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Sympathy and the Mechanics of Character Change

ANIK WALDOW

Abstract: Sympathy's susceptibility to interpersonal relations is problematic for Hume because even though sympathy is crucial for making moral judgments, it biases our character judgments in favor of those closest to us. This essay will argue that despite his emphasis on these negative effects and his insistence on the need to correct sympathy in order to attain universal moral judgments, Hume also offers resources for thinking that uncorrected, relation-susceptible sympathy plays a powerful role in the formation of character and in the refinement of one's character ideals. This positive role emerges from Hume's claim that close relations to other persons maximize the pains we feel in response to their disapproval, suggesting that our interactions with these persons strongly motivate us to become critical of morally questionable traits and sufficiently determined to abandon them. Focusing on this function of sympathy enables us to understand the importance of situatedness and attachments for our moral development and reveals how spontaneous affections can usefully feed into our more reflective moral insights.

Hume holds that sympathy is *both* crucial for making moral judgments and a distorting influence that prevents us from assessing the virtue of characters impartially. He writes,

When any quality, or character, has a tendency to the good of mankind, we are pleas'd with it, and approve of it; because it presents the lively idea of pleasure; which idea affects us by sympathy, and is itself a kind of pleasure. But as this sympathy is very variable, it may be thought, that our sentiments of morals must admit of all the same variations. We sympathize more with persons contiguous to us, than with strangers: With our countrymen, than with foreigners. (T 3.3.1.14; SBN 580)¹

This essay will argue that Humean sympathy can play a powerful role in the formation of character and refinement of one's character ideals, and that this is so precisely because our sympathetic responses vary in accordance with our relations to other persons. The reason for this is that for Hume character reform is a tedious project that easily falls prey to self-flattery and a lack of determination. Given the difficulty of reforming, the desire to reform one's character benefits from sentiments that forcefully push it in the direction of virtue. Humean sympathy provides us with such sentiments, especially so, as I will argue below, when we feel pain in our sympathy with the disapproval of closely related persons. Since these pains are particularly painful—which follows from Hume's claim that close relations fortify one's sympathy—they provide us with powerful motives to become self-critical and with strong incentives to abandon traits that tend to cause pain. This interpretation of Humean sympathy highlights the fact that interpersonal attachments are invaluable for our moral development, thus stressing the importance of our situatedness, emotional susceptibility, and pre-reflective sentiments in supporting, and even enabling, our more reflective moral views.

To be sure, Hume does not himself fully explore the role of sympathy in the formation of character, yet his account provides a framework that makes it possible to understand the positive role of one's emotional situatedness and partiality (understood as the unique set of relations that dictate the degree of one's sympathetically-produced sentiments) in the cultivation of morality. The reason for this is that Hume—unlike Smith, for instance, who might be thought to offer a more detailed account of how sympathy can be put to use in the cultivation of the moral self—acknowledges the possibility of painful sympathy. Hume thus offers the crucial building blocks for a theory that regards the pains engendered by our sympathy with the disapproval of closely related persons as equally important to the cultivation of our moral capacities as the pleasures we receive in response to their approval.

I begin by providing a reconstruction of a Humean account of self-assessment based on Hume's theory of moral judgment before exploring, in part 2, the particular way in which other persons' judgments can enhance our ability to become self-critical and alter our accustomed ways. The overall aim of these two parts is to show that Hume's account of sympathy offers *both* reasons to worry about the

influence of our emotional attachments and related biases on our moral judgments *and* resources for developing a positive perspective on the role these attachments can play in the formation of character. Thus, part 1 will argue, on the one hand, that the correction of our spontaneous sympathies is desirable when we make moral judgments of others but, on the other hand, that the impartial attitude undergirding this correction leads to two problems. The first problem stems from the fact that changing from our naturally self-flattering attitude to a self-critical perspective requires some effort; the second, from the fact that theoretical insights into one's flaws are not sufficient to effect change. I will suggest in part 2 that a Humean account that recognizes the moral relevance of sympathy's sensitivity to relations can handle both problems. Part 3 will address the worry that our openness to other persons' judgments might turn us into victims of manipulation by arguing that sympathy is able to correct itself in socially diverse settings.

1. Problems in Judging and Reforming One's Own Character

Hume typically approaches the question of how we judge character from the perspective of the spectator, suggesting that actions are the signs of character: "If any *action* be either virtuous or vicious, 'tis only as a sign of some quality or character. It must depend upon durable principles of the mind, which extend over the whole conduct, and enter into the personal character" (T 3.3.1.4; SBN 575). Moreover, he holds that differences in characters are identified by differences in observable actions and similarities in character, by observed similarities in action. According to Hume, "There are . . . characters peculiar to different nations and particular persons, as well as common to mankind. The knowledge of these characters is founded on the observation of an uniformity in the actions, that flow from them" (T 2.3.1.10; SBN 403).² Further places where Hume conceives of character from a third-person perspective can be found in "Of National Characters"³ and in section 8 of the *Enquiry*, "Of Liberty and Necessity" (EHU 8.1–8.25; SBN 80–96).⁴

Despite Hume's general interest in character judgments, he has little to say about the way in which we assess ourselves. In what follows I will develop an account of self-assessment based on his general account of character judgment by using his reflections on sympathy as a way to connect third- and first-person judgments of character. The aim of this is to reveal that self-assessment calls for the same kind of correction as the assessment of others and that it is this circumstance that creates problems for the reform of one's own character.

Engaging with Hume's way of approaching characters from a third-person point of view, Donald Ainslie suggests that in the attribution of character we account for changes in someone's conduct by correcting our previously formulated judgment. He concludes from this that for Hume character change is impossible, because we tend to say "that we were wrong all along in our ascription of

stinginess,”⁵ for example, if the person in question starts to be generous, rather than to acknowledge that the person’s character has changed. Notice, however, that when Hume considers the prospect of reforming one’s character, he distinguishes between the actions of a given person and the feelings that constitute the motives of her actions. He writes that the person who is “pleas’d to perform grateful actions” without feeling “gratitude in his temper” (T 3.2.1.8; SBN 479) does not count as truly virtuous. He thereby not only opens up a gap between the first- and third-person perspective (between the way I act and appear to others and the way I experience myself when acting in a certain manner) but also suggests that character change does take place when persons change their attitudes to their actions. Further passages indicating the possibility of character change can be found at T 1.4.6.19 (SBN 261), where Hume claims that “character and dispositions” may vary without effecting a change in the identity of a person, and at T 2.2.3.4 (SBN 349), where “repentance and a change of life” are required for a change in the way we see others. (Hume also mentions repentance and a change of manners at T 2.3.2.7; SBN 412 and EHU 30.8; SBN 98–99.)

Due to the gap between first- and third-person perspectives, one may wonder whether Hume thinks that we typically infer our own character traits from our actions or proceed in a more direct way, for instance, by paying attention to our feelings and motives. To answer this question it is useful to remember that for Hume character is something “durable or constant”: it is a stable element, in contrast to one’s actions, which are “by their very nature temporary and perishing” (T 2.3.2.6; SBN 411) and which are often caused by “momentary” mental occurrences, that is, by passions that we find within ourselves only temporarily (T 2.3.2.7; SBN 412). Introspection acquaints us with many such momentary passions and motives, and memory usually allows us to determine what kinds of passions arise often enough to qualify as constituents of our own characters. An inference from our behaviors to our motives here becomes otiose, even though sometimes such an inference can help us to discover traits that we previously failed to notice.

The account of character judgment given immediately below relates to situations where we are introspectively aware of the durable motives of our actions. Later I will discuss situations where we fail to see what drives our actions. In those cases the disapproval of other persons becomes a useful resource for creating a self-critical perspective. Thus, the fact that we can, and often do, fail to generate an accurate picture of ourselves will be seen as showing that sympathy with those near and dear to us can serve the purposes of morality by pushing us to recognize our unnoticed flaws.

For Hume, the standard by which we judge character is related to our sentimental reactions: “Every quality of the mind is denominated *virtuous*, which gives pleasure by the mere survey, as every quality, which produces pain, is call’d *vicious*” (T 3.3.1.30; SBN 591). In this passage, too, Hume is concerned with judgments of

other people's characters. However, in other contexts he acknowledges that we survey and judge ourselves, albeit without specifying the process undergirding this assessment. For instance, in the *Treatise's* conclusion of Book 3, Hume suggests that positive self-evaluation is required for attaining "peace and inward satisfaction" (T 3.3.6.6; SBN 620), though he does not describe the relevant evaluative process. In the second *Enquiry*, Hume is a little more specific, but again, without providing details about the manner in which we become aware of our character traits. Our "constant habit of surveying ourselves," he writes, is related to our "love of fame; which rules, with . . . uncontrolled authority, in all generous minds, and is often the grand object of all their designs and undertakings"⁶ (EPM 9.10; SBN 276). When Hume says, "By our continual and earnest pursuit of a character, a name, a reputation in the world, we bring our own department 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), he also connects the practice of surveying ourselves with the vested interest that we each have in our reputation, suggesting that there is a link between our awareness of being looked at and judged by other persons and our readiness to evaluate ourselves.

Hume's remarks about our interest in the opinions of others are instructive, because they suggest that a Humean reconstruction of the processes involved in self-assessment must make sense of the fact that other persons' opinions of us usually enter into our judgments of our own character. To develop an account of the process by which those opinions influence our self-assessments, I start with Hume's general account of moral judgment as a form of sympathy-involving perspective-taking, since it is this account that spells out in detail how it is possible to adopt perspectives that are not unique to our personal situations but, instead, reflect the opinions of all people willing to engage in disinterested character judgments.

Hume thinks that we judge a character trait to be virtuous when we sympathetically enter into the pleasure a certain trait causes either in the possessor of this trait or in those affected by the trait. "Tis easy to observe," writes Hume, that the distinction between vice and virtue "has also a considerable dependence on the principle of *sympathy*. . . . We approve of a person, who is possess'd of qualities *immediately agreeable* to those, with whom he has any commerce. . . . We also approve of one, who is possess'd of qualities, that are *immediately agreeable* to himself" (T 3.3.1.29; SBN 590). As mentioned above, the problem with this way of assessing characters, however, is that we are naturally biased in how we feel about the qualities of other persons because, as Hume says, "we sympathize more with persons close to us, than with persons remote from us: With our acquaintances, than with strangers: With our countrymen, than with foreigners" (T 3.3.1.14; SBN 581). Correction of our spontaneous sympathetic responses is, therefore, mandatory if we want to judge the merits of persons impartially.

Hume illustrates this point in the example of the diligent servant “who may excite stronger sentiments of love and kindness than *Marcus Brutus*” (T 3.3.1.16; SBN 582) due to the benefits we receive in our daily interactions with her. Despite this, however, Hume explains that we would not judge the servant to be more laudable than the famous Roman, because “we know, were we to approach equally near to that renown’d patriot, he would command a much higher degree of affection and admiration” (T 3.3.1.16; SBN 582). While for Hume this correction works to enable an appropriate *degree* of praise independently of the strength of our feelings for the person in question, it does not go so far as to convert approval into disapproval.

When we correct our initial sentiments in this way, we take up the general point of view, a shared perspective which renders character judgments general. Hume describes the corrective function of the general point of view as follows:

[E]very particular man has a peculiar position with regard to others; and ’tis impossible we cou’d ever converse together on any reasonable terms, were each of us to consider characters and persons, only as they appear from his peculiar point of view. In order, therefore, to prevent those continual *contradictions*, and arrive at a more *stable* judgment of things, we fix on some *steady* and *general* points of view.” (T 3.3.1.15; SBN 581–82)

The way to achieve this correction is by what Jacqueline Taylor calls a multiplying of “our own passionate experience,”⁷ which requires that we engage our imagination in such a way as to sympathize with persons who might be quite unrelated to us. For instance, by imaginatively engaging with the pains that a friend of ours inflicts upon his colleagues, we come to see our friend’s character in a different light and, by multiplying our sympathies, are able to counter the effects of the natural tendency to love and praise friends more than strangers. We thus manage to assess the character of another person without being affected by our partiality.

Now, given this characterization of appropriate character judgments as satisfying the demand of being general and steady,⁸ I propose that we think of the “review” and “survey” of oneself that constitutes moral self-assessment as involving the general point of view.⁹ The plausibility of this proposal hinges on two claims: first, the claim that one’s self-survey is just like any other kind of character judgment in that one has to transcend one’s subjective perspective to arrive at a judgment in which others would concur; and second, that according to Hume, to arrive at generally accepted judgments we must take up the general point of view. These claims together imply that an appropriate moral self-assessment requires adopting the general point of view. More specifically, this means that to correctly judge my own character I need to engage in the kind of imaginative perspective-taking that connects me with the viewpoint of those who judge my actions on the basis of the feelings that these actions cause in others.

If this account of Humean self-assessment is correct, two problems emerge. Since self-assessment is tainted by self-love and vanity—as Hume suggests when he attributes to men an “almost universal propensity . . . to over-value themselves” (T 3.3.2.10; SBN 598)—the first problem can be characterized as follows: What would motivate beings who rejoice in the belief that they are better than they are to become self-critical and embrace potentially painful truths about themselves? To put it another way, the problem is how can we correct spontaneous sentiments in favor of ourselves in such a way that we limit positive self-assessment to properties able to “procure the esteem and approbation of mankind” (T 3.3.2.11; SBN 598) and thus form appropriate character judgments that satisfy the demand of being generally approvable?¹⁰

To stress this point—namely, that it is not evident that a disinterested perspective can or would be adopted—even further, it is useful to turn to Hume’s characterization of the habit of surveying oneself as a form of “reflection” (EPM 9.10; SBN 276). Hume’s terminology suggests that judging the self is possible only if we actively focus on feelings and thoughts that we would otherwise just experience. Thus, Hume’s account of self-survey requires the judge to change from her natural default attitude of merely *having* certain perceptions to an artificially established perspective that enables her to *examine* these perceptions. This gives rise to questions about the motivation for switching to this rather unnatural self-reflective stance, which I have identified as the Humean general point of view.

To answer these questions, one might refer to Hume’s claim that the motive for entering into the general point of view is “to prevent . . . continual *contradictions*, and arrive at a more *stable* judgment of things” (T 3.3.1.15; SBN 581–82). This passage provides a hint, but it does not tell us how contradictions counteract our self-flattering tendencies. I will argue below that sympathy can help explain this, since sympathy is able to turn confrontations with other persons’ opinions into highly painful experiences and in this way provides us with a form of contradiction that acts as a powerful motive for entering into self-critical reflections.

The second problem emerging from my Humean reconstruction of accurate self-assessment as requiring a reflective correction of one’s biased self-perception concerns change of character. In the *Treatise* Hume claims that it is “almost impossible for the mind to change . . . or cure itself of a passionate or splenetic temper, when they are natural to it” (T 3.3.4.3; SBN 608), while in the “The Sceptic” the worry surfaces that it might be hard to implement one’s desire to change one’s character. Hume writes that “even upon the wise and thoughtful, nature has a prodigious influence; nor is it always in a man’s power, by the utmost art and industry, to correct his temper, and attain that virtuous character to which he aspires. The empire of philosophy extends over a few, and with regard to these too, her authority is very weak and limited” (“The Sceptic,” 169).¹¹ Philosophical reflection is thus presented as enabling individuals to be “sensible of the value

of virtue” (ibid., 169). However, since philosophy’s influence is characterized as weak and limited, the skeptic suggests that character change cannot be expected to follow from mere philosophical insights into the value of virtue alone but, in addition to this, requires a “continual effort” accompanied by “a constant watch” over oneself (ibid., 170).

Since in this essay Hume represents the views of the skeptic, it is difficult to assess how much weight to give this passage when describing Hume’s own views. However, this passage is followed by a sentence that stresses the value of habit formation as a means of reinforcing character change. When he writes that “Habit is another powerful means of reforming the mind, and implanting in it good dispositions and inclinations” (“The Sceptic,” 170–1), Hume raises a point that he also addresses at T 3.2.1.8 (SBN 479) where he maintains that virtue can be acquired by practice, namely by performing actions that are characteristic of the virtuous person. Hume’s remarks in “The Sceptic” thus emerge as supporting his long-held position that conceives of the possibility of character change in relation to some practical measure conducive to the implementation of the desire to change. What is more, by describing the dynamics of character change in this way, Hume indirectly alerts us to the second problem. This is the problem that self-critical reflections—which by themselves are able to create the desire to change—might fall short of effectuating actual change if unsupported by some additional practical measure that enables us to train ourselves to become better persons.¹²

By constructing Humean character judgments as requiring the reflective perspective of the general point of view, we are led to see, first, that it cannot be taken for granted that a self-critical perspective is available to everyone all the time, because our natural default attitude is, as Hume recognizes, self-flattering. Secondly, Hume’s discussion of habit formation as a way to effect character change suggests that even when we have managed to adopt a self-critical perspective and have understood that it is time to alter our accustomed ways, intended change might not materialize unless we take some practical measures.

In the next section, I will argue that our situatedness and the relations between ourselves and particular members of our social environment can help us to deal with both problems. The reason for this is that emotional attachments generate experiences that function as strong sources of motivation both to become self-reflective and to effect change. In pointing to these potential benefits of our interpersonal attachments, I will argue that, while it might be correct to agree with Hume that sympathy can be a liability with regard to character judgments because it varies depending on one’s relations, there are, nonetheless, reasons to think that when it comes to the formation of our own character and the ways in which we assess ourselves, sympathy can be an invaluable asset, and this value is due to the fact that we sympathize more strongly with those close to us. This argument thus offers a new perspective on Hume’s claim that moral judgment requires a

correction of sympathy. Rather than seeing this correction as a complete rejection of the value of uncorrected sympathy, it shows that spontaneous and corrected sympathies can, and often do, mutually support one another in the shaping of an agent's capacity to act and judge virtuously.

2. Sympathy as a Solution to the Problems of Self-Assessment and Reform

This section examines how sympathy can deal with the two problems I outlined in the previous section, namely, that we need to be motivated to become self-critical and that theoretical insights into one's flaws might be insufficient to effect character change. The first problem will be addressed by exploiting the fact that for Hume, sympathy is produced by an associative process set off in one's social interactions. If it can be shown that such associative, spontaneously triggered sympathy is able to push agents to become self-critical, then the problem that we are naturally self-flattering and have to put some effort into becoming aware of the true merits of our character is solved, since it turns out that there is a mechanism that helps us to achieve this. To deal with the second problem, I will argue that strong pains are more conducive to character change than slight discomfort and, hence, that the susceptibility of sympathy to personal relations, which causes us to feel strong pains in response to the disapproval of those closest to us, can act as a valuable resource for character change. I will take up these two points in turn.

In *Treatise* 2.1.11.7 Hume explains that sympathy proceeds by producing lively ideas of another person's mental states (SBN 319–20). Hume also notes that relations function to elicit sympathetic sentiments, because it is through them that the liveliness pertaining to the idea of self can be transferred to ideas of another person's sentiments and beliefs, which, in virtue of their enhanced liveliness, turn into the relevant sentiments and beliefs themselves. Thus he says, "We have a lively idea of everything related to us. All human creatures are related to us by resemblance. Their persons, therefore, their interests, their passions, their pains and pleasures must strike upon us in a lively manner, and produce an emotion similar to the original one" (T 2.2.7.2; SBN 369. See also T 2.1.11.7; SBN 319).¹³

Since all human beings are related to one another through features we share as members of the same species, Hume's account of sympathy implies that we are able to sympathize with any human being regardless of whether there are further relations tying us to this person. What is more, due to his characterization of the nature of the associative process undergirding our sympathetic responses, it is even possible to attribute to Hume a much stronger claim: that it is not only possible for any normally functioning human being to respond sympathetically to others¹⁴ but also that under normal circumstances, that is when our associative propensity is unimpeded, we *cannot help* sympathizing with their feelings and thoughts.

The reason why this is so is that the perception of what Hume describes as “the effects of passion in the voice and gesture of any person” (T 3.3.1.7; SBN 576) automatically sets off the associative process through which I form lively ideas of another person’s mental states. As a consequence of this spontaneous unfolding of my sympathy, it is not possible for me not to enter into the opinions and sentiments of other persons whenever I am surrounded by them and perceive their actions. Hume captures this compelling character of sympathy when he says, “So close and intimate is the correspondence of human souls, that no sooner any person approaches me, than he diffuses on me all his opinions, and draws along my judgment in a greater or lesser degree” (T 3.3.2.2; SBN 592).

Already, then, we can see that a Humean account of character change that focuses on the sort of sympathy that we happen to have spontaneously, rather than on corrected sympathy that is the mark of the reflective person who has managed to self-initiate an imaginative perspective-taking, can deal with an important problem. If sympathy unfolds in *everyone* who is socially engaged, and sympathy both enables us to form ideas of the opinions that others have about us and makes us entertain those opinions, expressions of disapproval will push us to recognize that we may not be as virtuous as we might have thought. Importantly, a self-critical perspective is here initiated not by oneself but by others,¹⁵ so the fact that we are naturally self-flattering and need to be motivated to see ourselves in the right light no longer poses a problem, because we no longer need to self-initiate reflections on our characters but are led to recognize our own character flaws as a result of our interactions with others.

Hume does not draw these conclusions himself, but they do seem to follow quite straightforwardly from his concept of sympathy as the product of an associative process (that is, sympathy in its immediate, uncorrected, and partial variety). And he explicitly recognizes that sympathy is very powerful in its influence on the mind. While not being able “entirely to change my sentiments, and way of thinking,” sympathy is said to be “seldom . . . so weak as not to disturb the easy course of my thought, and give an authority to that opinion, which is recommended to me by his [another person’s] assent and approbation” (T 3.3.2.2; SBN 592). This suggests that even Hume could agree with the claim that sympathy is disturbing enough to *prompt* me to adopt a self-critical perspective that is not naturally mine.

Given that Hume regards “pain and pleasure, as the chief spring and moving principle of all [the mind’s] actions” (T 1.3.10.2; SBN 118), one’s sympathetic reactions to others, because they involve pain and pleasure, can also serve as motives for change independently of a reflective desire to change. After all, persistent disapproval articulated by different people on different occasions can become a great source of pain—as much as persistent and frequent sympathy with approval can lead to great pleasure. Thus, there is room within Hume’s framework for character

change that results from the pains (and pleasures) we receive in our interactions with others without any reflective prelude.

Unreflective character change, as it is construed here, happens in the absence of reflectively established motives. Any calm passions that are derived from a self-critical reflective survey are, therefore, also taken to be absent.¹⁶ Pains received in one's interactions with others, pains that, as a species of the violent passions, are best suited to cause action, in cases of unreflective character change, rule one's conduct (T 2.3.8.13; SBN 437 and T 2.3.4.1; SBN 419).

Although unreflective character change may open us up for undesirable forms of manipulation, it is hard to deny that such change often constitutes the beginning of a process that enhances one's moral capacities. Children who first respond to approval and disapproval by behaving as they are told, that is, before they reflect on their behavior and thereby understand the moral value of their conduct, provide an example of this kind of character formation. Another case that comes to mind is a person who has been encouraged to behave in a certain way (by the praise or blame of others) and *then* comes to embrace her actions as the morally praiseworthy output of a desirable character trait. In these situations, the right kind of habits bring along the right kind of mind-set in a process that could be described as a form of moral training.

I say more about unreflective ways of changing one's character in the next section when discussing how education infixes character ideals. I there suggest that one further benefit of sympathy that derives from its sensitivity to relations is that it is able to motivate a gradual change in the evaluation of one's infixed character ideals—a change that takes place relative to one's current social environment, thus creating a critical distance from the values communicated in one's formative years. This explanation stresses the idea that the sympathy that renders us amenable to manipulation also brings with it its own remedy, for by keeping us perpetually open towards people with different value systems, it ensures that the possibility of adopting a critical perspective on one's own socially instilled values is never completely foreclosed. Before entering into this discussion, however, I will return to the second problem raised in the previous section, namely, that reflection and the consequent desire to change often cannot, by themselves, effect character change, and its solution in terms of spontaneously triggered sympathy.

According to Hume, ideas of what others think of us, by themselves, leave but a slight impression. Thus he says, "The sentiments of others can never affect us, but by becoming, in some measure, our own; . . . And even when they are known, if they went no farther than the imagination, or conception; that faculty is so accustom'd to objects of every different kind, that a mere idea, tho' contrary to our sentiments and inclinations, would never alone be able to affect us" (T 3.3.2.3; SBN 593). However, such ideas almost always go further than the imagination and conception. They often do affect us by becoming "in some measure" our own. If

we remember that for Hume pain and pleasure are the chief sources of action, we can see how a Humean account of character change would deal with the fact that reflection and the attendant desire to change is a rather weak motive for character change. This account would exploit the fact that sympathy is sometimes able to engender strong emotional responses to expressions of approval and disapproval because, according to Hume, it is our emotional involvement that influences our actions most powerfully, and our emotional involvement with the opinions of others is able to bolster our interest in realizing reflectively acquired desires for change. For the sake of simplicity, in what follows I will only focus on the negative case and analyze the function of disapproval, since positive assessments would work in a similar way.

To develop an account that acknowledges the motivational force of pain, it is useful to take a closer look at the conversion process involved in spontaneously triggered sympathy. Hume describes this process as follows:

When we sympathize with the passions and sentiments of others, these movements appear at first in *our* mind as mere ideas, and are conceiv'd to belong to another person, as we conceive any other matter of fact. 'Tis also evident, that the ideas of the affections of others are converted into the very impressions they represent, and that the passions arise in conformity to the images we form of them. (T 2.1.11.8; SBN 319)

This conversion is effected by sympathy, which involves an enlivening of the idea due to its association with another lively idea—the idea of the self. As we have seen above, the lively idea of self is associated with ideas of all human beings, since all human beings are related to one another through species resemblance. It follows that liveliness will be passed on whenever I form an idea of another person's mental state, which entails that I am able to sympathize with any human being.

Despite this general ability to sympathize, it is clear, however, that Hume holds that the degree of our emotional involvement varies, for he claims that “beside the general resemblance of our natures . . . any peculiar similarity in our manners, or character, or country, or language” enhances our sympathetic responses (T 2.1.11.5; SBN 318). And he claims that “the stronger the relation is betwixt ourselves and any object, the more easily does the imagination make the transition, and convey to the related idea the vivacity of conception, with which we always form an idea of our own person” (T 2.1.11.5; SBN 318). Hume thus explicitly states that specific relations, *in addition* to mere species resemblance, enhance the liveliness and strength of feelings that we come to experience when sympathizing with other persons. So, while it might well be the case that mere species resemblance is sufficient to produce an impression of another person's sadness in me (as opposed to the mere idea of sadness that can have but a slight effect on me), my feeling of

sadness becomes especially strong when resemblances in addition to mere species resemblance connect me and the person with whom I sympathize, for instance, resemblances constituted by a shared language, culture, family history, or values.

Hume makes the same point—namely, that the different aspects through which I relate to another person bring me closer to her, and through this, strengthen my sympathetic feelings for her—when he refers us to the three associative relations to explain what accounts for perfect sympathy. He says, “For beside the relation of cause and effect, by which we are convinc’d of the reality of the passion, with which we sympathize; besides this, I say, we must be assisted by the relations of resemblance and contiguity, in order to feel the sympathy in its *full perfection*” (T 2.1.11.8; SBN 320, emphasis mine).¹⁷ In addition to the number of relations, Hume also mentions that it matters how much we resemble one another and how near our location in time and space is to those with whom we sympathize (T 2.2.4.2; SBN 351–52). Formulated as a general rule, these passages suggest that the more relations connect two persons with one another and the more intense these relations are, the more intense their mutual sympathy will be.¹⁸

Persons who are closely related are particularly important for character change. These people can be conceived as confronting us with particularly strong pains when they express disapproval of us, which in turn, will serve to put us under great pressure. Given that Hume believes that characters can be trained to become virtuous, he must also hold that the chances that agents in this situation will initiate conduct that will make them more virtuous increase. The chances become even better if the closely related persons express their disapproval not just once, but if they keep confronting us with it. The pains triggered by their repeated negative reactions to us then act as powerful reminders that change has not yet taken place, and we need to do something about this. The point here is not so much whether sympathy with this disapproval is what prompts us to analyze the reasons behind it before we become active in training ourselves to adopt more acceptable forms of conduct. Rather, what matters is that repeated confrontations with expressions of disapproval on the part of closely related persons are particularly painful and, as such, well suited to produce and sustain the desire to change as well as the change itself.

Hume’s treatment of esteemed persons provides additional support for this interpretation. He states that “we receive a much greater satisfaction from the approbation of those, whom we ourselves esteem and approve of, than of those, whom we hate and despise” (T 2.1.11.11; SBN 321). When we esteem another person for her skills and character traits, this feeling often goes hand in hand with the conception of this person as exemplifying virtues that we would appreciate in ourselves if we had them. By relating our ideal self to the esteemed person in this way, we create a special kind of resemblance that exceeds mere species resemblance, while the feelings of love and admiration for the esteemed person create

additional emotional ties. Both relations can thus be cited in order to explain why the disapproval of esteemed persons counts more than the disapproval of someone to whom we are indifferent.

There are factors other than the relations mentioned above that influence the feelings we have in response to other persons' criticisms. For instance, we can strongly sympathize with mild disapproval and yet not be moved to change. The number of critics also seems to play a role in determining our readiness to change. The disapproval of three of my friends may affect me more than the criticism of merely one, in part because I am more often hurt and more often reminded of the fact that I need to change. The same, in principle, holds for strangers who, despite their being strangers, relate to us in various ways—for instance, by being in the same café, or by being members of the same guild, club, or party. Due to these relations, the strangers' disapproval will affect us emotionally, and if this disapproval is articulated frequently enough, our initial discomfort may become so strong that it affects us in the same way as the disapproval of one close friend. (Of course, this would be all the more so if the strangers disapproved strongly.) This susceptibility to the disapproval of strangers might be useful in situations in which the repeated criticism of one particular close person has led to numbness and indifference. Be that as it may, despite all these variations, it still holds that, all things being equal, the number and intensity of the relation(s) between me and another person determines how influential her criticism will be. The number of my critics and the strength of their expressed disapproval are further variables that serve to either amplify or diminish my emotional reaction towards them.

I have so far discussed two benefits that emerge from sympathy by virtue of its sensitivity to relations. One consists in the fact that this sympathy encourages change in cases in which individuals fail to initiate the sort of self-critical reflections through which the desire for change could emerge. Sympathy's susceptibility to relations promotes character change by rendering individuals particularly vulnerable to the disapproval of those closest to them. In so doing, it furnishes them with painful experiences that can then cause the desire to change in order to avoid future pain. Critical self-reflection can, but need not, precede this desire, so that as a result of another person's disapproval, an individual may intend character change with no understanding of the reasons for that disapproval.

The second benefit of sympathy's susceptibility to relations helps solve the problem that characters do not change easily, and in order to do so, they often require a certain form of practical character training that supports the desire to change. Because the repeated disapproval of those near and dear to us is so painful, we are slowly conditioned to change by receiving strong incentives to do something about those traits that keep causing pain. In this way, our wish to change (which may derive from insights afforded by a reflective perspective similar to that of the general point of view, from the desire to avoid the pain of the disapproval of those

closest to us, or a combination of both) might finally become powerful enough to cause actual change.

Thus, although Hume stresses that because sympathy is susceptible to relations, it renders us partial in our judgment of and commitments to other persons, here it turns out to be rather valuable precisely because it pushes persons to change their accustomed ways. By making us feel most strongly about the disapproval of those closely related to us, sympathy maximizes the pressure we feel to implement change. The surprising result of this analysis is that sympathy's susceptibility to relations, which Hume takes to undermine our ability to form appropriate moral *judgments*, can, under the right circumstances, be conducive to virtuous *conduct* in that it helps us to reform our character. Thus, the positive effects of sympathy's susceptibility to relations are not limited to the production of actions resulting from compassion and pity: sympathy also assists us in replacing objectionable action tendencies with virtuous ones.

Having said that, disagreement between the ways we see ourselves and the ways others judge us are rather frequent and can prevent sympathy from becoming a dominant influence in the improvement of character. For example, sometimes we are faced with disapproval and yet believe that the other person's judgment is wrong. In this situation we might give in and adjust our behavior to the other person's expectations—for better or worse, but we can also choose to resist change while trying to convince the other of the falsity of her judgment, or we could simply avoid our critic's company. The option a person chooses will depend on a multitude of factors, including her self-confidence, the number of critics, the strength of her desire to be part of the group, and the strength of her convictions.

A detailed discussion of all of these cases is unnecessary for the purposes of this essay. Suffice it to say that an account of character change developed in line with Hume's discussion of sympathy can accommodate the fact that the influence of others is strong (Hume says that suggestibility is not limited to young age but also affects "men of the greatest judgment and understanding" (T 2.1.11.2; SBN 316); we might add that this influence diminishes and increases at different times in our lives (for instance when we feel uncertain or enter into a new social environment)), and that it can be so subtle that change occurs without our noticing it. By acknowledging these factors as variables in the formation of character, it is possible not only to develop an account of character change that captures the reality of our lives as socially embedded beings but also to avoid the sort of overemphasis on the importance of impartiality and universal judgment that tends to occur if we focus exclusively on Hume's requirement that we correct sympathy by taking the general point of view. On the account developed here, our ability to judge from this impartial perspective is *one* component of complex processes rooted in our situatedness and partial emotional attachments, which, by shaping our spontaneous uncorrected sympathizing, play an equally significant role in our moral lives.

Despite these benefits, it is clear, however, that the value of other people's influence over us crucially depends on the quality of their moral evaluations and good intentions. After all, others might encourage us to change and yet not enhance the improvement of character. It therefore remains to be examined whether and how our susceptibility to the judgments of others can, in addition to rendering us amenable to criticism, also create a perspective that enables us to distance ourselves from values we came to embrace just because others taught us to do so.

3. Social Integration and Moral Development

This last part of the essay examines the connection between one's ability to form attachments in *new* social environments and one's readiness critically to evaluate some of one's socially conditioned character ideals. The aim of this discussion is to show that because sympathy is sensitive to relations, it can make agents, through their responsiveness to the evaluative practices of new social environments, capable of critically scrutinizing previously embraced values that they were trained to accept through their previous friends, relatives, and companions' expressions of approval and disapproval. It thus appears that in certain naturally occurring social scenarios, such as those associated with a change in one's habitual social environment, our sympathetically based judgments are corrected not as a result of an imaginative exercise that traces the concerns of unrelated people, as they are when we adopt the general point of view, but as a consequence of concrete interactions. The sort of correction involved here is socially triggered, rather than self-initiated, and is able to push agents to revise their character ideals critically.

Before investigating yet another value of sympathy's susceptibility to relations, which is sympathy's ability, under new societal conditions, to create a critical distance from established character ideals, it is crucial to clarify to what extent Hume recognizes that training and education can lead to some socio-cultural flexibility in the assessment of what counts as a desirable character trait. For if Hume's idea was that societies generally converge on how they assess the relation between conduct and virtue, the prospects for developing a Humean approach to character change by drawing on the socio-cultural variability in character judgments would be dim.

It is clear that for Hume attitudes towards social practices based on artifice exhibit some variability. One of the places where Hume explores this thought is in his discussion *Of the origin of justice and property* (T 3.2.2; SBN 484–501). Hume writes, "Tho' this progress of the sentiments be *natural*, and even necessary, 'tis certain, that it is here forwarded by the artifice of politicians, who, in order to govern men more easily, and preserve peace in human society, have endeavour'd to produce an esteem for justice, and an abhorrence of injustice" (T 3.2.2.25; SBN 500). And he adds, "Any artifice of politicians may assist nature in the producing of those sentiments, which she suggests to us, and may even on some occasions,

produce alone an approbation and esteem for any particular action; but 'tis impossible it should be the sole cause of the distinction we make betwixt vice and virtue" (T 3.2.2.25; SBN 500). Hume here confirms that moral approbation at its heart depends on natural sentiments, yet he emphasizes that artifice is used to *promote* certain virtues. Public esteem and private education are furthermore considered as jointly striving to teach the "rules, by which society is maintained" (T 3.2.2.26; SBN 500). These passages suggest that the training we receive through expressions of public and private approval and disapproval is fitted to the task of preserving the artificially established rules of societies, that is, rules that might vary and engender diverse moral practices.¹⁹ Moreover, since it is artifice that determines the rules of society and, in relation to these rules, also the particular kinds of action that are promoted as virtuous during our moral education,²⁰ an account emerges that can comfortably accommodate the fact that different kinds of action come to be associated with virtue in different societies and cultures.²¹

A Humean account of character change that explores the moral potential of sympathy's susceptibility to others can put this insight into the role of moral education to positive use. Once we acknowledge that moral evaluations are influenced by social practice, it becomes possible to argue that a change in the practice of evaluating virtue in our environment can affect us such that our perception of the desirability of certain traits would also change. As I will explain below, this change in the perception of what a virtue is is made possible by sympathy, that is, the very kind of affective response that has helped to instill respect for a given set of values in the first place. To see this we only need to remember that one essential feature of this sympathy is, as has been argued above, that it arises spontaneously whenever we perceive other persons' expressions of opinions or sentiments so that, socially embedded as we are, there will be no way around sympathizing with the approval and disapproval of others and recognizing the value they assign to actions of a specific kind by sharing their sentiments. In a new environment with socially accepted values diverging from those socially accepted in one's original environment, sympathy leads to confrontations with new evaluative practices—confrontations through which a critical perspective on one's established value system can emerge. To unravel the details of this process, I will focus on Hume's claim that one way to escape the discomfort that the disapproval of closely related persons causes consists in "placing ourselves in a contiguity to strangers, and at a distance from relations" (T 2.1.11.14; SBN 322).

Hume certainly thinks that the disapproval of strangers can, because of the absence of close relations to them, never be as painful an experience as the disapproval of family members, dear friends, and esteemed peers. However, in "Of National Characters" he also recognizes that social exchange and the sharing of the same language typical of people "united into one political body" (202) renders them similar in their manners.²² He thus suggests that the need to interact with one

another crucially impacts on one's readiness to adopt commonly shared patterns of conduct. In a situation in which I choose to surround myself with strangers in order to protect myself from the pain elicited by the disapproval of closely related persons, it can therefore be expected that due to frequent interactions with the members of my new social environment, I will gradually develop behavioral patterns and attitudes similar to theirs.²³

This integration of strangers into new social contexts is brought about by sheer practical demands, the habit of being surrounded by the same people day after day, and our "very imitative nature" (*Of National Character*, 202), while the importance of sympathy's being sensitive to relations becomes relevant in its influence on us *after* new resemblance relations have been formed. The reason for this is that with the establishment of relations that supplement mere species resemblance and spatiotemporal proximity, a person's sympathetic responses will become stronger and heighten the painfulness of her sympathy with disapproval. Sympathy thus puts agents in a position similar to the one they decided to flee: faced with the disapproval of those they interact with on a daily basis, they will feel increased pressure to change.

While this portrayal of sympathy as a force that pushes agents to conform to the expectations of whoever constitutes the dominant influence in their lives seems alarming, it actually contains a genuinely positive message. This becomes clear if we consider that with our increased interest in the opinions of those we are now attached to and the uncountable small changes that enable us to adjust our conduct to the current social practices, differences arise that distinguish us from those people who, by virtue of their having been close to us, had a substantial share in the shaping of our previous evaluative practices.²⁴ With these differences in place, a critical perspective on values characteristic of our upbringing becomes possible.

The interesting point about sympathy's sensitivity to relations and the way in which it affects our evaluative practices is not so much that it enables us to replace the influence of one group of persons with that of another. Rather, what really matters is that sympathy acquaints us with socially variable sets of values, and through our awareness of the many different ways in which action can be linked to virtue, contributes to the refinement of our character ideals. The refinement in question requires us to confront previously embraced values with conflicting new ones and to assess newly encountered social practices against the background of old ones. So, strictly speaking, sympathy enables us to correct our moral judgments not so much by replacing one pattern of affective responses with another but by freeing us from the unchecked influence of certain groups of people. It does so by opening us up to diverging moral practices through the formation of new attachment relations, thus creating not just imagined, but real contradictions, contradictions that Hume thinks we are keen to avoid (T 3.3.1.15; SBN 581–82).

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that sympathy's role in the refinement of one's character ideals rests on its ability to lead us to a point at which it becomes natural for us to adopt a critical perspective on our earlier judgments. In this function, it can motivate the kind of imaginative perspective-taking characteristic of the general point of view that, as I have argued in part 1, requires an extra effort that not all are permanently able or willing to make. While I discussed the motivational force of sympathy with respect to an individual's interactions within *one* social environment in part 2, reflections of the dynamics of spontaneously unfolding sympathy in socially diverse settings have now revealed how our emotional attachments, by activating sympathy in all its uncorrected partiality, can become instrumental in the development of a moral stance that emerges in one's engagement with diverse value systems. The refinement of our character judgments finally turns out to be an ongoing process that benefits from our readiness to form new emotional attachments in new social environments.²⁵

Once we understand the important role of sympathy's relation sensitivity in the shaping of one's moral capacities, it becomes clear that uncorrected immediate sympathy deserves more attention than it has hitherto received. By acknowledging the moral significance of our naturally partial emotional responses, this theory can be used to show that character formation does not take place in an imaginative vacuum cleared of strong emotional responses but is a social project that requires agents to embrace their emotional partiality. This is, as I have tried to show, because it is our partiality—and more specifically our attachments to other persons and the pains and pleasures that our sympathy with these persons elicits—that provides us with powerful motives for becoming self-critical and helps us to sustain our desire for change until this change has materialized.

NOTES

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1 References to the *Treatise* are to David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), hereafter cited as "T" followed by Book, part, section, and paragraph numbers, and to *A Treatise*

of *Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P. H. Nidditch, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), hereafter cited as “SBN” followed by page number.

2 Donald Ainslie, in “The Problem of the National Self in Hume’s Theory of Justice,” *Hume Studies* 21 (1995): 289–314, describes how it is possible to find out about someone’s personal character as opposed to one’s national character.

3 “Of National Characters” in *Essays. Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller, with an appendix of variant readings from the 1889 edition by T. H. Green and T. H. Grose, revised edition (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1987), 157–215. References to other essays taken from this book will be cited by title and page number.

4 References to the first *Enquiry* are to David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding: A Critical Edition*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), cited as “EHU” followed by section and paragraph number, and to *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P. H. Nidditch, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), hereafter cited as “SBN” followed by page number. See Jane McIntyre, “Character: A Humean Account,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 7 (1990): 193–206, 196, for the claim that Humean characters are real features of persons that are irreducible to action.

5 Donald Ainslie, “Character Traits and the Humean Approach to Ethics,” in *Moral Psychology*, ed. Sergio Tenenbaum (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 106.

6 References to the second *Enquiry* are to David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), hereafter cited in text as “EPM” followed by section and paragraph and *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P. H. Nidditch, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), hereafter cited in text as “SBN” followed by page numbers.

7 Jacqueline Taylor, “Virtue and the Evaluation of Character” in *The Blackwell Guide to Hume’s Treatise*, ed. Saul Traiger (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 282.

8 When I speak here of appropriate character judgments, I refer to judgments that are able to elicit general approval and, in this sense, count as objective. For further discussion on the objective status of judgments derived from the general point of view see David Norton, *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 137–44; Rachel Cohon, “Hume’s Difficulty with the Virtue of Honesty,” *Hume Studies* 23 (1997): 91–112; Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, “On Why Hume’s ‘General Point of View’ Isn’t Ideal—and Shouldn’t Be,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 11 (1994): 202–28; and William Davie, “Hume’s General Point of View,” *Hume Studies* 24 (1998): 275–94.

9 See Stephen Darwall, “Hume and the Invention of Utilitarianism,” in *Hume and Hume’s Connections*, ed. M. A. Stewart and J. Wright (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1994), 58–82, for a similar claim. He argues that, for Hume, “judgments of vice and virtue are made by sympathizing with the effects of traits on those most immediately affected by them” (71), rather than by producing “approbation in a spectator when contemplated in themselves” (70).

10 Capaldi remarks that “there seems to be no reason, either moral or non-moral, for choosing this perspective in the first place.” Nicolas Capaldi, *Hume’s Place in Moral Philosophy* (New York: P. Lang, 1998), 229.

- 11 David Hume, "The Sceptic," 159–80.
- 12 See Elizabeth Radcliffe, "Hume on Motivating Sentiments, the General Point of View and the Inculcation of Morality," *Hume Studies* 20 (1994): 37–58.
- 13 In order for an idea to qualify as a belief further factors apart from its liveliness matter, such as the process through which perceptions have been acquired; see my "Triggers of Thought: Impressions within Hume's Theory of Mind," *Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy* 13 (2010): 105–21 for discussion of this point.
- 14 An example of someone who does not qualify as functioning normally is the pervert whom Hume describes as being "of so callous and insensible a disposition, as to have no relish for virtue and humanity, no sympathy with his fellow-creatures, no desire of esteem and applause" ("The Sceptic," 169).
- 15 Jane McIntyre describes the social control function of sympathy in "Hume's 'New And Extraordinary' Account of the Passions," in *The Blackwell Guide to Hume's Treatise*, ed. Saul Traiger (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 213. And James Harris points out that Humean "passions do not exactly regulate themselves, . . . the regulation happens in the context of a social system in which my passions are regulated by yours, and yours by mine." James Harris, "A Compleat Chain of Reasoning: Hume's Project in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Books One and Two," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 109 (2009): 129–48, 137.
- 16 Hume thinks that the calm passions can control the violent passions if they are "corroborated by reflection, and seconded by resolution" (T 2.3.8.13; SBN 437–38).
- 17 Causal relations matter in a twofold way: first, they facilitate the belief that the other person is experiencing the passion in question (here the relevant causal relation is that between the occurrence of a passion and the action usually observed to go along with it); secondly, they create closeness when observer and observed person are related through family ties, which Hume also calls a form of causal relation.
- 18 According to Hume, even the approbation of a wise man becomes more satisfactory "after a long and intimate acquaintance" (T 2.1.11.11; SBN 321). Ainslie calls this susceptibility to relations its "differential nature" in "Sympathy and the Unity of Hume's Idea of the Self," in *Persons and Passions*, ed. Joyce Jenkins, Jennifer Whiting, and Christopher Williams (Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2005), 148.
- 19 Radcliffe recognizes the importance of moral education when training children to adopt moral behavior. Such education would make "effective in action the natural sentiments we already possess. It is one thing to have a motive in favor of morality and another thing to act on it" (Radcliffe, "Hume on Motivating Sentiments," 52). Radcliffe is here, in principle, only a short step away from also recognizing that education matters to an agent's competence to identify certain patterns of conduct as expressions of virtue. This is because moral training does not merely encourage children to act in certain ways but simultaneously provides them with a sense of what kinds of actions count as praiseworthy and morally acceptable.
- 20 Taylor deals with the social construction of the meaning of our passions when offering a Humean account of a "pre-just motivational psychology" in Jacqueline Taylor, "Justice and the Foundations of Social Morality in Hume's Treatise," *Hume*

Studies 24 (1998): 5–30, 10. Considering how children become attuned to local practices and custom, she claims that “our passions may . . . be properly understood as forms of communication that enable our participation in a world of value that is historically and socially instantiated” (“Justice,” 11).

21 A *Dialogue* (in David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P. H. Nidditch, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 324–43, discusses the diversity among moral views and brings in differences in utilities as well as customs as variables productive of differences in moral sentiments (SBN 337). Michael Gill, in *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), reflects on this social variability in the perception of the “content of that which we judge to be virtuous” (255) by looking at Hume’s theory of pride. This theory, he argues, suggests that moral judgment is “inherently comparative” (252) and, because of this, contingent upon the specific historical and social situation of agents.

22 Ainslie adds in this context that for Hume “nationality is not something that can easily be changed in the same way that we cannot easily change our family” (“The Problem of National Self,” 302). More concretely, he argues that an individual’s narrative will keep distinguishing her self-conception from that of the members of her new social environment. However, it is clear that a change in one’s social situation often leads to a change in one’s conduct. Given that one’s overall conduct is the guide to one’s character, one is thus justified in speaking of a *partial* change in character.

23 Hume writes, “where any set of men, scattered over distant nations, maintain a close society or communication together, they acquire a similitude of manners, and have but little in common with the nations amongst which they live” (“Of National Characters,” 205). This would be the reason why “the JEWS in EUROPE, and the ARMENIANS in the east, have a peculiar character” (“Of National Characters,” 205). In line with the reading developed in this essay, this phenomenon can be explained. In the cited cases, communities choose to stay among themselves without forming new interpersonal attachments in their wider social environment. They thus remain immune to the influences that would take hold of them if they were to mix with people with different evaluative practices.

24 Hume remarks that in certain circumstances the opposite takes place, namely that a “very great distance increases our esteem and admiration” (T 2.3.8.1; SBN 432). This account is developed in order to account for the odd case that does not conform with the general claim that relations of proximity matter to the strength of our sympathy, so it does not challenge the account given here.

25 Lorraine Besser-Jones makes a related point when maintaining that, according to Hume, the process of moral education is an “on-going and gradual one that begins at a young age, in the context of the family, and is then supplemented by politicians.” Lorraine Besser-Jones, “The Role of Justice in Hume’s Theory of Psychological Development,” *Hume Studies* 32 (2006): 253–76, 264. Besser-Jones is here concerned with moral development in relation to an individual’s commitment to the rules of justice; she does not discuss how encounters with different social practices that instantiate the rule of justice differently affect moral education.