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In Part 3 of *Projection and Realism*, P. J. E. Kail offers an original and thought-provoking analysis of Hume's views on morality. Kail seeks to make sense of Hume's talk of projection and realism. Kail's stated aim is to help us understand Hume's own views, rather than some new Humean view. Part 3 is thus a contribution to the literature on Hume's meta-ethics. Kail's particular approach presents two challenges to the student of Hume's works. First, Kail gives us a set of terms that are not Hume's; this includes a distinction between explanatory projection and feature projection; a distinction between two forms of realism, metaphysical hedonism and the identification of moral value with natural properties of character traits; and a distinction between what Kail terms relational value and essential value. The first challenge is thus to ascertain how well this terminology maps onto the substance of Hume's arguments. The task of meeting the first challenge is made difficult by the strategy Kail employs to build a cumulative case for his mitigated, naturalistic realism. Kail first draws on what is now well known in the literature as *the Comparison*, that is, the argument that beauty and virtue are like sensible perceptions such as color, and exist only as perceptions in the mind, to show that at the pre-theoretical level, we make an error in attributing essential value to those things we take to be virtuous or beautiful. He then draws a parallel between the early modern understanding of the functional nature of bodily pains and pleasures and a similar functional nature of the moral sentiments. This parallel, if successfully drawn, militates against the characterization of Hume's moral theory as an error theory and shows how we can make sense of our experience of the essential value

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of beauty and virtue. Kail's arguments here range across Hume's texts, sometimes without much consideration of the particular contexts in which Hume presents his views. The second challenge facing the student of Hume's texts is thus to ascertain how faithful Kail's interpretations are when compared with a more systematic reading of Hume's ethical texts. I shall argue here that Kail's terminology fails to capture adequately the subtleties of the distinctions Hume makes between moral qualities and our sentiment-based responses to them. I shall also argue that some of Hume's texts that Kail quotes or draws on, read in their larger context, fail to support Kail's claims.

I shall first give a brief sketch of the main arguments of chapters 7 and 9, and then make the case for my reservations about Kail's reading and analysis of Hume. Chapter 7 begins with a historically-situated reconsideration of the meaning of Hume's comparison between our perception of beauty or virtue and sensible perceptions of colors, sounds, tastes, and so on. Kail draws on passages familiar to readers of Hume: *Treatise* 3.1.1.26, Appendix 1 in the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, "Of the Standard of Taste," page 235, and three passages from the essay, "The Sceptic," pages 165, 166n, and 171. In these passages, Hume (or perhaps in the case of the skeptic, a persona) urges that, like color or sound or taste, beauty and virtue are not properties of objects; they cannot be established as facts in the way that, for example, the diameter and circumference of the circle can. Our perception of things as beautiful or virtuous arises, rather, because of the nature and fabric of the constitution and sentiments of the human mind. According to Kail, the Comparison is intended to explain why our pre-theoretical concepts of beauty and virtue, as the objects of evaluation, are of them as essentially valuable. Kail glosses essential value as things that are valuable or desirable of themselves (he here follows Hume in the passage he quotes). Kail rejects the idea that in invoking the Comparison Hume has in mind Locke's (or Descartes') primary-secondary quality distinction and instead argues that Hume draws on Malebranche. According to Kail, Malebranche does not endorse Descartes' argument that colors are identical to secondary qualities of objects, regarded as 'powers' "in the causalist sense" (Kail, 154). Malebranche instead places the emphasis on what we experience in sensible perception. Our experience of colors is of irreducible phenomenal qualities; the perception of something as colored may include both intentional features (I perceive the grass as green) and non-intentional features (I take Kail to mean something like the sensation of greenness). Malebranche describes the mind as in turn spreading what Kail calls the non-intentional features of color experience onto those things we take to be so colored. Kail calls this act of the mind, which explains phenomenal color, *feature projection*. *Explanatory projection* invokes feature projection to explain why we experience the world as colored. Kail argues that we should understand Hume's case for aesthetic and moral values analogously. The moral sentiments, for example, are peculiar pleasures or pains that have an

irreducible phenomenal character; the mind in turn projects this feature of the sentiments on to traits of character, rendering them as virtuous or vicious, with an essential value or disvalue.

Our pre-theoretical view of characters as essentially valuable is mistaken, but as with color experience, our tendency to project is "sufficiently stubborn," such that we regard moral and aesthetic properties as real properties of the objects (Kail, 222). In chapter 9, Kail gives a functional explanation of the moral sentiments to make the case for what he calls *naturalistic realism*. He turns to the common early modern view that bodily pains and pleasures have the function of indicating to us what is harmful or beneficial to the body. The harmful and the beneficial are *relational values*, insofar as they erode or promote, respectively, bodily wellbeing. The moral sentiments, as peculiar pleasures and pains, are similarly tied to relational values, in this case the useful and the agreeable. Kail understands the useful and the agreeable as relational values insofar as they contribute to some end, namely, the wellbeing of society and its members. Kail cites Hume, who writes that the virtues "have, for the most part, a tendency to the good of society, or to that of the person possess'd of them" (T 3.3.6.1; SBN 618).[1] The moral sentiments thus make salient to us the relational values of the useful or the agreeable in such a way that we experience them as essentially valuable. The parallel with bodily pains and pleasures is meant to establish the functional nature of the moral sentiments; the moral sentiments pick out features of characters that have value for us insofar as they contribute to our wellbeing. In order to preserve the parallel with bodily pains and pleasures, Kail argues that although the relational quality of utility, which is the distal cause of the moral sentiment, is a property of an external object, the moral evaluator need not herself have the awareness of the character trait as useful or as contributing to society's or the individual's wellbeing (although a more delicate sensitivity can be cultivated). It is Hume the philosopher's task to show that utility is what unites a certain set of traits as virtues, while in common life, we implicitly maintain that the useful is praiseworthy even though we do not have an explicit grasp of that fact (Kail here cites EPM 9.1; SBN 268).[2]

A close reading of the passage from which Kail quotes to make his case that all the virtues contribute to our good, reveals that Hume is in fact speaking only of the useful virtues that tend to the public good or the good of the individual (T 3.3.6.1; SBN 618). Hume does think "these form the most considerable part of morality," but the immediately agreeable qualities also comprise part of our personal merit (T 3.3.6.2; SBN 618–19). Hume draws an important distinction between the useful and the agreeable, and identifies only the former qualities of character as those that contribute to the wellbeing of society or of the individual who possesses them. With regard to the agreeable qualities of character, Hume writes, "there is another set of mental qualities, which, without any utility or any tendency to farther good, either of the community or of the possessor, diffuse a

satisfaction on the beholders" (EPM 7.2; SBN 250–51). The sentiment towards the agreeable aspects of character arise from the "same social sympathy" as does that towards the useful, but "no views of utility or of future beneficial consequences enter into this sentiment of approbation" (EPM 7.29; SBN 260; see also EPM 8.1, 8.7; SBN 261, 263). The "immediate sensation" of a quality such as cheerfulness is agreeable to its possessor, and we "enter into the same humour, and catch the sentiment, by a contagion or natural sympathy" (EPM 7.2; SBN 250–51). The same trait of character can have both useful and agreeable aspects, but Hume clearly distinguishes between them: "The utility of courage, both to the public and to the person possessed of it, is an obvious foundation of its merit; But to any one who duly considers of the matter, it will appear, that this quality has a peculiar lustre, which it derives wholly from itself, and from that noble elevation inseparable from it" (EPM 7.11; SBN 254). The immediately agreeable aspect of a quality is some form of pleasure, cheerfulness, sublimity, or kindly feeling, for example, experienced by the possessor of the quality, or those responding to her; it is that pleasure with which we immediately, and largely unreflectively, sympathize. In the case of courage, the immediately agreeable aspect is the "sublimity and daring confidence" of the courageous person; this "engages the affections, and diffuses, by sympathy, a like sublimity of sentiment over every spectator" (EPM 7.11; SBN 254). Some agreeable qualities, such as someone's manner, grace, ease or genteelness, can catch our affection "suddenly and powerfully," although "how, or why, or for what reason," we cannot determine; so that this class of qualities "must be trusted entirely to the blind, but sure testimony of taste and sentiment" (EPM 8.14; SBN 267).

The immediately agreeable qualities of character thus do not have relational value, since Kail has defined relational value as contributing to an end, and in the case of virtue, this end is the wellbeing of society or of the individual possessing the virtue. But as I noted, the account of relational value is critical to Kail's claim about the functional nature of the moral sentiments (and the analogy with bodily pains and pleasures), and to staving off the threat of an error theory. Moreover, in the final section of the book, Kail remarks that he cannot see how to make sense of aesthetic experience, as Hume explains it in "Of the Standard of Taste," precisely because Hume does not explain it as being evolutionarily adaptive for us. Our sentimental responses to the agreeable qualities as I have described them are on a par with aesthetic experience, as Kail understands the latter, insofar as they do not have the function of promoting our good in the way the useful virtues do. So, Kail has not given us an explanation of the value of those moral qualities that are immediately agreeable to their possessor or to others.[3]

In my summary of Kail's argument for the functional character of the moral sentiments, I noted that to preserve the parallel with bodily pleasures and pain, Kail urges that Humean agents need not grasp that a useful trait to which they

are responding with approbation is in fact useful. Kail claims that it is consistent with Hume's position to see us as only gradually developing an awareness of traits as valuable in virtue of their utility. In contrast, I think Hume distinguishes between an uncultivated moral view that takes private utility as valuable and a more cultivated morality that privileges public utility and general reflections about the value of virtue wherever and in whomever we find it. Hume's considered view, particularly in the account of moral evaluation that he presents in EPM, emphasizes the need to deliberately reflect on the utility of traits and conduct. "In common life," Hume writes, "the circumstance of utility is always appealed to" as giving merit to the social virtues (EPM 5.1; SBN 212–13; see also 5.44; SBN 230–31). Taking up the common point of view requires that we consider the public good and the tendencies "of characters and manners" (EPM 9.6; SBN 272–73). Kail quotes from EPM 5.4 (SBN 214–15), but Hume is there making the point that the skeptic who thinks morality is wholly a matter of "precept and education" is incorrect, because prior to the kind of precepts that politicians invoke to extend our natural sentiments, an uninstructed mankind *is* aware of the value of utility. The passage from EPM 9.1 (SBN 268) that Kail quotes makes exactly that point: "the first rude, unpracticed enquirers concerning morals" *would* have seen that the useful and agreeable mental qualities comprise personal merit, although prior to modern society where we form "enlarged reflections," earlier human agents would have regulated their responses "by the ideas of private utility and injury" (EPM 9.8; SBN 273–74). The first Appendix of EPM makes the case that we must use reason to gauge the tendencies of those qualities we take to be useful or harmful. This is particularly so in the case of justice and the framing of laws and policies. Hume clearly thinks that evaluating which laws will be most useful is work for experts, and he appeals to "the debates of civilians; the reflections of politicians; the precedents of history and public records" as all vital here. Far from not having an awareness of the tendency of a law or policy to be useful or not, "a very accurate *reason* or *judgment* is here often requisite, to give the true determination, amidst such intricate doubts arising from obscure or opposite utilities" (EPM, App. 1.2; SBN 285–86). Such reasoning is requisite in moral evaluations that concern utility or harm, although "it is not alone sufficient to produce moral blame or approbation"; while "*reason* instructs us" in the tendencies of actions, "*humanity* makes a distinction in favor of those, which are useful and beneficial" (EPM, App. 1.3; SBN 286; see also EPM 1.9; SBN 172–73). Good moral evaluation requires certain intellectual virtues.

I have suggested that Kail's parallel between bodily pains and pleasures and the moral sentiments breaks down at crucial places. This perhaps leaves Kail with an error theory. I think that despite Hume's talk of the Comparison (which is limited in his major moral writings in contrast to the *Essays*), what Hume emphasizes more than any indicator function of the moral sentiments is their practical function.

Particularly in EPM, but also in the *Treatise*, what Hume sees as important to moral practice is that we learn to become proficient in moral discourse, and that we learn the general preferences of our community, so that we can form general moral standards that, as Hume says, "serve all our purposes in company, in the pulpit, on the theatre, and in the schools" (EPM 5.42; SBN 228–29 and T 3.3.3.2; SBN 602–603). While Kail gives a phenomenal reading to Hume's line about our gilding and staining in the first Appendix of EPM, we might alternatively read Hume as pointing to the significant practical effects of our having a shared moral discourse and moral responses. We gild with our admiration or esteem those characters we find reputable or trustworthy, and thereby communicate our sense of their value to others. Conversely, the stain of our disapproval or contempt for vicious characters provides a caution for others. As Annette Baier has emphasized, for Hume, "character is what recognition is about, but it requires reputation, recognition by others, for its ontological security."[4] Hume writes, "by our continual and earnest pursuit of a character, a name, a reputation in the world, we bring our own deportment and conduct frequently in review, and consider how they appear in the eyes of those, who approach and regard us" (EPM 9.10; SBN 276). Our tendency to sympathize with others' views of us is an incentive to cultivate virtue insofar as we prefer to be gilded by praise rather than stained with censure.

Finally, I want to return briefly to Kail's point about aesthetic experience, as Hume discusses it in the essay "Of the Standard of Taste." Kail wonders, along with Nick Zangwill, about the point of our taking pleasure in artistic beauty, especially since Hume has moved away in "The Standard of Taste" from the utility-based account given in the *Treatise* (and also in EPM) and so cannot tell the kind of evolutionary story Zangwill had hoped to reconstruct on Hume's behalf.[5] I agree with both Kail and Zangwill that Hume would probably have cheered Darwin's theory of evolution. But the later Hume is more historian than natural scientist, and he is more interested in our learning from the experience of our forbears than in tracing our blind adaptation. Part of the pleasure we take from artistic beauty lies in our admiration of the genius of artists who can master and then transform and transcend the conventions of great art while showing us something profound about the human (and animal and nature's) condition. The criteria Hume describes for good artistic judgment is needed to discern the real elegance, spirit, and so forth of the works of art. But great art also provides moral and emotional inspiration, illustration, and education, hence the great importance for the man of humanity to "not pervert the sentiments of his heart for a moment" by endorsing art that valorizes ways of life characterized by inhumanity.[6] The inspiration and education afforded by great art is not the utility of comfort and convenience, as it is with the fertile fields and well-built boats of the utility-based account. But as with our admiration for someone's agreeable *je ne sais quoi*, in our regard for art, and particularly the literary artworks that Hume tends to focus on, the ethical

and the aesthetic sentiments overlap, and we justly find value in cultivating the pleasures of the arts.[7]

NOTES

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1 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), abbreviated "T" in the text and cited by Book, part, section, and paragraph number, followed by the page number in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A.Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed., revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), abbreviated "SBN" in the text.

2 David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), abbreviated "EPM" in the text and cited by section and paragraph, followed by the page number in *Enquiries Concerning the Principles of Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A.Selby-Bigge, revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), abbreviated "SBN."

3 Hume suggests that some of the qualities immediately agreeable to their possessor, and to which we respond with admiration, may, in terms of their tendency, in fact be pernicious unless tempered by another quality; benevolence should direct courage, for example. Given that sympathy can be overpowered by the exalted and noble sentiments of the courageous or magnanimous, we may immediately admire their confidence, although reflection on the tendency of the trait may regulate our admiration. I discuss the relation between the sentiments of humanity and sublimity in "Hume on the Importance of Humanity," forthcoming in *Revue Internationale de Philosophie.*

4 Annette C. Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume's* Treatise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 188. See also my "Humean Ethics and the Politics of Sentiment," *Topoi* 21 (2002): 175–86.

5 Nick Zangwill, "Hume, Taste and Teleology," *Philosophical Papers* 23 (1994): 1–18.

6 David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, Eugene F. Miller, ed. (Liberty Fund, 1985, 1987), 247.

7 See my "Hume on Beauty and Virtue," in *A Companion to Hume*, ed. Elizabeth Radcliffe (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 273–98.