual passages can be cited, and the general tenor of his commentary on the human scene, appears to make it altogether plain that Johnson believes that we have duties, that some actions are wrong, etc. Although several writers on Hume

suppose otherwise, it is not at all clear that Hume is a moral objectivist. Repeated adumbrations by these interpreters of Hume's occasional references to common life, and of what are sometimes seen as pragmatist dimensions in his thought, taken as licensing moral objectivism, are misleading, at best.

It is useful to identify what may be called *moral positivism*. This is the position that holds, *disjunctively*, that moral states, facts, or properties are fictional, or incoherent, or unknowable, or not possible subjects of scientific investigation. Someone who was a moral positivist might, consistently with that fact, want to explore and theorize about the natural facts of human moral-judgment-making, and the entire plethora of moral attitudes and discriminations that human life manifests. They might want to investigate the *structure and interrelationships* of moral concepts—the “*logic*” of morality—and the causal bases, the etiology, of, and what sustains, the *morality* part of life. Such investigation might be part of an enterprise meant to be scientific—indeed, the label *social science* suggest itself as the umbrella conception under which a moral positivist might undertake the exploration and delineation of the morality part of life.

If we add to moral positivism and the social science enterprise of investigating and producing theories about moral judgment and feeling—why we do that sort of thing, and what is involved in it—two further commitments, we arrive at an interesting composite theoretical stance. The first of the two further commitments is a belief that human nature is deeply *uniform*; that it is much the same sort of thing, with the same wellsprings, rhyme, and reason wherever it is met with (and including therefore, universally and in fact inexpungibly, the having of moral attitudes and engaging in moral practices and arguments). The second, almost a corollary of the first, is that if moral feeling and judgment are ubiquitous in humans, and the same sort of thing when found, the human investigator of morality will unsurprisingly and appropriately notice and occasionally draw upon his/her own participation in this universal human practice.

I think that there is excellent reason to believe that the foregoing composite fits Hume. He was a moral positivist, and wanted to be a social scientist—a Newton of the mind, above all the mind in so far as it engages in cognizing and moral-judgment-making.⁷ This is a part of what is meant—or should be meant—by calling Hume a *naturalist*. There is good circumstantial and biographical evidence for this construal of Hume. His remarks to Hutcheson point in this direction. Hutcheson has, Hume says, observed “that there wants [in Hume's work on morality] a certain Warmth in the Cause of Virtue, which, you think, all good Men wou'd relish, & cou'd not displease amidst abstract Enquirys. I must own”—Hume goes on—“this has not

happen'd by Chance, but is the Effect of a Reasoning either good or bad" (cited in PFH 19).

The contrast between moral objectivism and moral positivism seems well illustrated in passages from Johnson's and Hume's writings, respectively, many of them quoted by Potkay. Thus, in a footnote (PFH 98) on utility and morality, Johnson: "What is of most use is of most value"; Hume: "In all determinations of morality, this circumstance of public utility is ever principally in view." The differences between these sentences are not merely matters of style. Both Johnson and Hume will agree that some things are of (public) utility. That fact together with Johnson's sentence will imply that there are things of value. It is otherwise with Hume's sentence. Consistently and repeatedly Hume talks of what is regarded as of value, held to be ethical, just, right, and wrong, figures in the determinations of morality and its claims and degrees; and *not* of what is of value, ethical, just, right, wrong, virtuous *tout court*.

What I think particularly effectively makes this case then is the *parsing* of Humean sentences on morality. What one finds is, again and again, language about what we allow, regard, determine, judge to be good, virtuous, etc., and never what is good, virtuous, or our duty *tout court*, on their own. This is precisely what the social scientist investigation of morality would be expected to do.

In fact, I think it may be offered as a challenge, at any rate a test, for those who advocate a moral objectivist Hume, Potkay among them, to come up with clear, plausible passages in his writings on morality, that will plainly imply that there are objective goods, obligations, and moral justifications (and not merely what human beings regard as such). To meet this challenge or test, such passages would have to be without the "we will scarcely allow" sorts of adverbial modifiers that we find so generically in Hume's writings on morality. By contrast, as passages in Potkay's book show, it is easy to produce Johnsonian texts that meet the indicated challenge.

The point about moral objectivism and moral positivism is not just to be saying that here is a respect, even an important respect, in which Hume and Johnson differ. It is more that most of what Hume has to say about morality is part of a social science project (as most who believe that Hume is a moral objectivist will also agree), and that there is no evidence that anything Johnson has to say about morality is anything of the kind.

In addition to larger themes, particular passages in Potkay's book occasion dissent. I will give just a few examples. Sometimes they are matters of interpretation of passages in Hume or Johnson. In one case (PFH 93), Johnson says that "Sorrow is properly that state of mind in which our desires are fixed upon the past, without looking towards the future, an incessant wish that

something were otherwise than it has been." Potkay thinks that Johnson here is anticipating Brentanoesque intentionality, and the idea that objects of mental states may be unreal. This seems quite wrong; and to miss the real insight in Johnson's conception of sorrow as inexpungible regret for a past *reality*.

Johnson and Hume were not actually, contrary to what Potkay claims (PHF 30), of the same socio-economic station, or class. Neither was wealthy, although both attained pensions that afforded them what they regarded as a reasonable mode of life. But Hume was armigerous, the younger son of a landed proprietor, with claims of kinship to the Earls of Home. Johnson was the son of a tradesman. In eighteenth-century Britain these were differences that certainly should not be exaggerated, but that made a difference (and, I would argue, make some impress in Johnson's and Hume's respective social and historical writings).

To return to the larger plane, and to summarize, I think that while there is much that is subtle, persuasive, and illuminating in Potkay's probing of Johnson and Hume, much that enriches a broad tapestry of Enlightenment understanding, specific to these fascinating individuals and their sources and projects, and more widely, a case for fundamental philosophical unity or commonality between them is not successfully made. There *are* commonalities, suggestive, interesting intersections. But the claim for more than that is I think hyperbole. Hume remains in the conceptual space interstitial between Epicureanism and Academic Scepticism, with his own strikingly original additions. And Johnson remains a dark, glowering, deep, insightful, Christian of a man—superb literary psychologist, public *engagiste*, man of letters of very broad learning.

NOTES

An earlier version of this paper was presented as part of a symposium on Adam Potkay's book at the Hume Society meetings at Williamsburg, Virginia, 27 July 2000. I would like to acknowledge the learned civility of that occasion, and Adam Potkay's gracious response to my remarks—including pointing out one context where I had certainly misunderstood both him and Johnson.

1 Page references to Adam Potkay, *A Passion for Happiness: Samuel Johnson and David Hume* ("PFH") (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000) are provided in the text.

2 *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), xlii.

3 Peter Loptson, "Hume, Multiperspectival Pluralism, and Authorial Voice," *Hume Studies*, 24 (1998): 213–34.

4 "Roman Stoicism" would most naturally and commonly be understood to refer to Romans who were Stoics. Just two philosophers of any prominence seem to qualify: Seneca and Marcus Aurelius. (Only Seneca in fact wrote in Latin.) One might add Epictetus as a prominent Stoic of the Roman imperial period. None of the three appears to capture the "Roman Stoicism" that Potkay wishes to attribute to Johnson and Hume. Potkay in fact depicts Seneca—most "Roman" of all the Stoics—as taking stances antithetical to Hume's.

5 The full letter—from 1753—appears in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig (Oxford: Clarendon, 1932), 1: 172–4.

6 Moral objectivism may be formally defined as the view that for moral predicate *F* (defined extensionally as "is good," "is right," "is evil," "is a duty," . . .) at least one instance of the open sentence "*x* is *F*" is true.

7 This seems very well-supported by section 3 ("Of Justice") of the second *Enquiry*—which Hume at the summit of his maturity, surveying his life's work, calls "Of all my writings, incomparably the best." Hume argues that the reason people have and use a notion of justice is its utility; the argument at its last line citing conformity to Newton's methodological principles in the *Principia*.