



The Passions, Character, and the Self in Hume

Eugenio Lecaldano

Hume Studies Volume XXVIII, Number 2 (November, 2002) 175-194.

Your use of the HUME STUDIES archive indicates your acceptance of HUME STUDIES' Terms and Conditions of Use, available at

<http://www.humesociety.org/hs/about/terms.html>.

HUME STUDIES' Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the HUME STUDIES archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Each copy of any part of a HUME STUDIES transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

For more information on HUME STUDIES contact

humestudies-info@humesociety.org

<http://www.humesociety.org/hs/>

The Passions, Character, and the Self in Hume

EUGENIO LECALDANO

1. The Self Beyond Book 1 of the *Treatise*

In the long history of the interpretations of Hume's theses on the self and personal identity, it is by now widely accepted that the conclusions reached in the first book of the *Treatise* must be considered in light of what the philosopher adds on these themes in the second and third books.¹ Furthermore, there is no longer much support for the reading, which saw a contradiction here, given that while in the Book 1 he denies the reality of the self or of personal identity, he then accepts that reality when he turns to his discussion of the passions.² In presenting a more comprehensive reading of the theses of Hume on the self in the *Treatise* as a whole, it is essential not to lose sight of what Hume himself declared in Book 1, that "we must distinguish betwixt personal identity, as it regards our thought or imagination, and as it regards our passions or the concern we take in ourselves" (T 1.4.6.5; SBN 253).³ But having recognized the necessity of integrating the theses on the self of Book 1 with those advanced in the latter two books, there are still divergent opinions on what meaning should be assigned to this integration. The relationship between what Hume writes on the self in Books 2 and 3 and the discussion of that topic in Book 1 has been seen, variously, as a mere continuation, as a

Eugenio Lecaldano is Professor of Philosophy, Dipartimento di Studi Filosofici ed Epistemologici, Università di Roma "La Sapienza," via Carlo Fea, 2–Roma (00161), Italy. e-mail: eugenio.lecaldano@uniroma1.it

new development in a continuous interpretation, or, rather, as a completely new posing of the question, with its own new solution.⁴

As I have argued elsewhere,⁵ there are good reasons to accept the interpretation of Annette Baier, according to which the passage to Book 2 represents a real reimposition of the question of the self after the skeptical conclusions reached in Book 1.⁶ But even this argument represents, obviously, only a first, generic interpretation. Further specifications must be made about the way in which Hume poses his explanation of the nature of the self in Book 2. Furthermore, we must also explore the way in which the analysis of the self that makes reference to the passions and to sympathy in Book 2 connects to the discussion in Book 3 of the self and its character, which is presented there at the center of evaluations in terms of virtue and vice.

In this paper, I seek to offer a specific approach to these problems, not so much discussing Hume's view of the self in general, but seeking rather to shed light on what he writes on the awareness that each person has of his or her own self. Hume explores this particular dimension of the question both in his discussion of the intellect and in his treatment of passions and of morals. That is, Hume offers indications on how a person becomes aware of himself by perceiving himself intellectually, by considering himself at the center of his own passional life, or by considering his own character from a moral point of view. In tracing the way in which Hume faces the question of the self as a question of one's own self, I will not only interpret the text of this argument, but I will also highlight some more general points Hume makes with reference to the whole of his philosophy in the *Treatise*. I will examine Hume's affirmations on the self in an effort to show how these affirmations support the argument that the reality of the self is presented in the *Treatise* principally as something perceived at the level of the passions and, more properly, as a sort of moral sentiment.

This analysis can also be the basis for taking a position on some of the most controversial points in the interpretation of what Hume had to say on the nature of the self. The discussion of Hume's conception of the self should deal not only with our interpretation of the passage from Book 1 to Books 2 and 3, but also with the question of which positive approaches Hume takes in order to explain the continuity of the self and the processes through which each person identifies himself as different from others. We will see that a focus on Hume's analysis of the perception each person has of him or herself brings to light the fact that, while he doubts the possibility of an intellectual awareness of the self (in Book 1), where Hume turns to a recognition of the awareness of the self in his Books on the passions and on morals (2 and 3), he no longer considers the self a fiction. From this perspective, it is also clear

that although Hume examines the idea of the self in the context of the interpersonal relations that are constitutive of sentimental and moral life, he does not make the individual's awareness of himself depend on the image that others have of him. The self is not, that is, a mere reflection of the image that others have of us; rather, in these very discussions, Hume identifies the self in a more determined awareness of that which we find morally worthy or unworthy of approval in our own character.

2. The Awareness of One's Self and the Sense of Self

Among the dimensions that can be explored in order to investigate Hume's elaborations on the self and personal identity, let us turn then to that in which the philosopher explains more specifically the sense that each person has of his or her self. The observations we find in Hume on the awareness of the self are no less rich or complex than those on personal identity or on the idea of the self in general. Already in Book 1, Hume addresses the problem of the awareness of one's self, arguing that this awareness cannot have as its object any substantial reality; rather, it is always a perception of fleeting and variable mental content. That Hume approaches the more general question of the nature of the self through the specific effort to investigate the awareness that each person has of his or her self, appears clearly in the section of Book 1 on personal identity:

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat, or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perceptions. When my perceptions are remov'd for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am I insensible of *myself*, and may truly be said not to exist. And were all my perceptions remov'd by death, and cou'd I neither think, or feel, nor see, nor love, nor hate after dissolution of my body, I shou'd be entirely annihilated, nor do I conceive what is farther requisite to make me a perfect non-entity. (T 1.4.6.3; SBN 252)

Later in Book 1, it is similarly through a generalization of the perspective of "my self" that Hume comes to the conclusion that:

The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in infinite

variety of postures and situations. There is properly no *simplicity* in it at one time, nor *identity* in different; whatever natural propension we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity. The comparison of the theatre must not mislead us. They are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind; nor have we the most distant notion of the place, where these scenes are represented, or of the materials, of which it is compos'd. (T 1.4.6.4; SBN 253)

For that matter, even in the dramatic conclusion of Book 1 of the *Treatise*, which foreshadows the change in perspective we find in Hume's analysis of the passions,⁷ Hume makes use of the perspective derived from his explanation of his own personal identity to conclude: "I am first affrighted and confounded with that forlorn solitude, in which I am plac'd in my philosophy, and fancy myself some strange uncouth monster, who not being able to mingle and unite in society, has been expell'd all human commerce, and left utterly abandon'd and disconsolate" (T 1.4.7.2; SBN 264). When, finally, in his Appendix of 1740, Hume returned to the conclusions traced in Book 1, he again made use of this privileged perspective—that of "my self"—in order to explain the difficulties in his analysis of personal identity:

When I turn my reflection on *myself*, I never can perceive this self without one or more perceptions; nor can I ever perceive any thing but the perceptions. 'Tis the composition of these, therefore, which forms the self. (T Appendix, 15; SBN 634)

Indeed it is precisely here, at the basis of his effort to explain the awareness of the self, that Hume recognizes the failure of the analysis of Book 1, in that:

having thus loosen'd all our particular perceptions, when I proceed to explain the principle of connexion, which binds them together, and makes us attribute them a real simplicity and identity, I am sensible, that my account is very defective. (T Appendix, 20; SBN 635)

If we understand this appendix literally, as an addition to Book 1 before Hume begins his analysis of the passions and morality, we can assign a powerful importance to Hume's declaration here in which he entrusts to a further investigation of "my self" the realization of a "more mature reflection," and the task of "discover[ing] some hypothesis, that will reconcile those contradictions" (T Appendix, 21; SBN 636). Here then, one might suggest that Hume is warning the reader, before he or she begins to study Hume's second and

third books, that it will be a further investigation of the question of the self, in particular through a specific examination of how the awareness of the self appears in the realm of passions and moral sentiments, that will enable us to identify a more satisfying hypothesis—one able to reconcile Hume's conception of human nature with the need to take into account the real simplicity and identity that each of us attributes to our own self.

If we stop, therefore, with Hume's analysis in Book 1, we see that neither the intellect, nor the imagination, nor the memory is able to give a solid basis to our belief in being the same person that we were in our life so far and that we will be in the future, nor to the belief in being a distinct person, different in our particular characteristics from all other people. But having recognized the inadequacy of his analysis in Book 1, Hume does not, of course, abandon the conviction that he is still himself, with a continuity and diversity with respect to other selves. He certainly does not, that is, take up the position that the self is only a fiction.⁸ The explanations of Hume's ideas on the self that insist on the continuity between the analyses developed in Book 1 and those of Books 2 and 3, even when they usefully highlight the advances realized by Hume's treatment of the passions, still tend, however, to evaluate Hume's results on this theme in the light of the questions posed in Book 1. A unitary view of this type seems to be advanced for example by J. L. McIntyre, who suggests that Hume's discussion of passions and morality manages to reconstruct the same self that he engaged at the intellectual level in Book 1.⁹

I have some doubts about this position, which I will try to clarify through a brief discussion of a passage in a 1990 article by McIntyre. She writes:

As is well known, Hume rejected the view that the self is a substance, arguing instead that the self is a collection of perceptions (T 252), and perceptions are generally thought of as fleeting. Yet Hume also maintained that actions derive their moral significance from their connections with thinking beings endowed with persisting mental qualities. . . . Though he cannot explain these features of persons as states of an underlying mental substance, it should not be concluded that Hume can therefore provide no account of character traits. Hume's realism about character must be integrated, however, into his overall metaphysical and epistemological position.¹⁰

Perhaps McIntyre maintains that in the *Treatise* we have the same self in all three Books, such that in Books 2 and 3 Hume suggests (and explains) the reality, the identity, and continuity of the same self that he had presented in Book 1 as a bundle of perceptions. I agree, however, with Pauline Chazan¹¹

and Susan M. Purviance¹² that the self, presented as an object of pride, is a new and original self. The problems with personal identity in Book 1 are connected with Hume's attempt to derive the self from the activity of the mind as a product and an object of intuition. The self as an object of pride, on the other hand, is not independent from the passions. Hume explains indeed (T 2.1.5.3; SBN 286) that the self as an object of pride is connected exclusively with the universe of "actions and sentiments." Thus, we may exclude the possibility of the reality of a self in connection with external sense impressions, or with their reproduction in our imagination or in our memory. But it is possible to explain the self in Books 2 and 3 as a simple and original idea connected with the impressions of reflection.

I agree furthermore with Purviance on the analogy between Hume and Kant. She explains, "Because the grounds of morality and politics were too important to leave to the mercies of speculative metaphysics, each [both Hume and Kant] moved their foundations to higher ground, insulating the grounds of practical activity from the threat of metaphysical turmoil and skepticism."¹³ Both philosophers, then, worked towards the conception of a new moral subject and a new personal identity in the context of practical activity. I disagree with Purviance however when she labels Hume's proposal along with Kant's as an attempt to develop "a Fact of Agency Theory."¹⁴ Approaching the problem only from a Kantian point of view, Purviance fails to grasp the peculiarity of the Humean proposal on this topic. On the contrary, the new moral psychology of Hume presents a what we could call a "Fact of *Sentiment* Theory."

In moving from the skeptical conclusions of Book 1 to Book 2, then, Hume abandons the pretense of locating a basis for the intellectual belief in the reality of the self, as something perceived as continuous and distinct from other selves, through some sort of representation of a sense impression. Rather, Hume moves towards an explanation of the self in terms of sentiments and passions. Let us see, then, how this new perspective on the self can be illustrated through Hume's discussion in Books 2 and 3 of the awareness of the self from the perspective of passions and morality.

3. Being Proud of One's Self

Hume's claims on the self change radically as soon as we enter the realm of the passions. Here indeed there is no longer room for doubts and questions about who we are; on the contrary, the awareness of the self is presented as secure and solidly characterized. Not only do we no longer find complaints about the continual coming and going of fleeting mental perceptions, we

find rather that Hume immediately places the perception of the self and of everything related to it at the center of the passions of pride and of humility.

Hume underlines the fact that from the point of view of the passions, the self is an indubitable fact for all human beings, beginning with Hume himself. At this level, there seems no longer to be any room for the complications of the analysis of the intellect. Moreover, when we feel a passion like pride or humility, our own awareness of self appears as an entirely simple mental event, with a power and clarity which make us immediately interested and involved by everything that relates to us and that is in relation to our own selves. The problems related to the extension of the self over time are resolved in the immediacy of the passion of pride, which has already surpassed doubts about the continuity of the self at the moment it arises. It is, finally, also at the level of the passions that our awareness of self gives us a sure indication of which things relate to our own selves, differentiating them from others that relate to selves other than our own.

In the world of the passions, the awareness of self is manifested in a manner that is still stronger and more basic, if we keep in mind that, according to Hume, some of the principal human passions are explicable only insofar as we presume that we are able without doubt to perceive our own selves. In this sense, pride and humility—the two indirect passions with which Hume begins Book 2—can be explained only if we assume that every person is able easily to identify that which relates to his or her own self, and to understand the limits of the universe of those things that involve him or her emotionally.

Let us better examine Hume's analysis of pride in Book two of the *Treatise*, then, in order to understand the bases of Hume's explanation of the non-fictional nature of the awareness that each person has of his or her self, with its own continuity and particularity distinct from that of other individuals. Of course the same analysis can be given of humility with the obvious difference of the kind of sensation involved: "What I have said of pride is equally true of humility. The sensation of humility is uneasy, as that of pride is agreeable; for which reason the separate sensation, arising from the causes, must be reversed, while the relation to self continues the same" (T 2.1.5.9; SBN 288–9).

Regarding the self as an object of pride, Penelhum has underlined the difficulty that he sees Hume as encountering here.¹⁵ According to Penelhum, Hume cannot coherently identify the self as the object of pride or humility (or rather of "shame," as Penelhum has suggested following P. Ardal¹⁶), unless he has already been able to establish the reality of the self independently of the passions. Otherwise, taking into account Hume's analysis of the problem of self-awareness on the intellectual level, the passion of pride would have as its object a fiction and could only be illusory. But Hume explains,

dealing precisely with the issue of pride, how awareness of the self at the level of the passions is manifested in a natural and original manner:

First, I find, that the peculiar object of pride and humility is determin'd by an original and natural instinct, and that 'tis absolutely impossible, from the primary constitution of the mind, that these passions shou'd ever look beyond self, or that individual person, of whose actions and sentiments each of us is intimately conscious. Here at last the view always rests, when we are actuated by either of these passions; nor can we, in that situation of mind, ever lose sight of this object. For this I pretend not to give any reason; but consider such a peculiar direction of the thought as an original quality. (T 2.1.5.3; SBN 286)

The self, then, is the object of pride, a particular object determined by an original and natural instinct. But the self as object of pride is not the same metaphysical self that Hume investigates in Book 1. The self of pride is not, that is, a product of the imagination or of the association of ideas. The ontological nature of the self in Hume is presented not in connection with the metaphysical and epistemological position advanced in his discussion of intellectual understanding, but rather as an original and primary fact in the emotional world of the passions and morality.

At the very moment in which we feel pride, we are presented with the reality of our own past self. No one doubts, after all, that the actions of which one is proud were, in fact, his or her own; and even a vainglorious braggart is well aware of the distinction between that which he claims to have done and that which he really did. One's own past self appears entirely real and distinct from other selves at the very moment in which we feel proud about something that relates closely to us. Why then should we continue to insist that there are two separate perceptions here—the representative awareness of our own self on the one hand, and then, on the other, the passion of pride for that which this self has accomplished? To advance the thesis that the reality of the self must exist prior to the moment in which we feel pride for something directly related to us is, in part, to locate oneself outside of the framework of Hume's analysis. By insisting, that is, that the reality of the self is either the fruit of an operation of intellectual identification or it isn't anything at all, one is prevented from recognizing that the reality of the self is, precisely, a matter of passions and sentiments.

The world of the passions is not only able to give our awareness of the self a greater clarity, stability and continuity, putting us in direct emotional

contact with the self in which we are instinctively interested. It also indicates a particular manner in which that emotional awareness is realized. Indeed, Hume offers an anatomical explanation of the rise of the self in the context of the passions. He writes

That we may comprehend this the better, we must suppose, that nature has given to the organs of human mind, a certain disposition fitted to produce a peculiar impression or emotion, which we call *pride*: To this emotion she has assign'd a certain idea, *viz* that of *self*, which it never fails to produce. This contrivance of nature is easily conceiv'd. We have many instances of such a situation of affairs. The nerves of the nose and palate are so dispos'd, as in certain circumstances to convey such peculiar sensations to the mind: The sensations of lust and hunger always produce in us the idea of those peculiar objects, which are suitable to each appetite. These two circumstances are united in pride. The organs are so dispos'd as to produce the passion; and the passion, after its production, naturally produces a certain idea. All this needs no proof. 'Tis evident we never shou'd be possess'd of that passion, were there not a disposition of mind proper for it; and 'tis as evident, that the passion always turns our views to ourselves, and make us think of our own qualities and circumstances. (T 2.1.5.6; SBN 287)

In this passage the connection between the idea of self and the natural organs of the human mind is particularly important.

In addition to inserting his analysis of the self into the framework of the passion of pride, Hume further clarifies this reconstruction of the nature of the self. Elsewhere in the *Treatise*, he explicitly says:

Our love and hatred are always directed to some sensible being external to us, and when we talk of *self-love*, 'tis not in a proper sense, nor has the sensation it produces any thing in common with that tender emotion, which is excited by a friend or mistress. 'Tis the same case with hatred. We may be mortify'd by our own faults and follies, but never feel any anger or hatred, except from the injuries of others. (T 2.2.1.2; SBN 329–30)

Hume explicitly denies, therefore, that there can be love towards one's own self. We can be proud of ourselves, but not love ourselves; we can only love another person. Precisely because love requires an explicit awareness of the other person as distinct from one's self, this emotion is held to be distinct

from that of pride which, on the contrary, as that of humility, is constitutive of the awareness that each of us has of his or her own person. The sharp distinction operated by Hume between pride, as a direct perception of the self, and love, as an emotion directed towards another person, points with even greater clarity to the way in which Hume has completely abandoned the erroneous perspective with which he had approached the problem of the nature of the self in Book 1. The fundamental error of the perspective of Book 1 lay in the effort to explain individual self-awareness as a process of representation of another object. This way of viewing the person is that of love—that is, of a passion whose origin requires the perception of another self as real. In the case of pride, on the other hand, the self appears as a real object without any need to represent anything external.

While Hume denies that the passion of love can be felt towards one's own self, already in the first part of Book 2 he insistently underlines the importance of a particular kind of pride as constitutive of the sense of one's own person. The self that is the object of pride may have many pleasant qualities, but among these Hume assigns a special place to the pleasant qualities of our character, namely the virtues. Hume explains the subjects to which the qualities that cause pride and humility are connected as follows:

[T]hese subjects are either parts of ourselves, or something nearly related to us. Thus the good and bad qualities of our actions and manners constitute virtue and vice, and determine our personal character, than which nothing operates more strongly on these passions. In like manner, 'tis beauty or deformity of our person, houses, equipage, or furniture, by which are render'd either vain or humble. The same qualities, when transferr'd to subjects, which bear us no relation, influence not in the smallest degree either of these affections. (T 2.1.5.1; SBN 285)

The self is generated as an object of pride or humility. But the principal causes of pride and humility are the moral qualities of the person: in the passage quoted above, there is perhaps a difference between “being proud” of moral qualities and “being vain” about beauty, deformity, property, and so on. In this passage, Hume introduces the necessary connection (through what is, of course, a contingent and psychological necessity) between the self as object of pride on one hand and the moral self on the other. Our self, that is, also appears as our personal character, which can be morally approved from a general point of view. I will return below to the centrality of the perception of one's own moral character for Hume's explanation of the self.

The passion of pride already reveals that specific development of the awareness of the self that refers to a more specific collection of qualities—those which are morally significant. This reference to moral qualities is important to understand the new basis from which Hume poses the questions of personal identity left open at the end of Book 1. Indeed, to make sense of our reference to the moral qualities of ourselves and of others, we must be able to make reference to a broader extension of the person. This is the case already at the level of our awareness of our own selves, since, in fact, to be proud of our moral qualities, we must take up an examination not only of our own particular states of mind but of our character as a whole. It should be added that being proud of our own moral qualities implies that we have managed to complete a refinement of the sentiment of pride, by which this sentiment becomes worthy of approval when seen from a general point of view. Already at the level of the analysis of pride then, we can see an opening towards that further specification of the sense of self-awareness that Hume will realize in Book 3, in which self-awareness appears more explicitly as awareness of one's own character, seen as worthy or unworthy of approval for its virtuous or vicious qualities.

4. The Impression of the Self of Which We Are Always Intimately Aware in Sympathy

Before turning to the way Hume connects the sense of self to the examination of one's own character, seen chiefly in one's personal moral qualities, let us return, if only briefly, to the role that the sense of self plays in the mechanism of sympathy. This will allow us to suggest other hypotheses on the way Hume conceives the awareness of self that we realize in the world of interpersonal relations, as Hume confronts this in the books on the passions and morality. As is well known, Hume's explanation of the mechanism of sympathy leads him to affirm: " 'Tis evident that the idea, or rather impression of ourselves is always intimately present with us, and that our consciousness gives us so lively a conception of our own person, that 'tis not possible to imagine, that any thing can in this particular go beyond it" (T 2.1.11.4; SBN 317). In this passage, Hume not only tells us that our self is intimately present and that it appears as an "impression"; he also adds that "our consciousness" presents us thus with such a "lively conception of our person" that one can imagine nothing more intense than the awareness we have of ourselves. This passage has tended to be introduced in a context which, through reference to Hume's arguments in part four of Book 1, is critical of Hume. This approach to Hume's thesis that the self is an impression is exemplified by John Rawls's discussion in his *Lectures on the*

History of Moral Philosophy. Rawls writes, “Now this impression of self cannot be a simple impression, since Hume holds in I:vi:4 that there is no such impression. We might conjecture, as Kemp Smith does, that II is earlier than I and that Hume is just inconsistent: but let’s try to avoid saying this. We suppose instead that Hume’s preferred meaning may be the conception he used in II in connection with pride.” And so Rawls interprets this “preferred meaning” in the following way: “Hume views the self as that connected succession of perceptions of which we have an intimate memory or consciousness, the vividness of which is sustained by our directing our attention to the persons who most resemble us and to the things that belong to us.”¹⁷

This perspective is inadequate, however, because it continues to maintain that Hume was trying in Book 2 to explain the same self, understood as a succession of perceptions, of which he had denied the reality in Book 1 and which, in the Appendix, he had accused of having led him astray, making it impossible for him to explain our conception of our selves as being possessed of simplicity, identity, and difference from others. Moving from a perspective that privileges the approach to the self of Book 1, one fails to appreciate the importance of Hume’s declaration, in the context of sympathy, that the self is a constantly present impression for each of us. Only by moving from the impression that we have of ourselves and of our own passions and emotions are we able to transform the signs of others’ emotions into images of their passions that are sufficiently vivid (although never as vivid as our own emotions). Moving, on the other hand, from the erroneous privileging of the question of identity as a metaphysical and gnoseological question, Rawls—in his interpretation just quoted—ends up attributing to Hume a complete overturning of the role of self-awareness in the mechanism of sympathy. Indeed, we certainly cannot assign the role of making the emotions and passions of others more vivid to an idea of ourselves that we have derived from other people and from the things we possess. This explanation would still fail to account for that vivid and firm awareness of our own passions that we can project onto the persons that are more or less close to us, who more or less resemble us, and who are in causal relations with us.

It becomes evident, then, that an examination of the role of the impression of the self in the mechanism of sympathy allows us to offer a solution to the questions of whether the perception of the self is vivid or not, and to what degree this appears simple or complex, subject to analysis or inscrutable. However, to fully make sense of Hume’s analysis, we must completely put aside the notion that the self that appears as an impression in the mechanism of sympathy is the same self treated in Book 1. To grasp this change, it seems fruitful to follow some suggestions advanced recently by Kenneth P.

Winkler. Winkler invites us to look at Hume's analysis of the self and of personal identity in the context not of Locke's work, but of that of Shaftesbury. He writes, "I will present Shaftesbury as a critic of Locke inclined to locate personal identity not in the understanding, but in the will. . . . In the end, though, despite his appeal to the will and even to substance, Shaftesbury does not offer a fully elaborated metaphysics of personal identity [. . .] he renounces metaphysics, or declines serious engagement with it, in favor of appeal to ethics or practice, and to an unanalyzed notion of the self and its identity on which ethics and practice (in his view) depends."¹⁸ Locating Hume's analysis of the self in the context suggested by Winkler enables us to see that also in the *Treatise*, Hume abandons the pretense of offering a metaphysical analysis of the self, and that this analysis is rooted instead in the context of ethics and practice. In this context, as Winkler suggests, Hume privileges a "commitment to, or propensity towards the simplicity and identity of the self."¹⁹

To explain how Hume sets out to resolve this commitment and propensity, one must insist on the way in which each of us becomes aware of his or her self. This perception appears as a vivid sentiment of one's own person, something that presents itself to us instinctively and naturally, like the idea of our self when we are taken up with our emotional and practical life. This awareness we have of our selves is certainly not a product of the intellect or of a neutral collection of memories. It is rather a sentiment of one's self and of one's character, which appears to the mind as something original and not reducible to anything else. This sentiment offers a basis for the attribution of simplicity and identity to the self. The emotion of one's self does not exclude the simplicity of the perception in the way it presents itself and certainly it is not subject to analysis in parts. The awareness of the self is not reducible to a series of perceptions that accompany it; rather this awareness is itself a sentiment of the continuity of the self that constantly reappears, instinctively and originally, at the occasion of every passion or action. Hume does not fail to indicate what for him is the center of this awareness of the self. The center is given precisely by the perspective that each person has of his or her own character as being virtuous or vicious. With this emotion the person feels also his own identity. Dabney Townsend has explained this process in the following way:

Virtue, therefore, belongs to the nature of impression. So the virtue itself is an emotion in that it is both internal to the actor and characterized by the actor's qualities. An emotion, in this sense, is not simply a qualitative ego-state, but a quality of ego. Hume's psychology does not distinguish between an ego and emotional qualities as felt because

he finds no place for a substantial substratum independent of the emotional and passionate life of the ego. The emotions are themselves the stable principles that make up one's personal identity. Emotions are at once more stable and more individual than if they are regarded as fleeting psychological states of a substantive ego.²⁰

The moment has come, then, for us to explore the way in which Hume presents the connection between the character and the self, and the role that he maintains is played by the distinction between virtue and vice in the awareness of the self.

5. The Self, Awareness of One's Own Character, and Moral Self-examination

Hume's ideas on the way we achieve an awareness of our self can be further specified if we integrate what we have already said regarding pride and sympathy with what Book 3 of the *Treatise* adds on the moral examination of our own character. In coming to this final part of our reconstruction, it is worth recalling, first of all, that what Hume has to tell us on this topic takes part in the larger goals that inspire his science of man. In the *Treatise*, Hume seeks to explain human nature on the basis of an "experimental method." As Paul Russell has explained, a naturalistic explanation of moral responsibility is essential for Hume's project. Hume maintains that issues of moral responsibility can be understood only within the framework of human feeling and human society. Pride then is central to this naturalistic explanation of morality: "Pride and humility—instead of divine rewards and punishment in a future state—are principal instruments through which we attach some measure of happiness to virtue and misery to vice."²¹ The pride (or humility and shame) that we feel about ourselves is central, as it is the motivational basis of our conduct in a naturalistic account of human nature that makes recourse neither to divine sanction nor, alternately, to mere legal coercion, as in the case of Hobbes. Furthermore, as we have seen, according to Hume, we can be proud of a great number of qualities that relate to ourselves or to subjects in some relation to us. In this framework, then, in order to give a center and a solidity to this awareness of ourselves, we must consider the instinctive tendency of each of us to consider his or her own character from the point of view of its worthiness of moral approval or disapproval. The fact is that according to Hume, pride in the morally valuable qualities of one's own character is in a sense constitutive of the awareness of the self. Focusing attention on the strict correlation in Hume between explanation of the genesis of the impression of the self and the

moral considerations that each of us makes about our own character, we are able to clarify further aspects of Hume's interpretation of the conception of personal identity in terms of a moral sentiment towards one's self.

First of all, seeing the awareness of the self as understandable in terms of a feeling of general moral approval or disapproval of one's character, helps us to avoid the inadequate interpretation which sees the self in Hume's philosophy as merely a product of the passion of pride, experienced as a reflection of the image that others have of us. This is the interpretation of Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, which has the defect of reducing Hume's conception of the self to an idea that is derived completely from the evaluation that others make of our qualities.²² If, on the other hand, we underline the fact that the awareness of the self in Hume's analysis depends chiefly upon the examination of one's own character from a moral point of view, we are better able to correct the one-sidedness of this social construction of personal identity.

It is, of course, common to point out, as has, for example, Baier, that Hume's account of self-awareness develops in Books 2 and 3 not only through a move from the level of the intellect to that of the passions, but also through a different view of the person that Hume seeks to explain. This person is now no longer seen as an isolated individual, locked in his study, but as involved in a context of social relations. Indeed one cannot explain pride without considering the judgment that others make about those things of which we are proud. This interpretation can be taken too far, however, leading some to identify the impression of moral reflection on the one hand, which instinctively appears with our perception of ourselves, with, on the other, the impression of pride derived from our knowledge of being approved of by others. We have already seen that a similar reconstruction of Hume's notion of the self is unable to account for the role played by the impression of the self in sympathy.

Furthermore, with the aid of Hume's own metaphor of sympathy as a kind of mirror, we can see easily enough that if the impression of the self were completely reducible to an awareness of which of our qualities are appreciated by others, the mirror would end up with nothing to reflect. If we think of the self as an idea that is born by reflecting the passions that others feel towards us, the mechanism of sympathy would end up assembling a collection of mirrors, none of which would be able to reflect the image of anyone at all. I think, then, that in Hume we have a continuity, or better an identity, between the self as an object of pride and the moral self. The self as object of pride is nurtured by the moral pleasures that we feel about our own qualities.²³ The self is also constituted of our individual and personal pleasures. In Book 3, Hume specifies that these pleasures are those generated by the calm passions that go along with the prevalence of our "general character" (T 2.3.4.10; SBN 418). The self in

Hume's *Treatise* originates from a consideration of our "constant and inherent personal character" (T 2.2.3.4; SBN 348).

Focusing on the hypothesis that the awareness of the self is, for Hume, strictly linked to the moral sentiment stimulated by the qualities of our character in general, we can better explain how it is possible in the *Treatise* to offer a solution to the questions of the continuity, stability, and individuality of the self. The point is not to lose sight of that stability, continuity, and individuality that are present in the idea of moral character. At the moment in which we are proud of our moral qualities, the self appears as a character with that stability, constancy, and peculiarity that lend importance to our feelings of moral responsibility about our choices and actions. It is on this system of valuation that we base that minimum of self-esteem necessary to make us proud of ourselves and thus able to go on peacefully with our lives.

To connect the awareness of one's self to that of one's character in general is not the same, however, as to reduce the self to character. Indeed, as Russell reminds us,²⁴ Hume explicitly denies the reductionist approach (à la Derek Parfit²⁵) that reduces the self to the character of a person, admitting that a person can, after all, change his or her character (T 2.3.2.7; SBN 412). It is also true, however, that Hume holds: "it being almost impossible for the mind to change its character in any considerable article" (T 3.3.4.3; SBN 608). Thus the person who has changed character will naturally be aware of him- or herself as of a person who has changed character—almost a new person—considering this change worthy of approval or of blame. By making reference to character in his account of the self, Hume means to extend to the self all those things ascribed to character, including principally—as underlined again by Russell²⁶—the notion that we cannot choose or create our character, which is largely a matter of "constitutive luck." But from this perspective, the insistence with which Hume presents the impression, or idea, of the self as the product of processes—or even as the product of natural and biological organs like the body—reveals that one of his goals was to naturalize not only the sentiments of moral responsibility, but the very moral subject itself, understood as a whole. In doing this, then, Hume could not help but follow his own peculiar path, developed in terms of sentiments—a path that presents a marked alternative to the rationalist and constructivist path followed by Kant.

Finally, connecting the awareness we have of ourselves with the moral sentiment stimulated by our character in general also leads us to privilege a particular type of pleasure as the central point of the sense that we have of ourselves. Hume insists on the centrality of this notion both the Conclusion of Book 3 of the *Treatise* (T 3.3.6.6; SBN 620–1) and discussing the response that could be given to the "sensible Knave" in the *Enquiry concerning the Principles*

of *Morals* (EPM 9.21–5; SBN 154–6).²⁷ It is in this context of “peaceful reflection on one’s own conduct” (EPM, 9.25; SBN 156) that we can find that “general character or present disposition of the person” (T 2.3.3.10; SBN 418) that gives him or her that “strength of mind” that permits him or her to prevail over the violent passions. The awareness of the self as a pleasant moral sentiment of the virtuous qualities of one’s own character appears in Hume as a calm and strong passion. Thus understood, the sense of self fully explains that “impression of ourselves . . . [that is] always present with us” as well as “our consciousness” that “gives us so lively a conception of our own person” (T 2.1.11.4; SBN 317).

By way of conclusion, we might briefly add another argument in favor of this interpretation of Hume’s philosophical analysis of the self by showing that Hume seems to employ this same emotional conception of the self at the biographical level as well.²⁸ That is, we can turn to the autobiography that the philosopher penned only a few months before his death as a document of the awareness that David Hume achieved of his own self—a document in which Hume makes explicit what sort of awareness guided his own life.²⁹ In this text, we find clear signs that Hume thought it essential to look to the passions that have given continuity and specificity to one’s character in order to give an account of one’s life. He himself declared that “a passion for literature . . . has been the ruling Passion of my life, and the great source of my Enjoyments” (1). The impulses of this passion are responsible for the principal events of Hume’s life, which he narrates here, showing special concern to avoid vanity. We find that Hume assigns great importance to the pleasures derived from the awareness that the principal motivations of one’s own conduct—which have given continuity to one’s character—are morally praiseworthy; not least for the general moderation and tranquility that these qualities have made possible. Finally, Hume declares:

To conclude historically with my own character—I am, or rather was (for that is the style, I must now use in speaking of myself; which emboldens me the more to speak my Sentiments). I was, I say, a man of Mild Dispositions, of Command of Temper, of an open, social and cheerful Humour, capable of attachment, but little susceptible of Enmity, and of great Moderation in all my Passions. Even my Love of literary Fame, my ruling Passion, never soured my humour, notwithstanding my frequent Disappointments. (7)

NOTES

The first draft of this paper was written for the 28th Hume Conference, Victoria, Canada, July 25–28, 2001. I am grateful to the audience for questions and comments and to the editors of *Hume Studies* and to two anonymous referees for their perceptive observations and suggestions. I wish to thank Benjamin Martin for his help with the English version of the text.

1 For a reading that integrates the views of the self in the various books of the *Treatise*, see for example T. Penelhum, “The Self of Book I and the Selves of Book 2,” *Hume Studies* 18 (1992): 181–91; reprinted in T. Penelhum, *Themes in Hume. The Self, The Will, Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 88–98.

2 For an explicit accusation of contradiction, see J. Passmore, *Hume’s Intentions*, 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1968), especially 126–7. But the difficulties in the theory of Hume that assumes that the self that appeared as a fiction in Book 1 could be a real object of pride in Book 2 are also underlined by T. Penelhum, “Self-Identity and Self-Regard,” in *The Identities of Persons*, ed. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 253–80; reprinted in T. Penelhum, *Themes in Hume*, 61–87.

3 Citations refer to *A Treatise of Human Nature*, David Fate Norton and Mary Norton, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Following the letters SBN will appear the page references to the edition of L. A. Selby-Bigge, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd ed., revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

4 The various ways that have been proposed of integrating the analysis of the self in Book 1 with that of Books 2 and 3 are categorized by W. Waxman, *Hume’s Theory of Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 224.

5 Eugenio Lecaldano, *Hume e la nascita dell’etica contemporanea* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1991; 2nd ed., 1998), 63–74; *Hume e le teorie psicologiche dell’identità personale*, in *Individui e istituzioni*, ed. A. E. Galeotti (La Rosa Editrice: Torino, 1992), 107–38; *L’Io, il carattere e la virtù nel Trattato di Hume in Filosofia e cultura nel Settecento Britannico*, ed. A. Santucci, vol. 2 (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000), 143–66.

6 Annette Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume’s Treatise* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 129–52.

7 This change in register in the *Treatise*, from the failure of the intellectual analysis of Book 1 to a new project of research from Book 2 onward in terms of sentiments and emotions has been clearly explained by A. Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*.

8 T. Penelhum, “Self-identity and Self-regard.” 255–7 (in *Themes in Hume*, 62–4), sees Hume in difficulty as he attributes to Hume a certain tendency towards this position.

9 See J. L. McIntyre, “Character: A Humean Account,” in *History of Philosophy Quarterly* (1990): 193–206, especially 195; but see all of McIntyre’s illuminating

articles on this topic, in particular "Personal Identity and the Passions," in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 27 (1989): 545–57.

10 McIntyre, "Character," 195.

11 Pauline Chazan, "Pride, Virtue and Self-Hood. A Reconstruction of Hume," in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 22 (1992): 45–64.

12 Susan M. Purviance, "The Moral Self and the Indirect Passions," *Hume Studies*, 23 (1997): 195–212.

13 Purviance, 195.

14 Purviance, 210.

15 T. Penelhum, "Self-identity and Self-regard," 255–7 (in *Themes in Hume*, 62–4).

16 P. Ardal, *Passion and Value in Hume's Treatise* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), 34.

17 John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, ed. B. Herman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 87.

18 Kenneth P. Winkler, "'All is Revolution in Us': Personal Identity in Shaftesbury and Hume," *Hume Studies* 26 (2000): 5.

19 Winkler, 40, note 58.

20 D. Townsend, *Hume's Aesthetic Theory: Taste and Sentiment* (London: Routledge, 2001), 95.

21 Paul Russell, *Freedom and Moral Sentiment: Hume's Way of Naturalizing Responsibility* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 154.

22 Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, "Pride Produces the Idea of Self: Hume on Moral Agency," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1990): 255–69.

23 See P. Chazan, "Pride, Virtue and Self-Love."

24 Russell, *Freedom and Moral Sentiment*, 108, note 24.

25 D. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

26 Russell, *Freedom and Moral Sentiment*, 130–3.

27 David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. T. L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). Following the letters SBN are page references to *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

28 This perspective on Hume is made use of in particular by Donald T. Siebert, *The Moral Animus of David Hume* (Newark, N.J.: University of Delaware Press, 1990), especially 187–212.

29 David Hume, *My Own Life*, in J. Y. T. Greig, *The Letters of David Hume*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 1: 1–7.

