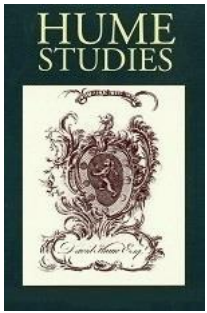

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Hume's Use of "Moral Distinctions" in *Treatise* 3.1.1

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Abstract: There is widespread scholarly disagreement concerning Hume's use and understanding of the term "moral distinctions." While commentators offer a range of interpretations of this term, there has been little attempt to understand the diverse range of meanings attributed to it, or to adjudicate between them. The present paper attempts to contribute to the understanding of Hume's position on the nature and origin of moral distinctions by filling this lacuna. I argue that Hume uses "moral distinctions" in two senses. First, in the context of his refutation of the moral rationalist position on moral distinctions, Hume uses "moral distinctions" to refer to the demonstrable, eternal, and necessary relations that obtain between, and apparently exist separately from, moral qualities. And second, in the context of his account of the role that sentiment plays in moral perception, Hume uses "moral distinctions" to refer to the differences that we uniformly experience when evaluating an object, between qualities that are both distinctively moral and the strict opposites of one another. For example, the difference between moral good and evil, or the distinction between particular virtues and vices, such as the difference between justice and injustice, or between gratitude and ingratitude, and the like. Hume explains the uniformity in the way we experience and talk about moral distinctions, by locating their origin in the same sentiment or impression that, in his understanding, explains how we perceive and, consequently, have ideas of moral qualities themselves. This enables Hume not just to replace the rationalist's moral epistemology, but

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also to reject Hobbesian skepticism about "the reality of moral distinctions" (EPM 1.2; SBN 169–70), despite arguing that "moral distinctions" does not represent anything external to the mind.

Introduction

In the opening passages of Book 3 of the *Treatise*, Hume informs us that he wishes to join the debate regarding the origin of moral perception. That is, he intends to examine "*[w]hether 'tis by means of our ideas or impressions we distinguish betwixt vice and virtue, and pronounce an action blameable or praise-worthy*" (T 3.1.1.3; SBN 456).[1] Hume thus raises, I argue, two closely related but still distinct epistemological questions. The first is a question regarding the origin of *moral distinctions*: what faculty, or, as Rachel Cohon notes, activity of the mind,[2] is responsible for distinguishing the opposite moral qualities from one another, or in other words, perceiving the differences between them? For example, the difference between gratitude and ingratitude. The second question concerns the origin of *moral qualities*: what faculty, or activity of the mind, is responsible for perceiving moral qualities per se—particular virtues or vices (here, gratitude or ingratitude), moral goodness or evil, or right or wrong—which we attribute to characters and actions to mark them as morally praiseworthy or blameworthy?

Hume's strategy for responding to these questions, in part 1 of Book 3 of the *Treatise*, is to develop an argument that has two aspects. First, the negative and, at times, skeptical aspect, set forth in *Treatise* 3.1.1, aimed at establishing what moral perception is not about. In the pursuit of this aim, Hume offers a critique of the rationalist moral epistemological claim that it is possible, "from reason alone, to distinguish betwixt moral good and evil" (T 3.1.1.4; SBN 456–57). In this way he aims, as the title of *Treatise* 3.1.1 suggests, to show that "Moral distinctions [are] not deriv'd from reason" alone—a project that also includes, among other things, a critique of the rationalist moral ontology; that is, their position on what moral qualities and moral distinctions are, and whether they exist as mind independent entities or not. Hume thereby clears the ground for establishing the second, positive aspect of his argument—an account of the role that sentiment, or moral sense, plays in the activity by which we perceive moral qualities and recognize the distinctions between them, which he articulates in *Treatise* 3.1.2.

Notwithstanding the complexity of the ongoing debate concerning how to interpret Hume's position, scholars generally recognize that the analysis of Hume's intentions and arguments is especially problematic owing to, among other things, the ambiguities in his language. Hume uses a plethora of expressions to refer to different elements in the complex process of moral evaluation, or to the conditions

that he deems necessary for moral evaluation to occur. He also often uses terms interchangeably and, to a degree, loosely, at times assigning the same meaning to different expressions, or using terms equivocally.

The prevailing view in the secondary literature—a view this paper rejects—is that this holds true for the term "moral distinctions," which, as Don Garrett notes, leads to problems in establishing a clear picture of Hume's intentions and argument. According to Garrett: "[Hume] seems to have given no clear theory of the nature or meaning of moral distinctions at all, leaving it obscure what he means by saying that reason does not discover such distinctions."[3] As a result, there is a widespread disagreement among scholars over Hume's use of the term and the meaning he assigned to it. Moreover, there seems, surprisingly, to have been little attempt so far to bring together the diverse range of meanings attributed to "moral distinctions," or to adjudicate between them. The present paper attempts to fill this lacuna.

In section 1, I offer a survey of literature on Hume's use of "moral distinctions," and aim to locate Hume's language in the context of the common linguistic practices at the time of his writing. I then proceed by attempting to disambiguate Hume's use of "moral distinctions" in *Treatise* 3.1.1 from that in *Treatise* 3.1.2. In section 2, I argue that in *Treatise* 3.1.1, Hume, with good reason, did not have to articulate a theory of the nature or meaning of moral distinctions. Given that the purpose of *Treatise* 3.1.1 is to refute the moral rationalist position on moral distinctions, not to introduce Hume's own position on moral distinctions, it follows that Hume relies on a specific view of the nature or meaning of moral distinctions. It is the view that his moral rationalist opponents hold, or more specifically, Samuel Clarke and, perhaps more surprisingly, William Wollaston. On this view, "moral distinctions" refers to demonstrable, eternal, and necessary relations, those that obtain between, and exist separately from, opposite moral qualities.

In section 3, I offer an analysis of Hume's position on moral distinctions. I argue that Hume's use of "moral distinctions" partly changes as his argument progresses in *Treatise* 3.1.2. Hume is no longer interested in his opponent's position on moral epistemology and moral ontology, but he still uses "moral distinctions" to talk of moral differences. It is the differences that we uniformly experience, when evaluating an object, between qualities that are both distinctively moral and the strict opposites of one another—the difference between particular virtues and vices, justice and injustice, for example, or between moral good and moral evil.

I conclude this paper by arguing, in section 4, that Hume's position on moral distinctions is grounded in the supposition that the emergence of the distinctively moral sentiment is explanatorily basic. Hume seems to explain the uniformity in the way we experience and talk about moral distinctions, by locating their origin in the same sentiment or impression that, according to Hume, explains how we perceive and, consequently, have ideas of moral qualities themselves. This enables

Hume not just to replace the rationalist's moral epistemology, but also to reject Hobbesian skepticism about "the reality of moral distinctions" (EPM 1.2; SBN 169–70),[4] despite arguing that "moral distinctions" does not represent anything external to the mind.

1. Hume's Use of "Moral Distinctions"—Irremediably Confused?

I cannot give justice to the vast literature on Hume that contains an exposition of Hume's theory of moral distinctions. Notwithstanding the complexity of this debate, a brief survey of the secondary literature, which I offer here, reveals some commonly recurring, conflicting interpretations of Hume's use of "moral distinctions." I wish to adjudicate between these, by locating Hume's language in the context of the common linguistic practices at the time of his writing. I argue that Hume uses "moral distinctions" to discuss moral differences—the differences that we experience between strictly opposite moral qualities, such as the differences between particular virtues and vices, or moral good and evil, or right and wrong.

Scholars who take part in this debate generally endorse one of the two main approaches to discussing Hume's use of "moral distinctions." On the one hand, it is not uncommon for commentators to discuss Hume's text without offering an explicit analysis (or definition) of the meaning he assigned to the term "moral distinctions." For example, in what is an illuminating work on moral theories of some of the most prominent British moralists of the period, Michael B. Gill takes this approach to discuss arguments on moral distinctions that can be found in the works of rationalists and sentimentalists alike, including Hume.[5] We find the same approach in the literature dedicated to analysis of Hume's work specifically. In the most recent collection of essays on Hume's argument in the second *Enquiry*,[6] for example, commentators offer no explicit interpretation of Hume's use of "moral distinctions," or the meaning he assigned to the term, although Hume opens the book by rejecting skepticism about moral distinctions specifically (EPM 1.2; SBN 169–70).

Many scholars who endorse this approach also commonly treat "moral distinctions" as referring to the moral qualities—particular virtues or vices, moral good or evil, right or wrong, or moral beauty or deformity—attributable to motives, characters, and actions. Often, this position on Hume's use of "moral distinctions" is tacit. Elizabeth S. Radcliffe, for example, seems to maintain that terms like "virtue" and "vice" are synonymous with "moral distinctions,"[7] though she also talks of the "distinctions between virtue and vice."[8] Some scholars discuss moral distinctions by explicitly referring to moral qualities per se. Jacqueline Taylor, for example, attributes to Hume the view that "without sympathy" we would not "perceive moral distinctions such as virtue and vice;"[9] suggesting thereby that

"moral distinctions" in Hume refers to moral qualities—virtue or vice, moral good or evil, and the like.

Not all scholars have conflated moral distinctions with moral qualities. According to Colin Heydt, "Hume's unorthodox list [of virtues] expressed the belief that there is no qualitative moral distinction between qualities like cleanliness and wit, and qualities such as justice or temperance."[10] This suggests that "moral distinctions" refers to the differences that we establish between moral and non-moral qualities. David F. Norton, on the other hand, attributes to Hume the view that "moral distinctions" refers to the differences felt between moral qualities, that is, "distinctions between virtue and vice;"[11] though he does not consider it necessary to argue for this position on Hume's use of the term.

The lack of explicit analysis of the meaning Hume assigns to "moral distinctions" at times complicates things, so much so that it appears that Hume's use of the term is irremediably confused. James Baillie's analysis of the text, for example, may imply that Hume uses "moral distinctions" to refer to any of the following: moral qualities;[12] "moral differences" (*Hume on Morality*, 115), understood either as "the relation of contrariety" between two opposite moral qualities (115–16) or the difference between moral and non-moral qualities (117); duty (115–17); or moral judgment, for Baillie also suggests that Hume aims "to show that moral distinctions do not derive solely from the understanding, but also require input from the sentiments" to establish "that the making of moral judgements consists in the correcting, by reason, of natural sentiments" (97).

Baillie is not the only commentator to suggest that Hume's point about moral distinctions is a point about moral judgment or moral evaluation (Baillie uses "moral judgment" and "moral evaluation" interchangeably). David Owen, for example, writes: "That reason of itself can never account for moral distinctions [as Hume claims in *Treatise* 3.1.1] means that a creature with all its rational capacities intact, but deficient in passions and sentiments, will be incapable of making moral judgements."[13] It is right to say that Hume's point about moral distinctions is also a point about moral judgments; the activity of perceiving of moral distinctions is part of the process by which we arrive at moral judgments. What is problematic is Owen's supposition that "moral distinctions" is in Hume synonymous with "moral judgments"—assuming that that is Owen's position. Like many scholars mentioned here, Owen does not offer an explicit account of Hume's position on moral distinctions, so I am not claiming this to be his exact view. Elsewhere, Owen also seems to attribute to Hume the view that "moral distinctions" refers to moral qualities.[14]

One's position in the debate concerning Hume's use of "moral distinctions" and "moral judgment" or "moral evaluation"—though Hume never actually used the expression "moral evaluation" in his works, a fact still not acknowledged in the secondary literature concerned with Hume's position on moral evaluation—also

depends on the meaning that commentators attribute to the expression "moral judgment," or more precisely, on one's position on what this expression refers to in Hume's text. Nicholas Capaldi differentiates "between moral sentiment (the initial apprehension of moral qualities) and moral judgement (the verbalization of a moral idea which copies the moral sentiment or impression),"[15] and argues that a moral distinction is the relevant sentiment,[16] not a judgment. One can also maintain that "moral distinctions" refers to moral judgments without rejecting the idea that it also denotes moral feelings. In this vein, A. T. Nuyen maintains that Hume uses "moral distinctions" to refer to moral judgments understood as "artificial" moral feelings.[17]

On the other hand, there are scholars who endorse a different approach to discussing Hume's use of "moral distinctions." They aim to, among other things, offer an explicit analysis of the meaning he assigned to the term. Capaldi, for example, does not just separate moral distinctions from moral judgments, as we have just seen, but also argues that the "expression 'moral sentiment' is synonymous in Hume with the expressions 'moral distinctions,' 'morals,' approbation,' 'morality,' and the 'sense of virtue.'"[18] Consequently, Capaldi maintains that an insight into Hume's view of the nature of moral sentiment, or moral sense, simultaneously provides us with an understanding of Hume's position on the nature of moral distinctions.

Many scholars hold this view, despite the differences in their interpretations of Hume's arguments. R. D. Broiles argues that because Hume, in *Treatise* 3.1.1, intends to eliminate "the possibility of moral distinctions being ascertained by reason," it follows "that they are impressions. And this, we shall see, is substantially Hume's argument for the moral sense theory."[19] D. F. Norton potentially endorses the same position, by suggesting that "explaining how we come to feel these unique moral sentiments will be equivalent to understanding moral distinctions themselves."[20] More recently, Peter Kail seems to use "moral distinctions" in a similar fashion, to refer to "a general sentiment of blame or approbation."[21]

Useful as Capaldi's work on Hume may be, to return to his analysis of Hume's use of "moral distinctions," due to the ambiguities in Hume's language Capaldi's reading leads to further interpretative problems. Capaldi argues that "moral distinctions" is synonymous with "moral sentiments," but he also suggests that it is synonymous with the expression "morals." This complicates things, because Capaldi does not consider that Hume uses "morals" in at least three other senses. At times, this expression refers to the science of ethics. In *Treatise* 3.1.1, for example, where Hume compares moral qualities to secondary properties and adds that "this discovery in morals, like that other in physics, is to be regarded as a considerable advancement of the speculative sciences" (T 3.1.1.26; SBN 468–69). Hume is clearly comparing two sciences here: ethics and physics. He is comparing moral qualities as an object of inquiry "in morals," that is, ethics, with secondary qualities as ob-

jects of inquiry in physics. We also see this use in the Introduction to the *Treatise*. Here, "Morals" is likened to the science of "Criticism" or aesthetics in that both are concerned with "tastes and sentiments" (T Intro. 5; SBN xv–vi).

"Morals" may also refer to morality (moral discourse and practice), a common usage in the period. Hume used the expression "morals" in this sense in suggesting that he is not "without hopes . . . that our reasonings concerning *morals* will corroborate whatever has been said concerning the understanding and the passions" (T 3.1.1.1; SBN 455–56). He compares the subject matter of Book 3 of the *Treatise* with that of Book 1 and Book 2. Book 3 of the *Treatise* is concerned with morality, "a subject that interests us above all others" (T 3.1.1.1; SBN 455–56). Book 1 is concerned with human *understanding*, and the *passions* are the main concern of Book 2.

In the third sense in which Hume uses "morals," which is the most frequent, it serves as a generic term, to refer to moral qualities; for example: at T 3.1.1.6 (SBN 457) and T 3.1.1.14 (SBN 460). This stance is neither novel nor one that needs detailed defense here.[22] Besides, I am not interested here in offering an in-depth analysis of Hume's view on moral qualities. The present concern is with what Hume intended by "moral distinctions," one of the least understood concepts in his vocabulary. Hence, I wish to stress that moral distinctions must not be confused with moral qualities attributable to characters, actions, and motives: namely, particular virtues (justice, for example) or vices (here, injustice), moral good or evil, right or wrong, or with morals for that matter, as is often the case in the secondary literature when commentators take the term "morals" to refer to moral qualities. Karl Schafer, for example, seems to maintain that "moral distinctions" is synonymous in Hume with "morals," with the term "morals" understood as referring to moral qualities.[23]

I wish to conclude this survey of the dominant interpretations of the meaning that Hume attributed to "moral distinctions," with one of the more nuanced, explicit arguments developed recently, the one that Rachel Cohon offers. While she does not conflate moral distinctions with moral qualities and acknowledges that Hume uses the term to refer to moral differences, Cohon also maintains that Hume uses "moral distinctions" loosely, interchangeably with other key terms in his ethics, and, more strongly, that Hume's use of the term, even confined to *Treatise* 3.1.1, is confused. When Hume uses "moral distinctions," Cohon claims, "he is talking about either (a) moral differences—the difference between good people and actions and evil people and actions—or (b) our activities of moral discrimination [that is to say, distinguishing, as the] process, whatever it is, by which we discriminate good from evil" (*Hume's Morality*, 79–80).

According to Cohon, Hume should be read as though his intention in *Treatise* 3.1.1 was to use "moral distinctions" to refer to the activity of moral distinguishing, that is to say, "our activities of moral discrimination" (80 and 86–88, 97) or moral evaluation (120–21),[24] rather than to moral differences understood as an

outcome of such an activity. Cohon claims that Hume "in places . . . understandably slides into treating moral distinctions as outcomes [of moral distinguishing] rather than distinguishings" (80). Hume slides into what appears to be a mistake because, according to Cohon, the "main intent of the section (*Treatise* 3.1.1) is to prove a certain point about reasoning and moral discrimination" but "his notion of moral discrimination [is not] always sharply in view" (80). She argues that Hume's actual view is that "[w]hen we distinguish between vice and virtue, we are engaged in the process of distinction—that is to say, distinguishing" (79–80) and adds: "Hume concludes that moral distinction is a different activity from any that goes on in reasoning. To begin with, however, moral distinction is that process, whatever it is, by which we discriminate good from evil" (80) rather than an outcome of moral distinguishing.

I reject the thesis that Hume treated "moral distinctions" in this way out of confusion. A more accurate interpretation of Hume's words might be that he is talking of an act of distinguishing (discriminating) between two things, and that he separates this activity from its objects—here, moral distinctions, but epistemic objects also being moral qualities, part of the complex *process* or *an activity* (an activity can occur in stages) of moral evaluation. This is evident in *Treatise* 3.1.1. After telling us that the rationalists think that morality is "discern'd merely by ideas, and by their juxta-position and comparison" (T 3.1.1.4; SBN 456–57), Hume suggests that all one needs to do to disprove his opponents' position on the origin of moral distinctions is investigate "whether it be possible, from reason alone, *to distinguish betwix*t good and evil, or whether there must concur some other principles to enable us to make *that distinction*" (T 3.1.1.4; SBN 456–57; my emphases).

Both the notion of moral distinction and the notion of distinguishing or discriminating were sharply in Hume's view here, yet they do not seem to refer to one and the same thing. The expression "to distinguish" or "to discern" refers to the *activity* of moral distinguishing; this much is clear from the text, regardless of the debate concerning its nature, and regardless of what the object or outcome of this activity of distinguishing exactly is. It seems equally clear that the phrase "betwixt vice and virtue" is synonymous with the phrase "between vice and virtue;" the words were commonly used interchangeably at the time of Hume's writing. See *OED* at "betwixt," where "between" is given as a synonym.

The phrase "that [moral] distinction," cited above, is the key expression here, and I suggest that it refers to *the distinction* "*betwixt* moral good and evil," or *the distinction* "*betwixt* virtue and vice," earlier in the text: that is to say, *the difference between* the two opposite qualities, such as the difference between justice and injustice for example, not the activity of *distinguishing* between them. To use Hume's own language, "*to make* that [moral] distinction" appears to be synonymous with "*to distinguish* betwixt," and both refer to the activity of moral distinguishing (discriminating or discerning) that "enable[s] us to make," or perceive (experi-

ence), "that distinction betwixt moral good and evil" (T 3.1.1.4; SBN 456–57) or *that distinction* "betwixt vice and virtue" (T 3.1.1.3; SBN 456), that is to say, the difference between the two qualities.

Hume's separation of the activity of distinguishing "betwixt" two objects from "that distinction" which is being established (namely, the difference in the two objects) suggests that he was not conflating "moral distinguishing" and "moral distinctions." The latter expression does not refer to an activity at all, let alone to a process. Hume uses "moral distinctions" rather to refer to an epistemic object (not necessarily a product but an outcome in the mind)[25] of the activity of moral distinguishing: the activity that makes us aware of the difference between two moral qualities. Correspondingly, the expression "moral distinction," which refers to the difference between two qualities, should not be confused with the expression "moral distinguishing" or "moral discrimination," which refer to the activity by which we delineate "betwixt vice and virtue" (T 3.1.1.3; SBN 456) or "betwixt moral good and evil" (T 3.1.1.4; SBN 456–57).

We can more clearly differentiate "moral distinctions" and "moral distinguishing," by observing that the link between distinguishing two things one from another, and the knowledge of the difference between them is captured in an *OED* entry defining the verb "to know" as "to recognize or distinguish, or be able to distinguish (one thing or person) *from* . . . (another)," a usage current in Hume's time, as it is today: for example, "Scarce could the Goddess from her Nymph be known" in Alexander Pope's *Windsor-Forrest* (1713). Instead of distinguishing one thing *from* another, of course, Hume often talks of distinguishing *between,* or "betwixt," two things. For him, "to make that distinction" between, or to perceive the difference "betwixt" (T 3.1.1.4; SBN 456–57), moral good and evil is precisely to apprehend (distinguish, discriminate, become aware of, or know) a difference between two moral qualities, that is to say, a moral distinction.

If we focus on Hume's use of "betwixt," we can also see more clearly that Hume differentiated "moral distinctions" on the one hand, and expressions used to refer to moral qualities on the other. In the narrow context of his critique of the rationalist position on moral distinctions in *Treatise* 3.1.1, Hume uses it in sentences expressing the specific relation in which two things stand without referring to either of these things specifically. This was also common usage. In *OED*, "You must look into the Contract betwixt him and his People": the "betwixt" signifies that the subject is in a contractual relation with the people—the contractual relation, of course, being distinct from the two parties themselves. Also in *OED*: "Can you find any farther difference betwixt them?"—like the "difference" or a "distinction" between some characters is, for example, those that we, as Hume claims in the second *Enquiry*, naturally perceive in the moral context as "the opposite extremes" (EPM 1.2; SBN 169–70).

Here, the focus is on the differences between two things, not merely on things distinguished. Hume is discussing the relation in which two objects stand, or the difference that we experience between them, without specifically making a point about either object in question, and without conflating this difference—or, in *Treatise* 3.1.1, the relation that marks that difference—with the objects themselves, or with the activity by which they are perceived. Of course, this is not to say that the perceiving of moral qualities and the perceiving of the difference, or as Hume's rationalist opponents maintain, the relation between these objects, are not related activities. For the rationalist, the perception of moral qualities (moral good *or* evil for example, or particular virtues and vices, such as honesty *or* dishonesty) logically precedes, and is necessary for, the perception of moral distinctions (here, the difference between good and evil, or between honesty and dishonesty) to occur. For Hume, on the other hand, it is one and the same activity, though it produces two separate outcomes in the mind.

What is also noticeable in *Treatise* 3.1.1 is that Hume always uses the notion "betwixt" in conjunction with the expression "good and evil," in which we find the two-placed logical operator, "and," rather than an ambiguous "or," employed to discuss the epistemic origin of *moral distinctions* (T 3.1.1.3, T 3.1.1.4, T 3.1.1.16; SBN 456, 456–57, 462–63). By contrast, he does not always use the "betwixt" in discussing moral notions like "vice" or "virtue," "moral good" or "moral evil," and similar expressions that he uses to discuss *moral qualities* specifically, or the activities involved in the apprehension of moral qualities per se. As I will show in section 4, at times Hume, with good reason, uses the exclusive "or," to make a point about moral qualities specifically, not moral distinctions. Namely, to argue that in specific instances of moral evaluation we can perceive either moral good or moral evil, as its strict opposite, either a particular virtue (gratitude for example) or a vice (ingratitude), but never both qualities at the same time.

When we locate Hume's text in the wider linguistic context in this way, it becomes clear that in keeping with the linguistic practice at the time of his writing, Hume differentiated between "moral distinctions" on the one hand, and expressions that he used to refer to moral qualities themselves on the other. Hence, "moral distinctions," for Hume, are not what we have in mind when we think of particular virtues and vices (such as justice, kindness, or gratitude, for example, or their opposites, injustice, meanness, or ingratitude), or moral good or evil, right or wrong, and the like. It also becomes clear that Hume differentiated between "moral distinctions" and expressions he used to refer to the activities in the mind that he considered to be responsible for moral perception, and constitutive of the complex process of moral evaluation.

We can provide further support to the argument that Hume was not confused in his use of the expressions pertinent to our analysis of his position on moral distinctions, if we separate Hume's discussion of moral distinctions and the use

of "moral distinctions" in *Treatise* 3.1.1, from that in *Treatise* 3.1.2. With this proposal, I reject the common strategy used in the secondary literature for interpreting Hume's exchange with the rationalist concerning moral distinctions, regardless of the disagreement over how to interpret the meaning of "moral distinctions."

Those who employ this strategy analyse Hume's critique of the rationalist position on moral distinctions by way of interpreting it in the narrow context of the role that he assigns to moral sentiments in moral evaluation or, even more specifically, his theory of the origin of moral qualities. That commentators often rely on this strategy is understandable, since Hume's arguments concerning moral distinctions, moral qualities, and the nature of moral distinguishing (that is, moral perception), or moral evaluation in general, are often entangled and difficult to separate from one another. Useful as it may be, however, such a strategy is potentially misleading. Though it often offers deep insights into Hume's argument on moral evaluation, and his theory of the nature and origin of moral qualities, this strategy neglects the subtleties in Hume's view of moral distinctions.

For one, it fails to appreciate the possibility that Hume's discussion of moral distinctions in *Treatise* 3.1.1 is distinct from his discussion of moral distinctions in *Treatise* 3.1.2. Hence, scholars who are more interested in Hume's moral sentimentalism, as articulated in *Treatise* 3.1.2, than in the moral rationalism he rejects, as articulated in *Treatise* 3.1.1, tend to interpret *Treatise* 3.1.1 in the context of Hume's positive argument in *Treatise* 3.1.2. As a result, we form a partial picture of Hume's critique of the rationalist position on moral distinctions. We also establish an inaccurate perspective on Hume's position on moral qualities and moral distinctions. For we tend to confuse moral distinctions with moral qualities, or with the moral spectator's distinguishing (via his feelings of approval and disapproval) of moral qualities, which occurs via impression or sentiment.

By contrast with this common strategy, I wish to stress the fact that while Hume's argument is, as Garret rightly notes, at times obscure, making it difficult for us to establish what Hume means by saying that reason does not discover moral distinctions,[26] *Treatise* 3.1.1 nevertheless leaves little room for doubt about whether Hume's intention was to refute his moral rationalist opponent's position on moral distinctions. Furthermore, what is often overlooked in the complex scholarly debate regarding Hume's use of "moral distinctions," is that *Treatise* 3.1.1 gives no insight into Hume's positive view on moral distinctions,[27] though Hume, at T 3.1.1.26 (SBN 468–69), articulates his positive, sentimentalist position on the origin of moral qualities, and reiterates his sentimentalist position on the origin of moral motivation, at T 3.1.1.6 (SBN 457) for example, which he developed earlier in the book, in "Of the influencing motives of the will."

Since there is less sentimentalism in Hume's own way of framing the debate concerning moral distinctions with the rationalist in *Treatise* 3.1.1 than is assumed in the secondary literature, it is useful to locate Hume's use of "moral distinctions"

in *Treatise* 3.1.1 in its historical context. If we focus on the voice of Hume's moral rationalist opponent as one can hear it in Hume's text, it becomes manifest that Hume's use of "moral distinctions" is not irremediably confused. In addition, it becomes clear that Hume, with good reason, did not have to articulate a theory of moral distinctions. For he relies on a specific view of the nature of moral distinctions in *Treatise* 3.1.1—namely, the view that his moral rationalist opponent holds. Hence, in section 2 of this paper I aim to locate Hume's use of "moral distinctions," in *Treatise* 3.1.1, in its historical context, by answering the following question: what is Hume's opponent's view of the nature or meaning of moral distinctions?

2. Moral Distinctions in the Historical Context

Locating Hume's argument, in *Treatise* 3.1.1, in its proper historical context has never been a straightforward matter. Hume attributes to his moral rationalist opponent such a diverse set of claims that it is not easy to establish who his targets exactly were. The fact that Hume was, as Penelhum notes, a "master of non-citation,"[28] only exacerbates this problem. Moreover, no rationalist of Hume's time aimed at developing a system that contains all the claims that Hume attributes to his opponent and subjects to scrutiny in *Treatise* 3.1.1. Yet many of these claims can be found in the works of representatives of various forms of moral rationalism of the time. Not just in the works of Clarke and Wollaston, but also that of Ralph Cudworth, Nicolas Malebranche, Bishop Butler, and even John Locke, among others.[29] What also generates confusion is that Hume, at times, anticipates his opponent's objections to his arguments, and the role of Hume's hypothetical objector is not always to capture a view of any one moral rationalist specifically. At times, Hume introduces objections and his responses to them as a way of improving the internal logic of his own argument.

Notwithstanding such difficulties, our task may be easier than it seems, with the help coming from Hume himself. To determine what Hume's moral rationalist opponent's theory of moral distinctions was, it is useful to turn to one of Hume's most revealing, though often overlooked, claims regarding his intentions in *Treatise* 3.1.1, which can be found in the *Letter From a Gentleman to His Friend in Edinburgh*.[30] In this letter, Hume informs us that in the *Treatise*:

> He hath indeed denied the eternal Difference of Right and Wrong in the Sense in which Clark and Woolaston maintained them, viz. That the Propositions of Morality were of the same Nature with the truths of Mathematicks and the abstract Sciences, the Objects merely of Reason, not the Feelings of our internal Tastes and Sentiments. (*Letter*, 30)

This passage suggests that Hume's critique of his opponent's position on moral distinctions, presumably in *Treatise* 3.1.1 specifically, is focused narrowly on Clarke's and Wollaston's claim that *moral distinctions*—here, the difference between right and wrong—are, like mathematical truths, known via abstract, demonstrative reason alone. By contrast, Hume's critique of his opponent's position on the origin of *moral qualities*, in *Treatise* 3.1.1, targets not just the argument that these tokens exist in the guise of demonstrable relations, but also the argument that they exist as matters of fact, and the corresponding commitment to the epistemological claim that moral qualities can be inferred by probabilistic reasoning (T 3.1.1.18, T 3.1.1.26; SBN 463, 468–69).

The *Letter* thus raises the following question: what convinced Hume that probabilistic reasoning, for Wollaston, has nothing to do with moral distinctions, despite the fact that Hume was aware that Wollaston, in contrast to Clarke, maintained that moral qualities can be an object of probable reason or sense? As I will now show, it is the fact that Hume was also aware that "moral distinctions," for both Clarke and Wollaston, refers to *moral differences* conceived of as a special kind of moral relation, which we discern via demonstrative reasoning. Namely, the relation of contrariety obtaining between, and apparently existing separately from, moral qualities themselves. Therefore, I maintain that Hume, in the narrow context of his critique of moral rationalism in *Treatise* 3.1.1, uses the term "moral distinctions" precisely as these rationalists would, to discuss moral differences conceived of as such a relation, without thereby endorsing the rationalist moral ontology.

Before I proceed, I wish to observe that while I take this investigation into Hume's language in *Treatise* 3.1.1 as an opportunity to explore Clarke's and Wollaston's positions on moral distinctions, and the difference between them, this paper is not meant to offer an in-depth analysis of Clarke's and Wollaston's works, or an analysis of Hume's relation to Wollaston. Such an analysis is important and, when Hume's relation to Wollaston is concerned, long needed, but this paper is concerned with Hume's use of "moral distinctions" and his position on what moral distinctions are and how we perceive them. Hence, what follows is but a brief exposition of Clarke's and Wollaston's views.

2.1. Wollaston on Moral Distinctions

While the consensus in the secondary literature is that Hume, in *Treatise* 3.1.1, mounts a critique of Wollaston's argument, not many scholars are prepared to give prominence to Wollaston's work in trying to understand Hume's critique of moral rationalism. This is understandable, considering that readers interested in understanding Hume's approach to Wollaston tend to draw their conclusions by focusing on the harsh comments on Wollaston's ethics that Hume explicitly makes

in a footnote to *Treatise* 3.1.1. As it is well known, in that footnote Hume labels Wollaston's argument as a "whimsical system" (T 3.1.1.15n68; SBN 461–62n1).

In the whimsical part of Wollaston's system, Hume claims, we find the argument that actions can cause false judgments in the observer's mind and that "the falshood" of the relevant judgment "may be ascrib'd . . . to the action itself" (T 3.1.1.15; SBN 461). This causal link that Wollaston had established between action and false judgments in the observer's mind potentially explains why we perceive an action as immoral because, to use Hume's summary of Wollaston's point, "the tendency [in action] to cause such an error [in judgment] is the first spring or original source of all immorality" (T 3.1.1.15; SBN 461). According to Hume, to argue that "such a falshood is the foundation of all guilt and moral deformity" (T 3.1.1.15n68; SBN 461–62n1), or that the "tendency [in action] to produce error [in judgment is . . .] the very essence of vice and immorality" is a "whimsical" proposition (T 3.1.1.15n68; SBN 461–62n1).

What is less known, and what I wish to stress here, however, is that while this applies to Wollaston's position on what moral qualities are, and his explanation of how we discern these in action, it does not apply to Wollaston's position on moral distinctions. Hume was aware that Wollaston's argument on what a moral quality is, and how we perceive moral qualities, is related to, but still distinct from, his argument on what moral distinctions are and how we discern these. This explains why Hume, in the *Letter*, assigns a more prominent place to Wollaston's work on moral distinctions than his critique of Wollaston's argument in *Treatise* 3.1.1 appears to allow, and gives equal weight to Wollaston's and Clarke's arguments.

Although the explicit picture that Hume paints of Wollaston's system in *Treatise* 3.1.1 is potentially a partial one, as well as one that results in the misrepresentation of some of Wollaston's arguments and intentions,[31] Hume is right to attribute to Wollaston the view that the apprehension of moral qualities can originate in probable reason. Wollaston, in contrast to Clarke, did not think of moral judgments as being necessarily demonstrable, or of demonstrable propositions as the only bearers of truth. For he maintains that probabilistic reasoning can lead to judgments that capture the truth about whether an action is morally good or evil. While Clarke maintains that moral qualities, such as moral good or evil, exist in the guise of necessary, demonstrable "fitness relations," Wollaston argues that they can be located among the contingent matters of fact.[32]

This explains why Hume, in *Treatise* 3.1.1, considers it important to establish that *moral qualities* are neither an object of demonstrative reason nor that of probabilistic inference. Moral qualities, Hume maintains, neither exist in the guise of necessary, immutable relations, nor as matters of fact, but "may be compar'd to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind" (T 3.1.1.26; SBN 468–69). However, Hume's discussion of Clarke's and Wollaston's arguments on the nature and

origin of moral distinctions is, as the *Letter* suggests, focused narrowly on the claim that such differences exist only in the guise of relations known demonstratively.

Hume, with good reason, attributes to Clarke and Wollaston the narrow view that moral distinctions exist in the guise of immutable, eternal relations, and the corresponding epistemological claim that such a relation is perceived by demonstrative reason alone. For Wollaston held, I argue, a non-orthodox rationalist position that while judgments of moral qualities in action can originate in probable reason and still capture moral truth, judgments of the relations that mark the difference between two opposite or contrary moral qualities originate in demonstrative reasoning alone. Clarke, on the other hand, maintains that the origin of moral perception in general lies in demonstrative reason alone. Though he, like Wollaston, treats moral qualities and moral distinctions as related but still separate objects of moral perception, he also conceives of both moral qualities and moral distinctions as necessary, demonstrable relations.

This raises some questions about Wollaston's work. For example, it is unclear what enables Wollaston to consistently maintain that we can reach demonstrative certainty about moral distinctions, while at the same time relying on judgments grounded in probabilistic reasoning, those that presumably can capture the truth about whether an action possesses the quality of moral good or evil. Here, we are interested in one question specifically: what was Wollaston's position on the nature of moral distinctions, or in other words, what meaning did he assign to the expression "moral distinctions?"

Early in the RND, Wollaston informs us that he wishes to join the early modern debate regarding the nature and origin of moral qualities, intending to establish what he perceived to be a "new" rationalist account of "the nature of *moral good and evil" (*RND, 3). Later in the text, however, Wollaston adds that his goal is to also explain what constitutes the difference or "the distinction" (RND, 32) between opposite moral qualities, here the difference between moral good and evil, but also between particular virtues and vices, such as the difference between honesty and dishonesty for example (RND, 33–34). Wollaston joins this debate in moral ontology because the rationalist's position in moral epistemology depends on their view of what moral qualities and moral distinctions are, and he was keen to defend the epistemological claim that probable reason can be a valid source of moral truths (RND, 35, and 95–96). Importantly, Wollaston kept moral distinctions and moral qualities conceptually apart, treating them as related but still distinct and separately existing objects of knowledge and perception. We must further consider that the question concerning the nature and origin of moral distinctions is, for Wollaston, the "main subject" of Section 1 of the RND. On this, Wollaston writes:

> [L]et us return to that, which is our main subject, the *distinction* between moral good and evil. Some have been so wild as to deny there is any such

> thing: but from what has been said here, it is manifest, that there is as certainly moral *good* and *evil* as there is *true* and *false*; and that there is as natural and immutable a difference between those as between *these*, the difference at the bottom being indeed the same. (RND, 32–33)

Here, Wollaston not just puts moral distinctions, "the *distinction* between moral good and evil," in the focus of his investigation, but also suggests that a moral distinction is the *relation* in which two opposite or contrary moral qualities stand. Such a relation marks the *difference between* the two opposite qualities, and its nature and existence are to be distinguished from the nature and existence of moral qualities per se (moral good or moral evil); they are related but separately existing relations. This is evident in Wollaston's claim that his intention is to show not just that "it is manifest, that there is as certainly moral good and evil, as there is *true* and *false*" (RND, 32), but also that there is as "natural and immutable a difference between *those* as between *these*" (RND, 33).

Wollaston thereby simultaneously reveals his strategy for solving the problem of moral distinctions: he grounded his position on moral distinctions in his account of the nature and origin of moral qualities, or more precisely, truth and falsity. Wollaston relies on this strategy because of the conceptual link that he has established earlier in the RND, between moral qualities, moral action, and the nature of things, or the truth about things with an immutable nature. Wollaston claims that moral acts have meaning and "imply" propositions (RND, 7), thereby presumably suggesting that moral acts represent nature or capture the truth about the nature of things (RND, 15–16).[33] Notwithstanding the debate regarding how to interpret this aspect of Wollaston's argument, the consensus is that he maintains that moral acts can be labelled as true or false (RND, 7–8 and 11),[34] and argues that we evaluate whether an action is morally good or evil by determining whether an action, or propositions it implies, is true or false (RND, 29–30), that is to say, whether it corresponds to the truth about things.

For Wollaston defines truth as the correspondence relation between propositions and things or nature: "Truth is but a conformity to nature" (RND, 17) or "*the conformity of those words or signs*"—with the notion of a sign inclusive of moral acts—"*by which things are exprest, to the things themselves*" (RND, 6), because, as Wollaston explains later, "nothing can be true, nothing does exist, *if things are not what they are*" (RND, 20), including contingent things or facts once they have occurred in time (RND, 19). Since the notion of truth includes not just abstract truths, about ideas and relations, but also truths about contingent matters of fact (RND, 30), Wollaston also maintains that probable reason or sense can be a valid source of moral judgments (RND, 95–96). Such judgments presumably capture the truth about whether a moral act, or the proposition it implies, corresponds to the way contingent matters of fact and relations between these are.

Wollaston's strategy of tying his account of moral qualities to the notion of truth, which includes both abstract, necessary truths, and truths about contingent facts, enables him to also establish that moral distinctions are demonstrable, despite the fact that judgments of moral qualities may capture contingent truths only. For he maintains that contingent truths, while not necessary, are still immutable because truth, in Wollaston's words, "will be truth, and must retain its character and force" (RND, 47) regardless of what one's epistemic position is, and regardless of whether we have in mind "those truths, which we discover by [abstract] reasoning [. . . or] *matters of fact" (*RND, 35), which we can access via probable reason. Hence, Wollaston treats even relations between matters of fact (including moral actions), once they occur in time (RND, 19), as fixed and determinate, akin to relations ("ratio's") in mathematics (RND, 15–16).

This implies that there is an objective, necessary difference between true and false, that is, between right and wrong, or between good and evil, though not all truths relevant to moral judgments are necessary. From this it follows, according to Wollaston, that there is an objective distinction between two contrary moral qualities (RND, 32–33, and 40)—between good and evil (RND, 32–33), or between honesty and dishonesty (RND, 33–34). This relation is objective in the sense that everyone can perceive it as easily as they can perceive moral qualities (good or evil, or honesty or dishonesty), or truth and falsity, in action (RND, 40). Moreover, a moral distinction is also, Wollaston claims, a "natural" and "immutable" (RND, 33) or, to use Hume's words, "eternal" (*Letter,* 30) *relation between moral qualities.*

Rationalists in general treated the immutable relations of this kind—that is, as immutable but not apprehended as intuitively immediately available self-evident relations or truths—as an object of demonstrative reasoning. For Wollaston, such relations are immutable and demonstrable in the sense that the difference between truth and falsity is eternal and demonstrable, even though not all truths are necessary or demonstrable. This explains why Wollaston is convinced that by establishing that "it is manifest, that there is as certainly moral *good* and *evil*, as there is *true* and *false*" (RND, 32), he has at the same time shown that there is as "natural and immutable a difference between *those* as between *these*" (RND, 33).

This brief outline of Wollaston's views cannot give justice to the complexity of his work, but an in-depth analysis of Wollaston's ethics, though important and long overdue, is not relevant to our interpretation of Hume's use of "moral distinctions." What is important and relevant to us here, is that Wollaston uses the expression "moral distinction" (RND, 32 and 40, 41) to refer to the eternal and necessary relation, which has a substantial existence independently of the existence of moral qualities per se, and marks *the difference between* contrary moral qualities. Hence, Wollaston maintains that judgments that capture the truth about moral distinctions always originate in demonstrative reasoning, despite arguing

that some moral judgments, those that capture the truth about moral qualities in action, can be grounded in probable reason.

This explains why Hume, in *Treatise* 3.1.1, attributes to Wollaston a whimsical account of the nature and origin of *moral qualities* (T 3.1.1.15, T 3.1.1.15n68; SBN 461, 461–62), while at the same time giving, in the *Letter*, equal weight to Wollaston's and Clarke's arguments on the nature and origin of *moral distinctions*, apparently focusing his critique narrowly on the claim that moral distinctions are relations known demonstratively. Of course, Wollaston was not the only rationalist to separate the concept of moral distinction (the difference between moral good and evil, between justice and injustice, or between honesty and dishonesty) from the concept of the individual moral quality (here, good or evil, justice or injustice, or honesty or dishonesty) and conceive of moral distinctions as relations that mark the difference between (and exist separately from) opposing moral qualities. Nor is he the only one who used the expression "moral distinctions" to refer to such a relation. We find this conceptual distinction and the same usage of "moral distinctions" in Clarke's *Works,*[35] just like Hume had suggested in the *Letter*, as I will now show.

2.2. Clarke on Moral Distinctions

It is well known that one of Clarke's aims in ethics is to establish that moral judgments, about good and evil, or right and wrong, are meant to capture universal, necessary moral truths. What I wish to observe here, however, is that Clarke is focused in many instances not only on moral qualities, that is, demonstrable and necessary "fitness" relations, such as moral good or evil. He is also focused on moral differences—the "essential Difference between Good and Evil, between Virtue and Vice" (*Works* 1: 144), or the "eternal," that is, "natural and unalterable Difference between *Good* and *Evil*" (*Works* 2: 609)—in short, moral distinctions.

Clarke explicitly uses the phrase "distinction between" moral qualities (or things in general) interchangeably with the "difference between" them. Such distinctions, or the relation that marks such differences, exist independently of moral qualities (*Works* 1: 696). Clarke, like Wollaston, maintains that what separates moral distinctions from moral qualities is the difference between the objects that they relate to one another. Clarke argues that moral qualities are objective "fitness" relations between, for example, an action and truth, or reason (or the ideas in the divine mind). Whereas the "Distinction between Virtue and Vice" (*Works* 1: 696) is the relation in which two *contrary* moral qualities stand, the nature of which is immutable due to the immutability of the "fitness" relations that moral qualities in his eyes are, here virtue (justice for example) or vice (injustice). Hence, Clarke, like Wollaston, conceives of these as related but still separately existing moral relations, that is, distinct objects of moral perception and knowledge.

This is not to say that, for the rationalists, the perception of the relation between individual objects that are being distinguished from one another is possible apart from knowledge of the objects in the relationship. For one cannot compare the objects to establish the relation in which they stand (or the difference between them) before the objects are perceived. My point is rather that the relations in which the objects that are being distinguished stand to one another (e.g., the relation of contrariety between moral good and evil, or between moral virtues and vices) are neither to be confused with the objects themselves (good or evil, or the particular virtues and vices, such as justice or injustice), nor with the activities, or faculties, in the mind by which we perceive or detect such objects, or the relations between them. In addition, we must separate the activity by which we discern moral distinctions from the activity by which we detect moral qualities, though for Clarke, in contrast to Wollaston, both activities originate in demonstrative reason.

Clarke uses the same strategy as Wollaston for solving the problem of moral distinctions; he grounds his position on moral distinctions in his theory of moral qualities. Clarke confidently concludes that "[t]here is originally in the very Nature of things, a necessary and eternal Difference between Good and Evil" (*Works* 1: 697) because he maintains that things that are being distinguished have an immutable nature. That is, because "it is as evident, that Good and Evil, are things prior and superiour to all humane Laws [or Custom], and which they cannot alter; as that the Difference of Light and Darkness does not depend upon the Will and Pleasure of men, and cannot be changed by them" (*Works* 1: 698).

Clarke, just like Wollaston, locates the origin of moral distinctions in demonstrative reason: "The *Light*, which God *originally* implanted in Men, is *Reason*, or their *Natural* Sense and Discernment of the Difference of Good and Evil" (*Works* 1: 247). Of course, while Wollaston argues that some moral judgments, those that capture the truth about moral qualities in action, can be grounded in probabilistic reasoning alone, Clarke maintains that all moral judgments have to do with absolute, *necessary* moral truths. For he maintains that both the moral qualities and the relations between them, that is, moral distinctions, exist in the guise of necessary demonstrable relations (Works 2: 608 and 618).[36] Notwithstanding such differences in their respective positions, Clarke and Wollaston assigned the same meaning to "moral distinctions" and held the same position on their nature and origin, just like Hume had suggested in the *Letter*.

Clarke's and Wollaston's arguments reveal a common interest among the rationalists: an interest in the nature of the difference, or the distinction, between individual objects—not just between moral qualities but between things in general—and the relations in which these objects stand, without these relations being confused with the objects themselves, or with the faculties or activities in the mind by which agents perceive them. Clarke's and Wollaston's arguments

also reveal a common rationalist aim, which is to establish that moral evaluation yields universal, objective judgments, though they may disagree on whether only judgments capturing necessary truths are objective. According to Clarke, given that moral facts or fitness relations, such as moral good and evil, and the relations in which they stand, that is, the difference or distinction between good and evil, exist in the guise of distinct, necessary and essential mind-independent relations, that can be found in the "Nature and Constitution of the world," it follows:

> Moral *Judgment* concerning Good and Evil, is nothing else but a *Perceiving* the nature of Things to *be* what it *is*. And consequently it cannot but be the *Same* in *All* rational Beings, at *all* Times and in *all* Places. It is One and the same in *All* men; and the same in all *Other* intelligent Beings whatsoever, as in *Men*; and the same necessarily in God *Himself*. (*Works* 2: 98 and 99, 608)

Clarke thus establishes that moral judgments, capturing the truth about moral qualities and moral distinctions, are independent of the divine will too, not only of human agents. Wollaston, too, aimed at explaining how moral reasoning necessitates objective, universal agreement in judgments in moral matters, despite him, in contrast to Clarke, not conceiving of such judgments as having to do with necessary truths only.

The moral rationalists were motivated by the need to respond to the skeptical or relativistic claims that follow from early modern moral voluntarism, which can be read as the thesis that morality is dependent on nothing but subjective or social relations of some sort, some relative framework preventing us from making morality objective. Call it secular voluntarism, though one needs to be careful in speaking of non-theological voluntarism in the period, since theology was still deeply embedded in the works of many moralists.[37] This is a kind of voluntarism that may follow from Hobbes's nominalism, materialism and psychological egoism (if one detaches them from his religious views); from Mandeville's conventionalism and his insistence on the role of affections in morality;[38] or from sentimentalism—as John Balguy[39] and Richard Price[40] have suggested—found in Hutcheson's and Hume's works.

Clarke explicitly informs us that he considered it necessary to "prove and establish the *eternal difference* of *Good* and *Evil*" in response to the arguments of "Mr *Hobbes* and some few others" who argue "that there is no such real Difference *originally*, *necessarily*, and *absolutely* in the Nature of Things" (*Works* 2: 609). Cudworth joined this effort as well. For he, as Adam Smith notes, "justly observed" against Hobbes that the civil law "could not be the original source of those [moral] distinctions."[41] In addition, Cudworth uses "moral distinctions" in the same way as Clarke and Wollaston, to refer to moral relations that are distinct

from the moral qualities themselves.[42] Wollaston joins this effort, too, not just by targeting those who "have been so wild as to deny there is any such thing" as the relation that marks "the *distinction* between moral good and evil" (RND, 32). Wollaston also confronted those who have, like Hume, pursued the project of articulating the naturalistic, sentimentalist position on the origin of moral distinctions (RND, 35–36).

In this section, I have located Hume's critique of the rationalists' position on moral distinctions in the historical context, to show that Hume's use of "moral distinctions," despite his never defining it, is clear. In the narrow context of his attack on Wollaston's and Clarke's argument on moral distinctions, in *Treatise* 3.1.1, Hume is using the term as these rationalists would, to refer to demonstrable relations that obtain between, and exist separately from, moral qualities themselves. Hume may have intended to keep his opponent's use of "moral distinctions" intact for yet another reason. Were Hume to change the meaning of the term, his critique of moral rationalism in *Treatise* 3.1.1, that is, of Clarke's and Wollaston's argument on moral distinctions, would miss its mark.

That is, even if Hume's argument that moral qualities are neither an object of demonstrative reason, nor that of probabilistic reasoning, is deemed successful, Hume would still be in danger of failing to achieve the aim of *Treatise* 3.1.1, which is, as the *Letter* suggests, to also show that moral distinctions are not an object of abstract reason alone. For even if we accept Hume's claim that we obtain ideas of moral qualities from impressions, via the copy principle, we could still object to Hume that the perceived difference between any two opposite moral qualities is explicable in terms of comparison of the ideas of moral qualities, those copied from the relevant impressions; such a comparison could still originate in intuitive understanding or demonstrative reasoning. This would in turn threaten the cogency of Hume's overall epistemic project in part 1 of Book 3 of the *Treatise*; Hume, in *Treatise* 3.1.1, aims to refute the argument that moral distinctions are an object of reason, to pave the way for his own positive epistemic argument on their origin, the one he establishes in *Treatise* 3.1.2.

My strategy so far has been to separate the context of *Treatise* 3.1.2 from that of *Treatise* 3.1.1 because, as I maintain, it is a mistake to read Hume's positive, sentimentalist account of the origin of moral distinctions, articulated in *Treatise* 3.1.2, back into Hume's way of framing the rationalist position that he wishes to attack in *Treatise* 3.1.1. This strategy enables us to see more clearly why Hume, though it appears that he fails to explicitly articulate a theory of the nature of moral distinctions, did not have to articulate such a theory in *Treatise* 3.1.1. It also strengthens my argument that Hume's use of "moral distinctions" is not irremediably confused. In the narrow context of *Treatise* 3.1.1, Hume largely takes over the usage of "moral distinctions" from the rationalists who he is critiquing, namely Clarke and Wollaston, like them, resisting the conflation of moral distinctions

with the moral qualities per se, though refuting the rationalists' claim that the former are demonstrable, mind independent, relations.

However, this strategy also raises the question of how Hume's use of "moral distinctions" in *Treatise* 3.1.1 relates to his use of the term in *Treatise* 3.1.2. Were Hume to keep using the term in the same way, he would contradict the purpose of *Treatise* 3.1.2, which is, as its title suggests, to establish that moral distinctions are "deriv'd from moral sense." In section 3, I investigate this aspect of Hume's discussion of moral distinctions.

3. Moral Distinctions in *Treatise* 3.1.2 and Beyond

In *Treatise* 3.1.2, Hume cannot continue using the term "moral distinctions" to refer to demonstrable relations, and nor does he need to do so, for two main reasons. First, because he rejected such usage in *Treatise* 3.1.1; and second, because he now aims at establishing a sentimentalist explanation of the origin of moral distinctions. Nonetheless, there are still several sources of potential confusion about Hume's position. For one, he does not state explicitly what he means by "moral distinctions." In addition, Hume's explanation of how we discern moral distinctions is grounded in, and entwined with, his account of the origin of moral qualities, so it is often difficult to see that they are still distinct arguments. Lastly, while Hume offers no insight into his positive view on moral distinctions in *Treatise* 3.1.1, he explicitly argues that moral qualities are "perceptions in the mind" that originate in the "sentiments of pleasure and uneasiness" (T 3.1.1.26; SBN 468–69)—a position that he continues developing in *Treatise* 3.1.2.

This explains why two interpretations dominate the secondary literature on Hume's use of "moral distinctions." First, that the term refers to moral qualities—particular virtues or vices (justice or injustice for example, or gratitude and ingratitude, kindness and meanness, and the like), moral good or evil, or right or wrong. And second, that it refers to moral sentiments, or the having of sentiments, that is to say, the activity of moral distinguishing by which we perceive moral qualities. I have already shown, in section 1, that these views fail to appreciate the subtleties in Hume's use of "moral distinctions" in *Treatise* 3.1.1. Here, I propose that they misrepresent Hume's position on moral distinctions. I argue that Hume still treats moral qualities and moral distinctions as related but nevertheless distinct outcomes of moral distinguishing. Correspondingly, he uses "moral distinctions" in the same sense, to talk of moral differences, though the term no longer refers to demonstrable relations existing independently of the observer. The term now refers to the perception in the mind. Or, more precisely, it refers to the difference that we uniformly experience, all things being equal, when evaluating an object, between particular virtues and vices, between moral good and moral evil, or between right and wrong.

That Hume, outside of the narrow context of *Treatise* 3.1.1, treats moral qualities and moral distinctions as related but distinct perceptions in the mind is evident in his language. Hume, in *Treatise* 3.1.2, still discusses not just moral qualities, properties like "virtue and vice" (T 3.1.2.1; SBN 470) and "moral good or evil" (T 3.1.2.3; SBN 471 and 3.1.2.4; SBN 471–72), but also "the difference betwixt" them (T 3.1.2.1; SBN 470), that is, "the distinction betwixt" (T 3.1.2.7; SBN 473–74) moral qualities. In such instances, the term "betwixt," and the phrases "difference betwixt" and "distinction betwixt," are still used in conjunction with the expression "good and evil," in which we find the inclusive, two-placed logical operator, "and," rather than an ambiguous "or." These terms were commonly employed at the time of Hume's writing, as we have seen, to discuss the *difference* or *distinction* between the objects that are being distinguished from one another, without that distinction being confused with the objects per se (here, good or evil), with moral sentiments, or the activity of moral distinguishing.

This is consistent with the common linguistic practice, as well as with how Hume uses these terms in *Treatise* 3.1.1, to discuss not just moral differences (T 3.1.1.3, T 3.1.1.4, T 3.1.1.10, T 3.1.1.16, T 3.1.1.22; SBN 456, 456–57, 458, 462–63, 465–66) but also the differences between objects in general. For example, when he discusses the difference "betwixt internal actions, and external objects" (T 3.1.1.21; SBN 464–65), or "the connexion betwixt the relation and the will" and "the difference betwixt . . . minds" (T 3.1.1.22; SBN 465–66), or "the connection betwixt two objects" (T 3.1.1.15n68; SBN 461–62).

Importantly, Hume's use of "moral distinctions" (and the phrases "difference betwixt" and "distinction between") in *Treatise* 3.1.2 is consistent with how Clarke and Wollaston used these terms. This is important because it implies that even outside of the narrow context of *Treatise* 3.1.1, Hume and the rationalists are using "moral distinctions" to speak of moral differences—the differences between, or betwixt opposite (or contrary) moral qualities—despite their disagreement on what the term's referent exactly is, or how a moral distinction is perceived. For Clarke and Wollaston, moral distinctions are relations that exist independently of moral qualities themselves and are discerned by demonstrative reason alone. Hume, on the other hand, locates the origin of moral distinctions in impressions or sentiments, as is evident at T 3.1.2.1 (SBN 470).

We have just seen that Hume, at T 3.1.2.1 (SBN 470), treats moral qualities and moral distinctions as separate objects of perception. What I am stressing now, however, is that in this passage Hume also separates moral qualities and moral distinctions from moral sentiments themselves, or from the activity of moral distinguishing. Furthermore, he also reveals his strategy for solving the problem of moral distinctions. The strategy is to locate the origin of moral distinctions in the same natural impression or sentiment by which we perceive and, consequently, have ideas of moral qualities themselves. Hume writes: "Since vice and virtue are

not discoverable merely by reason, or the comparison of ideas, it must be by means of some impression or sentiment they occasion, that we are able to mark the difference betwixt them" (T 3.1.2.1; SBN 470).

By arguing that "it must be by means of some impression or sentiment they occasion"—with the term "they" referring to the perceptions of moral qualities, here "vice and virtue"—Hume separates the "impression or sentiment" that is constitutive of the activity of moral distinguishing on the one hand, from its outcome on the other, an outcome of moral distinguishing being not just particular moral virtues and vices, but also the "difference betwixt them." The term "them" here clearly refers back to moral qualities mentioned earlier in the passage (or a class of such properties)—particular virtues, such as justice, gratitude, or kindness, and vices, such as injustice, ingratitude, or meanness, but also moral good or evil, or right or wrong—whereas the "difference betwixt" them, on the other hand, denotes a moral distinction. I maintain that Hume's position here is that the emergence of the very impression by which we perceive a moral quality (for example, justice, or moral good) in specific circumstances of moral evaluation at the same time enables us to "to mark" or perceive "the difference betwixt" the initially perceived moral quality and its opposite (here, injustice, or moral evil). If there is any doubt that this is what Hume means, it is soon dispelled in the following passage:

> [S]ince the distinguishing impressions, by which moral good or evil is known, are nothing but particular pains or pleasures; it follows, that in all enquiries concerning these moral distinctions, it will be sufficient to shew the principles, which make us feel a satisfaction or uneasiness from the survey of any character, in order to satisfy us why the character is laudable or blameable. (T 3.1.2.3; SBN 471)

Here, Hume explicitly suggests that to locate the source ("the principles") responsible for the rise of impressions by which we "know" or perceive qualities like "moral good or evil," is sufficient for solving the problem of "these moral distinctions," that is to say, "the difference betwixt" moral qualities discussed earlier in the section (T 3.1.2.1; SBN 470) and in *Treatise* 3.1.1.

Since Hume ties his theory of moral distinctions to his account of moral qualities in this way, his argument naturally progresses to establishing what is distinctive of the class of impressions that enable us to perceive moral qualities and moral distinctions. Hume first asks: "[O]f what nature are these impressions, and after what manner do they operate upon us?" (T 3.1.2.2; SBN 470–71). Hume establishes that the relevant impression is "a pleasure or uneasiness of a particular" (T 3.1.2.3; SBN 471) and, as he adds, "peculiar kind" (T 3.1.2.4; SBN 471–72). It is a special class of impressions, the sentiment of the moral kind, distinct not just from the sentiment from interest (T 3.1.2.4; SBN 471–72), but also "from

the pleasure and pain arising from inanimate objects" (T 3.1.2.5; SBN 473). The moral sentiment is also a natural kind, being deeply "rooted in our constitution and temper" (T 3.1.2.8, SBN 474). Hume contrasts this not just with the "original instincts" (T 3.1.2.6, SBN 473), the supernatural (T 3.1.2.7, SBN 473–74), or the "rare and unusual" (T 3.1.2.8; SBN 474), but also, as Hume informs us at T 3.2.2.25 (SBN 500), with artifice.

That Hume, as his argument progresses beyond part 1 of Book 3 of the *Treatise*, is still focused on the task of explaining the origin of moral distinctions is important. Its importance lies in the fact that it shows Hume's consistent separation of moral distinctions from moral qualities. It also shows that Hume still uses "moral distinctions" to discuss moral differences—the difference between particular virtues and vices, between moral good and evil, or between right and wrong—and treats these as outcomes (in the mind) of the activity of moral distinguishing. *Treatise* 3.2.2 is important for yet another reason: it suggests that Hume's contemporaries were wrong to accuse him for "sapping the Foundations of Morality," as Hume observes in the *Letter,* "by denying the natural and essential Difference betwixt Right and Wrong, Good and Evil . . . making the Difference only artificial, and to arise from human Conventions and Compacts" (*Letter*, 18).

Hume's critics were wrong because his aim is not simply to replace the moral rationalist explanation of the origin of moral distinctions. Rather, as we see in *Treatise* 3.2.2, Hume also rejects skepticism about moral distinctions, the kind that presumably follows from the works of Hobbes and Mandeville. Such a view, according to Hume, contradicts the facts of moral experience and human nature, those that Hume's naturalistic explanation of morality is supposed to accommodate. So, despite having located the origin of justice "in the artifice and contrivance of men" (T 3.2.2.11; SBN 490–91), and despite of the fact that he maintains that "*self-interest* is the original motive to the *establishment* of justice" (T 3.2.2.24; SBN 499–500), Hume nevertheless argues that "a *sympathy* with public interest is the source of the *moral* approbation, which attends that virtue" (T 3.2.2.24; SBN 499–500). To this 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 or 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)

Even in instances wherein we perceive a moral distinction as the difference between artificial qualities, here between justice and injustice, the origin of the notion of moral distinctions that is acquired thereby is not explicable solely in terms of self-interest or arbitrary political and linguistic conventions. We must also consider,

Hume adds, that "if nature did not aid us in this particular, 'twou'd be in vain for politicians to talk of *honourable* or *dishonourable*, *praise-worthy* or *blameable*" (T 3.2.2.25; SBN 500).

What Hume means by nature's aid is the fact that we, all things being equal, feel "natural sentiments" (T 3.2.2.25; SBN 500), those that cannot emerge without sympathy, as Hume claims at T 3.2.2.24 (SBN 499–500). Of course, we must also consider that Hume, at T 3.3.1.15 (SBN, 581–82), locates the general point of view in the heart of the process by which we arrive at moral sentiments, and its role is to compensate for the variability of sympathy (T 3.3.1.14; SBN 580–81). Hence, it is reasonable to think that Hume's point, at T 3.2.2.24 (SBN 499–500) and T 3.2.2.25 (SBN 500), is not that moral distinctions, or moral sentiments for that matter, were dependent on sympathy alone. Rather, Hume seems to establish that without sympathy we would neither perceive moral qualities, such as particular virtues and vices, nor moral distinctions or the differences between opposite moral qualities.

Importantly, we feel these "natural sentiments" prior to and independently of arbitrary political or linguistic conventions. They are the class of distinctively moral sentiments discussed in *Treatise* 3.1.2, the kind of pains and pleasures "by which moral good or evil is known" (T 3.1.2.3; SBN 471) or perceived in the mind. Without these sentiments, words like "*honourable* or *dishonourable*, *praiseworthy* or *blameable* . . . wou'd be perfectly unintelligible" (T 3.2.2.25; SBN 500) because, as Hume had established at T 3.1.2.3 (SBN 471), the feeling of those very sentiments explains what it is to "have the sense of virtue," that is, moral approbation or disapprobation. Given that Hume has, at T 3.1.2.1 (SBN 470) and T 3.1.2.3 (SBN 471), as we have seen, grounded his position on moral distinctions in his account of the origin of moral qualities, he concludes, at T 3.2.2.25 (SBN 500), with the proposition that "nature"—that is, the "natural [distinctively moral] sentiments"—"must furnish the materials, and give us some notion of moral distinctions," prior to and independently of arbitrary political or linguistic conventions.

This is not to say that moral evaluation, understood as a complex process that enables us to reach judgments on moral matters, consists in nothing but the emergence of the sentiment by which we perceive moral qualities and moral distinctions. I separate the complex process of moral evaluation by which we form a moral perspective on the one hand, from its constitutive elements on the other—with the latter including not just moral sentiments and the activity of moral distinguishing (the experiencing of moral sentiments) but also, among other things, the outcomes of that activity (moral qualities and moral distinctions), the activation of sympathy (or, in the second *Enquiry*, the principle of humanity), and the general point of view. Hume's explanation of how we perceive moral qualities and moral distinctions is only a part of his broader account of the process of moral evaluation. I thus support the argument that we must separate the feeling of a specific moral sentiment (or moral distinguishing as I have defined it here) on

the one hand, from moral evaluation (or moral judging) on the other.[43] We must also avoid confusing the processes or activities in the mind with their epistemic objects or outcomes (in the mind), such as a moral distinction is, a point I defend in this paper.

Hume's explanation of the origin of moral perception enables him to reject skepticism about moral distinctions, though Hume, like Hobbes, also rejects the rationalist moral ontology and epistemology. As a result, Hume's theory presumably has an obvious advantage over that of Hobbes. Hume can explain the consistency and uniformity in moral language, not just in the use of terms like morally "*praiseworthy* or *blameable*" (T 3.2.2.25; SBN 500), or moral "praise or admiration" (T 3.1.2.3; SBN 471), but also in the use of "moral distinctions," as well as the expressions used to refer to moral qualities themselves. There may be disagreement regarding whether an action is morally good or evil, or a character virtuous or vicious, or regarding the exact nature of a moral quality. Regardless of these disagreements, the nature and origin of moral sentiments explains why we have uniform experiences (notions) of moral distinctions and, correspondingly, use the phrase "moral distinctions" to refer to differences that we experience between opposite moral qualities—between particular virtues and vices, between moral good and moral evil, or between right and wrong.

We find the same position on moral distinctions beyond the *Treatise*, in the second *Enquiry*. Here, Hume consistently separates moral qualities from moral distinctions and uses "moral distinctions" to refer to the differences felt between opposite moral qualities (see EPM 1.2; EPM 1.4, EPM 5.3, EPM 5.14, EPM 5.39, EPM 9.8; SBN 169–70, 170–71, 214, 217–18, 225–26, 273–74). He also treats these as outcomes of the activity of moral sense, that is, sympathy and humanity (EPM 9.7, EPM 9.8; SBN 273, 273–74).[44] Here, Hume also explicitly rejects skepticism about "the reality of moral distinctions" (EPM 1.2; SBN 169–70)[45]—a position that he attributes to "disingenuous disputants," presumably the likes of Hobbes and Mandeville. This is not to say that, in his later work, Hume embraces a position on moral distinctions that is inconsistent with his critique of Wollaston's and Clarke's moral ontology in the *Treatise*. Hume's point is that to deny moral distinctions, or to define them as artificial products of arbitrary political and linguistic conventions (or a product of interest) alone, is to contradict the facts of moral experience and human nature.

Skepticism about moral distinctions contradicts the fact that we have ideas of moral qualities and moral distinctions, as well as the fact that we naturally experience moral distinctions uniformly, all things being equal, as the differences between opposite moral qualities. It also contradicts the fact that, according to Hume:

> The difference, which nature has placed between one man and another, is so wide, and this difference is still so much farther widened, by education, example, and habit, that, where the opposite extremes come at once under our apprehension, there is no scepticism so scrupulous, and scarce any assurance so determined, as absolutely to deny all distinction between them. (EPM 1.2; SBN 169–70)

This observation explains why some scholars maintain that "moral distinctions," in Hume, refers to "the difference between good people and actions and evil people and actions."[46] However, that observation does not, in and of itself, explain why we label the perceived differences in people's actions and characters as distinctively moral differences, those that we perceive or discern as "opposite extremes" (EPM 1.2; SBN 169–70) within the moral realm. To explain this, Hume, I believe, also observes the following:

> Let a man's insensibility be ever so great, he must often be touched with the images of RIGHT and WRONG; and let his prejudices be ever so obstinate, he must observe, that others are susceptible of like impressions. The only way, therefore, of converting an antagonist of this kind, is to leave him to himself. (EPM 1.2; SBN 169–70)[47]

Hume's point here is that the apprehension of moral distinctions and, therefore, the idea we have of moral distinctions, is necessitated by the emergence of the very impression that explains how we perceive moral qualities themselves, in this case right or wrong, but also moral good or evil, as well as particular virtues and vices (like justice, kindness, and gratitude, or their opposites). Therefore, in the second *Enquiry* Hume uses the same strategy for solving the problem of moral distinctions, which he has articulated in *Treatise* 3.1.2 and deployed in *Treatise* 3.2.2. He grounds his position on moral distinctions in his account of the origin of moral qualities.

In this section, I have shown that Hume, in *Treatise* 3.1.2, still uses "moral distinctions" to discuss moral differences—the differences that we uniformly experience, when evaluating an object, between particular virtues and vices, between moral good and evil, or between right and wrong—just like he did in *Treatise* 3.1.1. I further argued that Hume consistently uses "moral distinctions" in this way in the later sections of the *Treatise* as well as in the second Enquiry. The term, however, no longer refers to mind-independent relations but perceptions in the mind—an outcome of the activity of moral distinguishing or the experiencing of distinctively moral sentiments. This enables Hume not just to offer a naturalistic explanation of the observable phenomena of our shared experience, thereby replacing the rationalist's moral epistemology, but also to reject Hobbesian skepticism about moral distinctions, despite also rejecting the rationalist moral ontology.

Hume's approach to moral distinctions, which appears to be the same in the *Treatise* and the second Enquiry, raises an important question. Namely: what is the basis on which Hume maintains that the emergence of a specific, single impression in the breast, moral pain or moral pleasure, simultaneously generates two distinguishable outcomes in the mind—the perception of a specific moral quality, moral good or moral evil for example, and the perception of a moral distinction, here, the difference between moral good and evil? This is the question that I now turn to.

4. Moral Distinctions and the Explanatory Basic Impressions

I have established that, for Hume, when we feel the "natural sentiments" (T 3.2.2.25; SBN 500)—that is, the "particular" (T 3.1.2.3; SBN 471), "peculiar" (T 3.1.2.4; SBN 471–72), and distinctively moral pains or pleasures—we thereby perceive not just a specific moral quality in an action or a character. According to Hume, we simultaneously, discern (non-inferentially) a moral distinction or the difference between the perceived moral quality (natural or artificial) and its opposite. The perceiving of moral distinctions is non-inferential because its origin cannot lie in reasoning—a point that Hume establishes at T 3.1.2.1 (SBN 470). Hence, the origin of moral perception lies in the sentiment, though the relevant feeling or sentiment is, as Hume observes in *Treatise* 3.1.2, "commonly so soft and gentle, that we are apt to confound it with an idea" (T 3.1.2.1; SBN 470).

This argument raises the following question: how can the emergence of a single sentiment in the breast, moral pain *or* moral pleasure, by which we perceive a specific quality, either moral evil or moral good for example, at the same time enable us to distinguish the perceived quality from its opposite? The answer to this question, as I show in this, the concluding section of the paper, lies in the fact that the emergence of the distinctively moral sentiment is, for Hume, explanatorily basic.[48] The emergence of the moral sentiment makes it evident that it is—within the moral realm—distinct from the strictly opposite moral sentiment. Given that when I feel a moral sentiment, say moral pleasure, I thus perceive a specific moral quality, a particular virtue, like justice for example, the emergence of that sentiment also makes it evident that the perceived moral quality is different from and contrary to moral vice, here, injustice. Of course, agents can still confuse these calm sentiments with non-moral sentiments (T 3.1.2.4; SBN 471–72), with ideas (T 3.1.2.1; SBN 470) or reason (T 2.3.3.8; SBN 417), though presumably not "by a man of temper and judgment" (T 3.1.2.4; SBN 471–72) but rather "by those, who judge of things from the first view and appearance" (T 2.3.3.8; SBN 417).

So, it seems that "moral distinctions" in Hume does not refer to the difference between moral and non-moral qualities, as some commentators maintain.[49] Rather, Hume locates the origin of moral distinctions and moral qualities in one and the same impression—a distinctively moral sentiment. This suggests that the terms

like "moral distinguishing" and "moral discrimination" have the same referent, not that "moral distinction" refers to the difference we experience between moral and non-moral properties. What makes moral differences distinctively moral, I contend, is the fact that we perceive them within the moral realm itself.

A possible objection to my argument is that I have failed to take into consideration the fact that, for Hume, when an agent evaluates something, there could be many objects of evaluation, for example, qualities per se, or different aspects of qualities, actions, and characters. According to this objection, an object of assessment can at times have several morally relevant aspects, which could yield different moral emotions and give rise to what we may experience as opposing sentiments. This variety of aspects is understandable because a moral quality can be, as Hume claims in the second *Enquiry, "useful, or agreeable to a man himself, or to others"* (EPM D.37; SBN 336).[50] This implies that we can look at one and the same quality by fixing on four of its aspects: its usefulness to others, or to the agent, and its agreeability to others, or to the agent. Hence, we can, during the complex process of moral evaluating, detect one quality, and yet see it in several different ways, and thus feel several moral sentiments. This, in turn, suggests that I could feel several moral sentiments while evaluating an object, say a person's character, and that some of these sentiments may appear to me as the opposite of, or contrary to, one another.

While this adds to the explanation of why whenever we perceive moral qualities themselves, we may also have the experience of moral distinctions, it does not explain how we obtain the idea of a moral distinction. For these sentiments are not *strictly opposite* to one another, as they may be directed at different character traits in the person being evaluated. Hence, I do not reject the possibility of feeling several different moral sentiments while evaluating an object and experiencing them as opposites of one another. My position is that the term "moral distinctions" does not apply here; it applies narrowly to the difference between strictly opposite moral qualities. The reason for this is that Hume's moral psychology seems to preclude the possibility for two strictly opposite moral sentiments to simultaneously emerge in the mind.[51] One and the same agent cannot simultaneously experience moral pleasure and moral pain, as its strict opposite, in response to the same object considered under the same aspect. This holds even though Hume gives many examples of conflicts of moral sentiments that are fixed on different aspects of the same quality or action and are, therefore, not in strict opposition.

Yet another possible objection to this reading now arises. If the claim that strictly opposite sentiments cannot, simultaneously, arise in the breast applies only to moral impressions, it runs the risk of being rejected on the grounds of being an ad hoc thesis. However, we have good reason not to think of it in that way. For the thesis potentially applies not just to moral impressions but to all forms of pain and pleasure, approval and disapproval, that is, *to all impressions*, under the

condition that they are directed at the same object, and under the same aspect, and for that reason count as strictly opposite to one another. We see this, for example, in Hume's discussion of the passions of pride and humility in *Treatise* 2.1.2. Here, Hume writes that although pride and humility are "directly contrary" (T 2.1.2.2; SBN 277), that is, in strict opposition because they are fixed on the same object—"the self"—these passions cannot arise simultaneously as long as the self is also conceived of as their cause. He explicitly asserts that in such instances "'[t] is impossible a man can at the same time be both proud and humble" (T 2.1.2.3; SBN 277–78); a man is *either* proud *or* humble. To this, Hume adds:

> [I]n the present case neither of the passions cou'd ever become superior; because supposing it to be the view only of ourself, which excited them, that being perfectly indifferent to either, must produce both in the very same proportion; or in other words, can produce neither. To excite any passion, and at the same time raise an equal share of its antagonist, is immediately to undo what was done, and must leave the mind at last perfectly calm and indifferent. (T 2.1.2.3; SBN 277–78, and T 2.3.3.8; SBN 417)[52]

The case is the same with moral impressions. In specific instances of moral distinguishing, we cannot simultaneously feel two strictly opposite or "antagonistic" moral sentiments, that is, sentiments focused on one and the same object of evaluation. We can feel either moral pain or moral pleasure, thereby perceiving or experiencing either moral evil or moral good in an action, or, if we evaluate a character trait, either a particular moral vice or a particular virtue. Hence, although moral sentiments are generally calm and subtle, felt with little internal turmoil, the having of moral sentiments is not an indifferent activity. This is evident in Appendix 1 to the second *Enquiry*. Here, Hume suggests that pains and pleasures are "the ultimate ends of human actions" (EPM App1.18; SBN 293). He offers the following explanation:

> Now as virtue is an end, and is desirable on its own account, without fee and reward, merely, for the immediate satisfaction which it conveys; it is requisite that there should be some sentiment, which it touches; some internal taste or feeling, or whatever you please to call it, which distinguishes moral good and evil, and which embraces the one and rejects the other. (EPM App1.20; SBN 293–94)

In this passage, Hume explicitly treats moral sentiments as explanatorily basic. The nature of moral impressions and, by extension, the activity of moral distinguishing or having a moral sentiment, is such that when in the course of moral

evaluation a single moral sentiment emerges in the breast (say, moral pleasure), we thereby perceive a moral quality (moral goodness for example, or a particular virtue, such as gratitude), and, within the moral realm, simultaneously "reject" the other, where the "other" refers to moral pain, or the moral quality that is strictly opposite to the one perceived (here, moral evil, or ingratitude).

Although the feeling of a specific sentiment is a result of the complex process of moral evaluation, the "rejecting" of the opposite sentiment, within the moral realm, is not a result of some complex process. We become aware of the distinction between strictly opposite sentiments by feeling only one of these sentiments, in instances where these sentiments would be fixed on (or caused by) one and the same object. This is because the strictly opposite sentiments naturally pull us in opposite directions in such a way that only one can emerge in the mind. We cannot *at the same time* feel both moral pain and moral pleasure as its strict opposite; we perceive either a particular virtue or vice, moral good or evil, right or wrong, or moral beauty or deformity. Otherwise, we would not be able, according to Hume, to form a moral perspective at all, for the result would be an indifferent state of mind. This explains why Hume did not consider instances of feeling sentiments that are not strictly opposite to one another as sufficient to explain the origin of moral distinctions; these are fixed on different aspects of the same quality or action.

Notwithstanding the complexity of Hume's argument on the nature of moral evaluation, Hume's solution to the problem of moral distinctions appears to be simple. As Hume suggests at T 3.1.2.4 (SBN 471–72), when I feel the moral sentiment, if I am attentive enough, I should be aware of it as distinct from non-moral sentiments, for example the sentiment from interest. Of course, distinctively moral sentiments can still be confused with non-moral sentiments. The sentiments "from interest and morals," Hume also observes, "are apt to be confounded, and naturally run into one another" (T 3.1.2.4; SBN 471–72). However, Hume also adds that they are nevertheless distinct and distinguishable: "[T]his hinders not, but that the sentiments are, in themselves, distinct; and a man of temper and judgment may preserve himself from these illusions" (T 3.1.2.4; SBN 471–72), a point he returns to at T 3.2.2.25 (SBN 500). Importantly, I should simultaneously become aware of the difference between the felt moral sentiment and the moral sentiment that is strictly opposite to it. Correspondingly, when I thus perceive a moral quality, a particular moral virtue (justice for example), if I have felt moral pleasure, I should immediately become aware (non-inferentially) of the difference between that quality and its strict opposite, namely moral vice (here, injustice)—that is to say, moral distinction.

The simultaneous emergence of the strictly opposite sentiment, moral pain, is neither possible nor necessary for us, in instances of moral distinguishing—an activity that is not to be confused with the complex process of moral evaluation (or moral judging)—to discern the difference between the two strictly opposite

moral qualities. This explains why Hume maintains, at T 3.1.2.3 (SBN 471), that to solve the problem of the origin of moral distinctions "it will be sufficient to shew the principles" wherein the origin of moral qualities lies. These distinctively moral sentiments are natural and experienced uniformly, all things being equal, prior to and independently of arbitrary political and linguistic conventions. It is for this reason that Hume can reject skepticism about moral distinctions, despite him also arguing that the term "moral distinctions" does not represent anything external to the mind.

NOTES

1 Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the 41st International Hume Society Conference in 2014 at the Portland State University, at the 2015 Philosophy Seminar in the School of Humanities and Languages, UNSW, and at the 2016 School of Philosophy and Theology Seminar at the University of Notre Dame Sydney. I have benefitted from the questions and comments of those in attendance on those occasions. I am very grateful to my commentator in Portland, James Baillie, as well as to Peter Kail, Willem Lemmens, Anik Waldow, Lucy M. Smith, Stephen Gaukroger, Melissa Merritt, and Michael B. Gill, for extensive comments and discussion leading to a much–improved paper. My profound thanks to two anonymous referees for *Hume Studies*, and to the editors Karl Schafer, Amy Schmitter, and Ann Levey, for invaluable feedback and encouragement.

References are to Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by Norton and Norton, hereafter cited in the text as "T" followed by Book, part, section, and paragraph number; and to Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by L. A. Selby–Bigge, revised by P. H. Nidditch, cited in the text as "SBN" followed by the page number.

2 Cohon, *Hume's Morality*, 80.

3 Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment*, 187.

4 Reference is to *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, abbreviated as "EPM," followed by section and paragraph numbers from the Tom L. Beauchamp edition, and the corresponding page numbers in the 1975 edition, revised by Nidditch, abbreviated to "SBN."

5 See Gill, *British Moralists* and *Humean Moral Pluralism*, 148.

6 Taylor, ed., *Reading Hume*. The case is the same with other, more recent collections of papers or monographs dedicated to analysis of Hume's opus. See, for example: Russell, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Hume*; Reed and Vitz, eds., *Hume's Moral Philosophy*; Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*; Pigden, ed., *Hume on Motivation and Virtue*; Norton and Taylor, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*; Radcliffe, ed., *A Companion to Hume*; Botros, Hume, *Reason and Morality*; and Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, 176.

7 Radcliffe, "Hume on Motivating Sentiments," 37. See also Russell, *Freedom and Moral Sentiment*, 63.

8 "Hume on Motivating Sentiments," 41.

9 Taylor, "Hume's Later Moral Philosophy," 323.

10 Heydt, "Hume's Innovative Taxonomy of Virtues," 128.

11 Norton, "The Foundations of Morality in Hume's *Treatise*," 270. See also Pitson, "Hume on Morals and Animals," 641 and "Sympathy, Humanity, and the Foundation of Morals," 116.

12 This is visible in Baillie's suggestion that the question "*[w]hether 'tis by means of our ideas or impressions we distinguish betwixt vice and virtue, and pronounce an action blameable or praise–worthy*" (T 3.1.1.3; SBN 456) is about how "we come to regard certain actions or character traits as instances of vice or virtue, and to morally condemn or endorse them," *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hume on Morality*, 97. Whereas I argue that in that passage Hume asks yet another question. Namely: how we come to discern moral distinctions, that is, the differences perceived between or "betwixt" strictly opposite moral qualities—for example, the difference between justice and injustice?

13 Owen, *Hume's Reason*, 200. Snare holds a similar view in *Morals, Motivation, and Convention*, 14. See also Oddie, "Experiences of Value," 124.

14 Owen, "Reason, Belief, and the Passions," 336.

15 Capaldi, *Hume's Place in Moral Philosophy*, 113.

16 *Hume's Place*, 114 and 48.

17 Nuyen, "Hume on Animals and Morality," 102.

18 *Hume's Place*, 114.

19 Broiles, *The Moral Philosophy of David Hume*, 9.

20 Norton, "The Foundations of Morality in Hume's *Treatise*," 288.

21 Kail, "The Moral Sense in the Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals," 174.

22 See Cohon, *Hume's Morality*; Corliss G. Swain, "Passionate Objectivity"; and Norton, *David Hume*, and "Hume's Moral Ontology."

23 Schafer, "Hume on Practical Reason," 365 and 376n33.

24 Cohon not only equates the expression "moral distinction" with "moral distinguishing," describing "the *process of distinction*" as "*distinguishing*," but also suggests it is synonymous with "moral discrimination," that is to say, "moral evaluation." For she also maintains that "moral discrimination" is synonymous with the expression "moral evaluation," *Hume's Morality*, 120–21. See also the "Index," specifically the entry for "moral evaluation or discrimination," 281.

25 I maintain that in the narrow context of *Treatise* 3.1.1 Hume uses "moral distinctions" to refer to an object of perception that is external to the observer, a use that reflects the position of Hume's moral rationalist opponent as I will show in section 2. However, I do not thereby maintain that Hume endorses his opponent's position. I discuss Hume's position in sections 3 and 4 here.

26 *Cognition and Commitment*, 187. Mackie makes a similar point in *Hume's Moral Theory*, 51.

27 For a contrary view, see Radcliffe, *Hume, Passion, and Action*.

28 Penelhum, "Butler and Hume," 251.

29 I do not wish to join a debate concerning whether the names cited here deserve to be mentioned as representative of moral rationalism or not. Locke, for example, is known for his engagement in the experimental science of human nature, but his moral epistemology is that of an abstract moral rationalist. Locke famously asserted that "[m]orality [is] amongst the Sciences capable of Demonstration," *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, IV.iii.18, 549, and that this is the case because "moral Rules are capable of Demonstration," I.iii.1, 66. Locke thus also acknowledges that we have ideas of moral relations, though in his second reply to Bishop Worcester, Locke also denies that demonstration in morality is a proof of existence of such relations, *The Works of John Locke*, 3: 239.

30 References are from the E. C. Mossner and J. V. Price edition, hereafter cited in the text as "*Letter*" followed by the page number.

31 As Feinberg notes, Hume is wrong to attribute to Wollaston the argument that the origin of moral qualities lies in the action's capacity, or tendency, to cause truth-apt judgments in an observer's mind, "Wollaston and his critics," 347.

32 Wollaston develops most of these arguments in Section 1 of his *Religion of Nature Delineated*, hereafter abbreviated as "RND" followed by the page number.

33 For a debate on how to interpret this aspect of Wollaston's work, see: Lucci, "William Wollaston's Religion of Nature"; Tilley, "The Problem of Inconsistency in Wollaston's Moral Theory" and "Wollaston's Early Critics"; Johnson, "Hume's Refutation of—Wollaston?"; Joynton, "The Problem of Circularity in Wollaston's Moral Philosophy" and "Wollaston's Theory of Declarative Actions"; and Thompson, *The Ethics of William Wollaston*.

34 In the secondary literature concerned with Wollaston's work there is also an ongoing debate regarding how to interpret his claim that moral action can be perceived as truth-apt. Some scholars argue that he literally meant it, claiming that actions are truth-apt. Others disagree, suggesting that actions per se are not truth-apt but imply or cause truth-apt propositions. See, for example: Kydd, *Reason and Conduct in Hume's Treatise*, 32–33; Woelfel, "William Wollaston's Religion of Nature"; and Baillie, *Hume on Morality*, 99–111. Hume is among those who maintained that Wollaston should not be interpreted literally. Wollaston's point, Hume claims, is that moral acts, though not literally truth-apt, can indirectly be treated as truth-evaluable because they cause (or imply) truth-apt judgments in an observer's mind (T 3.1.1.15; SBN 461).

35 References to Works are to the 1738 edition of *The Works of Samuel Clarke*, followed by the volume and page numbers.

36 See also *Works* 1: 64.

37 Voluntarism can also be read as the thesis that morality is somehow dependent on, or changeable by, the divine will (call it religious voluntarism)—a thesis attacked by Whichcote, Shaftesbury, Clarke, Cudworth, and Wollaston, among others. For useful discussion on moral voluntarism in the period, see Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason*;

Schneewind, "Voluntarism and the Foundations of Ethics," *The Invention of Autonomy* and *Essays on the History of Moral Philosophy*.

38 Mandeville, as Mackie notes, acknowledged the importance of affections in the human life, but pushed this point so far, according to Mackie, that he became not only "close in spirit to Hobbes . . . [but perhaps] even more cynical . . . than Hobbes," *Hume's Moral Theory*, 23.

39 Balguy, *The Foundation of Moral Goodness*, 20–1 and 25.

40 Price, *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*, 66–7 and 72–3.

41 Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 318–9.

42 Cudworth, *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, 3 and 19, 61, 201.

43 For a recent exposition of this view, see Sayre-McCord, "Hume on the Artificial Virtues," 435–69.

44 The question of what role Hume assigns to sympathy and humanity in morality, in the *Treatise* and the second *Enquiry*, is important but one that will not be taken up in this essay. For a useful, more recent survey of literature and discussion on this topic, see Pitson, "Sympathy, Humanity, and the Foundation of Morals."

45 See also EPM 5.3 (SBN 214).

46 Cohon, *Hume's Morality*, 79–80.

47 See also EPM 9.7, EPM 9.8 (SBN 273, 273–4).

48 The argument developed in this section has greatly benefited from James Baillie's penetrating comments on a version of this paper presented at the 41st International Hume Society Conference in 2014 at the Portland State University.

49 See, for example, Heydt, "Hume's Innovative Taxonomy of Virtues," 128, and *Baillie, Hume on Morality*, 117.

50 See also and EPM 9.1 (SBN 268–69) and, in the *Treatise*, T 3.3.1.24, T 3.3.1.25, T 3.3.1.26, T 3.3.1.27, T 3.3.2.16, T 3.3.5.1 (SBN 587–8, 588–9, 589, 589–90, 601, 614).

51 I am aware that my point is debatable, and I will defend it briefly. For a contrasting interpretation of Hume's position, see Gill, *Humean Moral Pluralism*, particularly chap. 2.

52 The relevant passions can still be fixed on, or caused by, different aspects of an object. So, Hume adds, that "where he has different reasons for these passions, as frequently happens, the passions either take place alternately; or if they encounter, the one annihilates the other, as far as its strength goes, and the remainder only of that, which is superior, continues to operate upon the mind" (T 2.1.2.3; SBN 277–78). As we have just seen, the same argument applies to the emergence of moral sentiments.

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