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Reply to My Critics

*Hume Studies* Volume 45, Number 1–  
2, 2019, pp. 179–186

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# Reply to My Critics

JACQUELINE A. TAYLOR

## I

I thank Genevieve Lloyd for her generous and thought-provoking comments and questions. She raises two distinct issues: one regarding how to think about the way in which Hume's account of pride might be innovative, and the other about how a genre of philosophical writing limits or opens up what and how an author might discuss the subject at hand. She sets both issues in the context of comparing Spinoza with Hume.

Lloyd reminds us that A. O. Hirschman, in *The Passions and the Interests*, charts a conceptual shift between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, such that the change in political and economic conditions, heralding the rise of capitalism, led to the deposing of the traditional opposition between reason and passion in favor of their alliance in the form of rational interest. Is Hume effecting a similar conceptual shift with pride? This is an excellent question, and one I had not explicitly addressed in the book. In the *Treatise* account of pride, Hume purports to be critically examining the "nature, origin, causes, and effects" of the indirect passions" (T 2.1.1.3; SBN 276).<sup>1</sup> In establishing the origin of pride by way of a double association of ideas and impressions, we see Hume at his most experimental, finding the general causes and effects that characterize every occurrence of pride. But, when he turns to the particular occasioning causes of pride, an account meant to provide evidence for the hypothesis regarding the double association, Hume presents general categories of causes, such as qualities of mind and of body, or wealth, that reflect the facts about what people take pride in, or are esteemed for, in the observation of "common life." Hume does here differ from Spinoza's more traditional (and in a sense Christianized) view of pride as an unjust estimation

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of oneself, or a putting of oneself above others (including God). For Hume, people justly take pride in their talents or virtue, their beautiful or talented children, as well as their beautiful house. He had also described these causes as non-original insofar as what counts as, say, virtue or a fine house will track such things as custom or trends, technological innovation or deprivation, and in particular the way in which sympathetic communication and mirroring help to create and sustain the contours of shared values.

I agree with Lloyd's point that Spinoza's distinction between the proud person's imagination-based inadequate idea of himself and someone whose rightful self-esteem is based on a true understanding of his capacities differs from the role that Hume assigns the imagination, especially with respect to the production of pride, and the sympathy-based shaping of pride's contours. As a naturalist, Hume takes an interest in what Lloyd terms sympathy's darker side, such as how sympathetic communication between those in a community with an extreme imbalance of power can enhance the pride of the powerful or the humility of the powerless. In his later work, especially the study in the *Essays* of moral causes, both fixed and accidental, we can reconstruct a broader and more in-depth account of the different kinds of institutional and less formal arrangements that can lead to greater or lesser sociability and society-wide flourishing. In the essay genre, and in the later moral philosophy of the *Enquiry*, Hume attends more fully to the social mores of common life, setting aside the detailed mental associationism of the *Treatise* in favor of locating the foundation of morals and the markers of social flourishing (knowledge, industry and humanity) in an observable human nature embedded in social contexts and linguistic conventions (for example, that of morality rather than self-interest, or of gallantry and politeness).

## II

Willem Lemmens has been a friend and fellow Hume researcher for a number of years, and I have valued the opportunities to visit beautiful Antwerp to discuss sympathy and Hume, and to work with some of his graduate students. In his remarks, Lemmens denies that Hume has reformist or emancipatory aims that would impart a normative dimension to his moral philosophy. For example, Hume's discussion of humanity is part of his speculative philosophy regarding morals, not an endorsement of the power of humanity to promote sociability and social flourishing. Similarly, resentment, as part of human nature, is one of the conditions that make justice necessary and possible for us. In interpreting Hume's moral philosophy, the notion of normativity is a vexed one (I do not believe I mentioned the word in my book). I did not claim that Hume has emancipatory aims akin to those, for example, of the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English radicals and reformers, or the campaigns for civil and other rights. Rather, I pointed to Hume's evident awareness in his discussion of gallantry and politeness of the value of a specific discourse, where a speaker may "yield the superiority" to the otherwise socially or politically disadvantaged, such as strangers or women, through the public enactment of civility and respect, to promote a more equal "intercourse of minds."<sup>2</sup> Hume specifically contrasts politeness and gallantry with ancient rusticity, and aligns the

former with virtues such as generosity, wisdom, and prudence, while the ancient men reduce “their females to the most abject slavery; by confining them, by beating them, by selling them, by killing them.”<sup>3</sup> Hume may of course be *describing* the difference between two kinds of societies, but since he is in this essay charting the rise and progress of arts, sciences, economies, and manners that lead to the flourishing of more rather than fewer members of a society, I read him as also *endorsing* modern manners, virtues, and the cultivation of humanity, and *condemning* the vices, including the treatment of women, of the ancients. A main implication, in my view, is that Hume’s insights provide resources for those of us interested in analyzing and charting ways to bridge more invidious socially constructed divisions.

Regarding resentment, Lemmens is right that Hume presents as a condition of justice our having the capacity to make felt the effects of resentment by those who injure, insult, or oppress us. But Hume is also making the point that the society of human beings, their association together based on a shared nature, “supposes a degree of equality” (EPM 3.18; SBN 190).<sup>4</sup> It is then, according to Hume, a fact about human beings that they stand in relation to one another in terms of some degree of equality, namely, that which is a ground for rights. This contrasts with a relation such as that between man and other animals, which is characterized by “absolute command on the one side, and servile obedience on the other,” that would place us under a duty of compassion rather than justice (EPM 3.18; SBN 190). A person’s resentment, even if it goes unanswered, thus functions as a complaint against injustice, or demand for more just treatment.

Lemmens suggests that for Hume, human nature is perhaps best realized through a society characterized by rank and other social distinctions such as that of gender, and that this is a reason for Hume to favor such distinctions. I put the point differently. According to Hume, government, which is needed for our continued association, in making “a distinction in property . . . establishes the ranks of men,” which in turn produces physical differences (“the skin, pores, muscles, and nerves of a day-labourer”)—differences to the mental fabric and our passionate makeup, as well persons’ sense of who they are in terms of social standing, and their understanding of who has claims to social authority (T 2.3.1.9; SBN 402). In the chapter of my book on power and “the philosophy of our passions,” I drew attention to Hume’s explanation of how comparison and mutual sympathetic mirroring worked to show how “the vanity of power, or shame of slavery, are much augmented by the consideration of the persons, over whom we exercise our authority, or who exercise it over us” (T 2.1.10.12; SBN 315). I take him here to be *describing* how an extreme imbalance of power informs a person’s sense of herself, based on her sympathetic communication of her own passions or sentiments and the reception of those of others, as well as their responses to them. The influence of mirrored sentiments shows how an initial sense of humility becomes an abject humility, while pride, in turn, becomes pride in having power over the abject. The ongoing mirroring of passionate responses contributes to a sense of identity in relation to others. Nevertheless, in his later works, there is no doubt that Hume regards the influence of the extreme imbalance in social relations, such as that between ancient men and women, or masters and slaves, and the production of a power-enhanced pride or an abject humility in response to that pride and power,

as the darker workings of sympathy. Moreover, in the *Enquiry*, the government-established ranks in the more robust and healthy economy (for example, day-laborer, vassal, and lord, in contrast to that of the slave-holding society) are not wholly constitutive of our passionate or sentimental attitudes towards one another. Hume writes:

A man, who has cured himself of all ridiculous prepossessions, and is fully, sincerely, and steadily convinced, from experience as well as philosophy, that the difference of fortune makes less difference in happiness than is vulgarly imagined; such a one does not measure out degrees of esteem according to the rent-rolls of his acquaintance. He may, indeed, externally pay a superior deference to the great lord above the vassal; because riches are the most convenient, being the most fixed and determinate, source of distinction: But his internal sentiments are more regulated by the personal characters of men, than by the accidental and capricious favours of fortune. (EPM 6.34; SBN 248)

The point Hume makes, and it is an important one, is related to the account I give of the discourses of politeness or gallantry in effecting a greater semblance of equality. In the example above, the norms associated with the social roles, such as that of lord and vassal, require the public performance of respect and deference to the lord. While it may sound as if the internal sentiments that value the character of the vassal over that of the lord find no public expression, we know, and I believe Hume knew, that there are more or less subtle ways of indicating one's internal sentiments (see *Reflecting Subjects*, 174–75, 179). My point, in response to Lemmens, is that even if social stratification is inevitable, Hume's description of our actual experiences of the expression of moral attitudes, which in some circumstances may not be *fully* separable from attitudes that get expressed in response to wealth or power, carry some normative weight. Against the backdrop of the actual social contexts in which we find ourselves, we can respond to one another in various ways, to moral character as well as rank, to signal different levels of valuation or esteem. Hume's account of the complex ways in which we negotiate the values of persons suggests he favors some valuations more than others. While some of high rank may particularly value the due deference they receive based on their social standing, Hume indicates that a moral esteem for personal merit has as its object something with more worth.

Regarding Humean sympathy, I think Hume does offer a coherent, albeit quite complex explanation of its workings. It explains different sort of phenomena: the reinforcement of particular cultural meanings and values, for example, when there is "any peculiar similarity in our manners, or character, or country, or language" (T 2.1.11.5; SBN 318); the sustaining or undermining of pride; the production of moral sentiments, and so on. This is an area where much more work might be done to see how Hume's account meshes with contemporary work, say, in neuroscience. Consider contemporary work on fear as a central state: fear, anxiety, and panic stand on a continuum with respect to threat imminence, and there may be different fear circuits depending on kinds of stimuli. We might argue for something similar for sympathy as a central state: contagion, sympathetic identification regarding causes, manners,

or temperament, and the cultivation of a sense of humanity all stand on a continuum with respect to the communication of opinions, passions, and sentiments, depending on what the sympathetic state is a response to.<sup>5</sup> I drew attention to Hume's recognition of sympathy's darker side, whether in the form of contagious sublime sentiments, or the zealous partiality of factions and seditions. That sympathy functions to create and sustain partialities does not militate against a more reason-informed sense of humanity that also has its source in sympathy. Hume develops his account of humanity in the *Enquiry*, emphasizing the need for reasoning, conversation, and negotiation, in order to form a general standard based on general views of useful or pernicious character traits.

### III

Since Lemmens and Dario Perinetti offer similar criticisms regarding my argument for Hume's advancing different accounts of moral evaluation between the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*, I will respond to both of them below. As I argue in chapter 4, Hume does provide some resources in *Treatise* Book 3 for an account of moral evaluation that gives some role to an independent and reason-informed judgment of the moral spectator; for example, in urging that virtue in rags is still virtue, Hume argues that we can in such cases rely on our understanding of the general tendency of character traits, even when someone cannot, due to circumstances, effectively exercise a trait she possesses. Nevertheless, Hume insists that we can bring a moral subject nearer, or evaluate his character impartially, "by a sympathy with those, who have any commerce with the person we consider;" and that our sympathy with *their* pleasures, pains, or interests is the basis for *our* moral approval or blame (T 3.3.1.18; SBN 583). I pointed to several passages that suggest an over-reliance on the passions or sentiments of others as the basis for our own moral sentiment. Consider the following:

Since every quality in ourselves or others, which gives pleasure, always causes pride or love; as every one, that produces uneasiness, excites humility or hatred: It follows, that these two particulars are to be consider'd as equivalent, with regard to our mental qualities, *virtue* and the power of producing love or pride, *vice* and the power of producing humility or hatred. In every case, therefore, we must judge of the one by the other; and may pronounce any *quality* of the mind virtuous, which causes love or pride; and any one vicious, which causes hatred or humility. (T 3.3.1.3; SBN 574)

The problem lies in the inference that Hume entitles one to draw in observing someone's love for a particular agent. My love for a partner's courageous daring and skill in stealing from or defrauding others is grounds for an observer to pronounce virtuous the quality that causes my love.

More problematic is Hume's argument for how we establish "the standard of virtue and morality" to correct the variable sentiments that arise when the moral subject is too distant from us to engage our natural sympathy:

In judging of characters, the only interest or pleasure, which appears the same to every spectator, is that of the person himself, whose character is examin'd; or that of persons, who have a connexion with him. And tho' such interests and pleasures touch us more faintly than our own, yet being more constant and universal, they counter-balance the latter even in practice, and are alone admitted in speculation as the standard of virtue and morality. They alone produce that particular feeling or sentiment, on which moral distinctions depend. (T 3.3.1.30; SBN 590)

Hume makes it quite clear: the interests and pleasures of the agent or those whom she affects are “more constant and universal,” and “counter-balance” our own natural response, and serve as “the standard of virtue and morality.” That is, their interests and pleasures are those with which we sympathize in order to conform our own sentiments accordingly. Perinetti suggests that another passage shows that Hume thinks we make an independent judgment regarding someone’s character. So, in judging the good qualities of the benevolent person, we:

confine our view, to that narrow circle, in which any person moves, in order to form a judgment of his moral character. When the natural tendency of his passions leads him to be serviceable and useful within his sphere, we approve of his character, and love his person, by a sympathy with the sentiments of those who have a more particular connexion with him. (T 3.3.3.2; SBN 602)

According to Perinetti, this passage indicates that our evaluation relies on our own evaluation of the person’s durable character traits. He acknowledges that we do sympathize with the sentiments of those in the agent’s sphere, so that the idea we form of their sentiments converts into a moral sentiment. But our moral approval or blame does not arise from our sympathy with their sentiments. I read this passage differently. Hume writes explicitly that “we approve of his character, and love his person, by a sympathy with the sentiments of those who have a more particular connexion with him.” The problem that this passage points to is Hume’s eagerness to account for our moral sentiments arising through association, a process that is, in a sense, similar to that of indirect passions. The generation of our approval or blame requires an antecedent pleasure or pain for us to sympathize with, so Hume relies on the pleasures or pains of those affected by the agent’s character. In contrast to Perinetti’s view, I find these passages decisive for an account of moral evaluation that gives too great a role to the pleasures, pains, and interests of those in an agent’s sphere. Hume sought to correct this account in the *Enquiry*.

In that work, Hume assigns good reasoning a considerable role in producing appropriate moral sentiments that accurately assess the tendencies of character traits. That accurate assessment is crucial for touching our humanity, a sense or principle that itself works to interest us in, and give us some concern for, the happiness and misery of others. I do not argue, as Perinetti suggests, that Hume abandons sympathy in favor of humanity. Rather, I argue that a broader conception of sympathy serves to generate different kinds of moral sentiments.

An immediate and unreflective sympathy produces through contagion, for example, the sentiment of sublime admiration in response to the immediately agreeable greatness of mind possessed by the ancient heroes and heroines. We cannot help but respond immediately to the charms of an agent's compassion in action. Humanity, Hume indicates, is grounded in the same sympathy; as he notes at the end of section 5 of the *Enquiry*, regarding the progress of his argument, consideration of qualities useful to ourselves and then qualities immediately agreeable to the self or others, "will bring a farther confirmation of the present theory, by showing the rise of *other sentiments* of esteem and regard from the *same or like principles*" (EPM 5.47; SBN 232, emphases added).

The principle of humanity produces reason-informed sentiments of approval or blame in response to the useful or pernicious tendencies of character traits. It does so not through our sympathy with the pleasures and pains of those affected by an agent's character. Rather, we establish a general standard of virtue by reasoning together (gathering facts, comparing cases, taking notes of relations, and so on regarding the tendencies of traits and policies) and conversing in terms of a specifically moral discourse, to arrive at (more or less shared) preferences for the qualities that make up personal merit.

Perinetti has advocated for an important historical dimension in Hume's *Treatise*, and I look forward to the monograph he is preparing on this. Regarding, however, his comments on my comparison between Hume and Kant on the possibility of autonomy (or independent judgment, as I put it), I do not ascribe to Hume a weak and Whiggish view of moral progress. Indeed, I make it clear that any such progress, for example, in a group securing a right that they were previously denied, while an achievement, may always be subject to the kinds of countervailing forces (tyranny or extremism, for example) that may gain hold and threaten to undo such accomplishments. Hume's position here, his comparison between a "party of humankind" and sympathetic yet factious partialities, is nuanced and subtle, and deserves further careful analysis and interpretation (EPM 9.9; SBN 275).

## NOTES

1 References to the *Treatise* are to Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. 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*, ed. Selby-Bigge, rev. by Nidditch, cited in the text as "SBN" followed by the page number.

2 Hume, "Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," in *Essays*, 132.

3 "Rise and Progress," 133.

4 References are to Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Beauchamp, hereafter cited in the text as “EPM” followed by section and paragraph number, and to Hume, *Enquiries Concerning the Principles of Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Selby-Bigge, rev. by Nidditch, hereafter cited in the text as “SBN” followed by page numbers.

5 See Adolphs, “The Biology of Fear.”

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