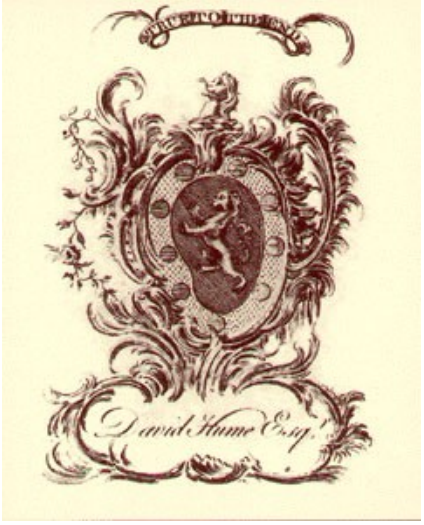

A. E. Pitson. ***Hume's Philosophy of the Self***
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A. E. PITSON. *Hume's Philosophy of the Self*. London: Routledge, 2002. Pp.196. ISBN 0-415-24801-9, cloth, £50.

A. E. Pitson's *Hume's Philosophy of the Self* is an ambitious study of the issues of self-awareness, self-reflection, agency, and the awareness of one's being one self among others. Although uneven in results, *Hume's Philosophy of the Self* offers admirable depth in its analyses. Argumentation is sustained by careful attention to the relevance of the entire philosophical corpus of Hume. Because ethical theory is interrelated with philosophy of mind, we need the sort of work Pitson undertakes.

I will be using the chapter titles to give one possible tour of this wide-ranging new work. "The self and human nature" (chapter 1) pulls a lot together on multiple fronts—developments in contemporary philosophy of mind, along with scholarship on Book 1 and Books 2 and 3 of the *Treatise*. It is very useful as a current reference for those new to systematic readings of Hume's philosophy. Pitson makes a good case for the Humean model of mind as a system of perceptions. His flow chart will probably become a flashpoint for those differing with him, but it presents his overall map of Hume on mind. More particularly, it helps to show the difficulty one might have with situating volitions. It also presents the direct and indirect passions as a nexus—both a product of multiple mental inputs and causative of judgment and action—prefiguring their importance throughout in the book.

"Hume and the idea of self" (chapter 2) presents an insightful summary of current discussions of the self-identity of the self, including some nice work on Locke's contribution to these matters. For Hume, the self is real; it merely lacks strict identity, as do most physical objects. Pitson's own view, that Hume's account allows him to distinguish his perceptions as a subject from his perceptions as a self observer, is also intriguing:

> In the former case, I may have a perception which is a recollection of some past perception to the extent that it is, in effect, a kind of present awareness of that past perception. In the latter case, I have a perception which is not *only* a kind of reflected awareness of the past perception in question; it is also an awareness of it *as* part of the succession of perceptions. (34)

One problem with the chapter is that it starts a line of criticism which it quickly drops; I would like to see a common critical standard which organizes the chapter. It is simply hard to see what view he is pushing when the argument stalls. For

example on 41-2 he takes up Nelson Pike ("Hume's Bundle Theory of the Self: A Limited Defense," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 4 [1967]: 159–65): "It does seem that insofar as I have a perception of this kind I also have an idea of the various perceptions which make up my mind at a time . . . of the self" (Pitson, 42). However in the subsequent footnote he seems to backpedal in response to a counter-argument by Peter Carruthers (*Introducing Persons: Theories and Arguments in the Philosophy of Mind* [London: Croom Helm, 1986; Albany, N.Y.: SUNY, 1986]). This sort of tentative double embedding of Pitson's own critical claims happens more than once and makes the upshot of critical discussions hard to pin down. In fairness I should say that it is less true in chapters 3 and 5.

In "Hume on the mind/body relation" (chapter 3) Pitson says that Hume finds no special problem in the mental/physical relationship. The particular deflation of the problem involves throwing out the problem of mental/physical interaction with the bath water of substance ontology. He argues that when Hume rejects both materialism and immaterialism as forms of substance ontology we supposedly see that

> *both* kinds of claim about the nature of mind are mistaken. The dispute between materialism and immaterialism is essentially misconceived because it assumes that we may intelligibly employ the notion of substance. (51)

But I think that Pitson is too optimistic about Hume's dissolution strategy. Substance ontology is not impeding our ability to determine how the mental is able to supervene upon, or be caused by, whatever is physical. New accounts of physicality have not rendered this question moot. Nor should we expect that they should. If personal identity quandaries about the unity and simplicity of the self are not rendered moot by our rejection of the early modern understanding of substance, how would it be that mind/body problems of interaction simply disappear? The problem for us now is largely conceptual rather than classically metaphysical. It is not yet clear how Hume can help us there.

One can see in this chapter a deep commitment to some sort of largely naturalist reading of Hume. Those who see Hume as offering projectivism will have trouble with this chapter, or will simply discount the importance of it.

He continues to juxtapose historical discussions with current problems, to good effect. Spinoza is featured for his argument that two entities which are not at all alike cannot possibly interact. Here Pitson puts it all together: he shows us a good grasp of Spinoza, a solid Humean reply, and a solid grasp of current issues in mind/body interactionism. (Briefly, Hume's account of causality in no way assumes that there is anything rationally intelligible *a priori* which sets limits on what can or cannot possibly causally interact; as long as it may be presented in

experience in the sort of way Hume describes, it can be the basis of an inference to a cause and explain our expectation of an effect.) The question of mind body interaction is thus advanced one step; next we have to consider if Hume's conditions for a causal inference are, in fact, met.

The discussion of mental causation in this chapter is inconclusive yet suggestive, if only in showing that Hume holds no views inconsistent with our current best thinking about mental causation. That is, to wit, a physical precursor cause behind an intention does not eliminate the possibility that subsequent causal links are fully mental to mental (60). This chapter could easily have a one-to-two week place in a philosophy of mind course at the mid-range level.

By contrast, "Hume's second thoughts about personal identity" (chapter 4) breaks little new ground. It is rather narrowly focused on locating the reason why Hume is dissatisfied in the Appendix. Pitson explains why he rejects Terence Penelhum's account of the problem ("Hume on Personal Identity," *Philosophical Review* 64 [1955]: 571–89). Briefly, where Penelhum seems to focus on the problem of synchronic unity, in Pitson's judgment it is in the attribution of diachronic unity to the self that Hume finds his own account to be inadequate to his own principles. I hold no view on this but invite the reader to consider Pitson's reasoning. It is exceedingly subtle and carefully sustained into a postscript to this chapter (an irony for what is a chapter on the Appendix).

"Hume on character and the self" (chapter 5) takes up the question of how an enduring character can unite the rather more episodic nature of perceptions. Here the perceptions in question are passional and the performed actions are episodic, making up the self of social life. The problem for this reading of Hume is well stated:

> But, as we have noted, a crucial feature of character traits is their *durability* as compared, for example, with the temporary nature of actions themselves. How, then, can this be reconciled with their (partial, at least) identification with passions, if the latter consist in the occurrence of certain kinds of perception? (89)

While Pitson stands in the tradition of incrementalist readings that make Books 2 and 3 of the *Treatise* a continuous elaboration of the principles and arguments of Book 1, I see more room for Hume engaging in radically rethinking the self. This is not to say that the principles of mental association disappear—they are still active. But do perceptions provide us the point of entry into Book 2? Is it helpful to think of passions as distinct from character traits and as identical with perceptions? Or are passions already constituents of character, precursors to character, in ways that perceptions cannot be?

Moving laterally, Pitson then turns to narrative accounts of self-identity. Explicating Donald Livingston's narrative account of the self (*Hume's Philosophy of Common Life* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984]), he confronts the problem of two orders of explanation: naturalistic and moral. He makes creative use of the distinction to explain how Hume might account for our idea of a unified self:

> [W]hile the relations belonging to the perceptions which make up the mind . . . are philosophical relations, it is only so far as they are also natural relations, producing associations among ideas, that they give rise to the idea of a unified and identical self. It requires the temporal perspective of the historian or biographer to give a narrative order to the events . . . seeing them as having a certain significance in relation to each other, so that their mutual dependence provides a strict unity of action. (95)

The indirect passions help to narrate a running account of how we are doing, as delivered to ourselves. Thus, self-repute is the basis of self-concept. An interesting consequence from this is that, instead of being responsible for an action only when the action is in character, we might say that a person's responsibility for the action reflects its place in the self-narrative which constitutes that person's character identity (99). But if so, Pitson ought to consider next how this general principle is likely to lead to different results depending on who is applying it. The individual's own self-narrative is likely to be subject to wishful thinking that another biographer (or spouse or coworker) might dispute. Despite this problem, I do think Pitson's reasoning offers a plausible way to draw together insights from both Livingston and Alasdair MacIntyre (*After Virtue* [London: Duckworth, 1981]) into a new perspective on the indirect passions, one well worth considering.

In "Human and animal nature" (chapter 6) Pitson draws upon previous work and a literature perhaps not explored by many who are conversant with Hume's theory of mind. While agreeing that Hume helps to undermine the special status of humans founded on their being made in the image of God, Pitson charts a moderate course. Our natural mental abilities may be on a continuum with other higher mammals, but Hume still sets us apart due to our moral understanding of the world. Hume's general rejection of special claims for humans seems not to fit with his claims that we, unlike animals, have actual virtues and vices. Why deny some natural virtues and vices to animals? If they share the ability to reason to solve basic problems of self-care and care of mates and young, and have many of the same passions, what is it about moral thinking which puts it out of the range of animals?

Pitson addresses this through two important discussions: the first, of the natural virtues of animal parenting, and the second, of the limitations of imaginative engagement with their future state. In both cases, the crux of the argument is the lack of a concept of moral self. Since there is no self-narrative ability, there is no virtue. But Pitson is careful here. He is not saying that other animals entirely lack pride or shame. Of course, all the interesting questions of evolutionary theory and of the biological foundations of self awareness come to mind. Did Neanderthals have mental self-referential assessments, pride, and humility strictly speaking? Could other animals also evolve these capacities under intensive selective breeding? Pitson did not hint but might have hinted at some of these questions.

So, one will find in Hume some deflation of the exalted place humans have been able to give themselves over animals, but they keep one key advantage. Hmm. . . . Perhaps as befits Hume's prejudices, animals are also found to lack what slaves, the lower classes, and weak men (women?) lack: self-command, a strength of mind (117). They are not capable of the calm passions and the long view. This matter is featured in a discussion of the comparison of human and animal male incest. What troubles me is that Pitson's discussion has a tendency to inflame social prejudices and to discount the effects of social circumstances. Pitson simply reports human superiority in this regard as if it were the correct and biologically neutral account of morality, rather than one which has some troubling social and historical roots.

"Hume and agency" (chapter 7) establishes the centrality of the passions to a Humean account of a real, definitely embodied, self. In his view, Hume takes the self to be given in the self-referential nature of the indirect passions. Here I find nothing at fault; indeed I agree that the self is not a fictional character in our own personal self-narrative. But the chapter is otherwise inconsistent and unsatisfying. Perhaps breaking the material into multiple chapters would have shown the incompleteness of the argumentation more clearly. The account is rather hypocritical. Even where the Humean passions reference one's future self, the question remains whether this is largely mediated by passion or affected by prudential reasoning. At times the standpoint of long term self-interest, felt as calm passions and mistaken for a purely rational standpoint, seems operative:

> We can presumably in the same way have expectations about the passions which we might expect to experience in the future under foreseeable circumstances, and so be sympathetically engaged at the moment in the passions of that future self. . . . The extension of sympathy into the future is facilitated by awareness of the person's present condition; our awareness of the perceptions we experience at present perhaps similarly enables us to conceive more vividly our own circumstances in

> the future and to have that special concern with them that belongs to the self as agent. (130)

Memory and sympathy extend the indirect passions over a narrative of a personal life. However, I believe that there is some unresolved tension between the more narrative (and sometimes fictive) readings of Hume on self, and more naturalized, purely passional readings of self. For if the passions just naturally present and continually re-present an object of pride and humility, what role is there for interpretation and autobiography? In the more narrative and autobiographical account of self-formation, there appears to be a distance set up between the narrator of self and the self which one then narrates. This distance is a structural difference which is present whether or not one feels as if one is being viewed by oneself at one remove. As a consequence it makes for a different sort of theory than the simpler model of indirect passions operating on direct inputs. My point is that if Pitson is still seeing these two theories of self as compatible and indeed complementary, I think that right away they begin to pull in different directions.

How then is the agency standpoint, as distinct from the evaluative standpoint, established? Pitson tells us that the idea of the self as an agent is an idea of

> a being which is capable of appropriating actions in the distinctive way associated with memory, which is concerned in these actions as well as those which it is motivated to perform in the future (to the extent that it may even be said to identify itself with the agent concerned), and which contributes to the causes of the indirect passions of pride and humility as well as providing their object. (131)

In other words, I have to be concerned with how my evaluation of my actions will make me pleased or pained with myself. Toward the end of the chapter Pitson returns to the bundle theory and the question of volition hinted at earlier. He reflects again on mental causation, explaining that what distinguishes the belief that I caused my arm to go up from the mere fact that it does go up is that in the former case there is a mental cause, an act of volition. So agency can also be explicated in terms of the mental causes of actions. Pitson uses this to good effect against Thomas Reid, who holds a theory of agent causation. Since Reid has made but few converts to his position that mental causation cannot explicate agency, Hume can hold his ground here.

"Hume and other minds" (chapter 8) is the final chapter. The critical engagement is almost entirely with the Hume texts and not with other Hume scholars, leaving us to wonder whether there are others with something to say who we are not getting to know about. Additionally the placement of this chapter at the end

of the book is anti-climactic and rather flat, given the strength of other chapters. One interesting note is the discussion of the asymmetry between the gross illusion of bodies and the mild illusion of empathy: empathy does not occur but sympathy makes us think it does. The mild illusion that when we feel sympathetic joy or sorrow we are actually feeling what the other person feels is as nothing compared with the gross illusion which the impressions of sense give us of the existence of continuous and distinct bodies. On a final note, Pitson compares the Humean account of our awareness of others to Wittgenstein on our ability to sense that another soul is present. Unfortunately, he does not develop the Humean/Wittgensteinian view further.

Hume's Philosophy of the Self gives the topics of self and mind the serious treatment they deserve. Rather than being a final statement of a single set of best positions on all the issues it takes up, this work introduces numerous avenues of exploration that both he and others will want to pursue further.

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