SHADOW-BOXING:
HUMEAN SELVES AND MORAL JUDGEMENT

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SHADOW-BOXING: HUMEAN SELVES AND MORAL JUDGEMENT

by

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Abstract

In Book I part IV of the *Treatise of Human Nature* David Hume argues that it is impossible to have an idea of ourselves enduring the same through time. We experience many and varying transient impressions over the course of our lives and our ideas are ultimately derived from and enlivened by our impressions, he explains. Now, if an enduring idea requires an enduring impression and an enduring impression is impossible, an enduring idea of personal identity is likewise impossible.

The implications are such that we can only ever know Hume's "self" as an historical entity and, at best, our knowledge can only ever be approximate, along the lines of "Jane is x type of person *presently*." Our judgements must therefore refer to varying instantiations of "self" rather than an *enduring* self. Assuming the authenticity and adequacy of judgements only hold so long as the judgement actually refers to the nature of the judged, judgement must prove superfluous and obsolete the moment one's identity changes.

Hume *does* attempt to allow for judgement later in the *Treatise*, arguing moral judgements are grounded in the sympathetic emotional responses of pleasure and pain and are refined by taking account of some general and stable points of view. Accordingly, the moral point of view must call into operation at least one sentiment common to all (normal) persons, otherwise it would not succeed in bringing everybody's judgements into agreement.

Given these considerations, I argue that (1) Hume's moral stance ultimately has its basis in *our* perceptions of another, insofar as it assumes that you or I can know what it is like to be that person. As such, it does not give us neutrality but rather a situated impartiality, and (2) Supposing our knowledge of another's nature can only ever be approximate and our judgements vague, the nature of Humean selves must necessarily elude comprehensive understanding, which leads me to (3) Selves can only ever be described on Hume's line, not judged.

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Chapter 1: Introducing The Problem of Personal Identity

It is sufficient if I can make the learned world apprehend that there is some difficulty in the case and that whoever solves the difficulty must say something very new and extraordinary – as new as the difficulty itself.

David Hume
- Abstract of *A Treatise of Human Nature*

The idea of questioning my identity didn't occur to me prior to my first year in university, where finding yourself, even at the bottom of a bottle, was what you were really pursuing. Like most questions, its answer initially seemed quite simple, and I felt foolish for having considered it being other than "Yes, I am the same person, have always been the same person." For the most part established and constant, "I" was knowable to myself and others. At least that was how it seemed at the time. But now it is more a statement of unabashed naivety than resolution, relying on my rationalization that at least one other scholar has urged "there is no conviction more profoundly felt... than this of a self enduring through all the changes and events of life."[1]

To be sure, each of us is always the same human individual, unique and distinguishable from others. That is not a matter of contention for me. Where my problem lies is in the assertion that each of us is always "the same thing, the same reality."[2] I am not alone in thinking this is arguable if not false.

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1 Hendel, Charles W., Studies in the philosophy of David Hume (New York: Garland Pub, 1983), 200.

2 Hartshorne, Charles, "Beyond Enlightened Self-Interest: A Metaphysics of Ethics," in Ethics (Vol. 84, No. 3. (Apr., 1974)), 201.

In fact, many philosophers have taken issue with this claim, including the great Modernists Descartes, Malebranche, Locke and Hume. While each revolutionized the way that we think about personal identity, it is David Hume's theory that I find the most groundbreaking and contentious yet difficult to disprove, making it an obvious choice for the subject of this thesis. Before I get to Hume, however, I want to begin by framing the problem of personal identity more precisely, providing an historical context through which Hume's theory can be properly examined.

Let's, then, begin with Descartes, who represented his entire system as the consequence of what he took to be an inevitable truth expressed in the proposition, *cogito ergo sum* – "I think therefore I am." Ever sceptical of the knowledge he could arrive at through his senses, Descartes realized at least one thing had to be true, namely that doubt existed and that a thinking subject had to be doing the doubting.[3] Because he had affirmed that he was a thinking subject with clarity and distinction this item of knowledge held more truth to him than anything that could be perceived in the material world, which was filled with uncertainty.[4]

Picking up where Descartes left off, Malebranche pointed out that this "thinking I" or "self" would be rather barren and meaningless if only identified with the mere fact of consciousness. Perception and thought must be directed towards *something* in order for these capacities to yield anything meaningful, he

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[3] Descartes, Rene, Excerpt from *Meditations on the First Philosophy*, in Modern Philosophy, 4th Edition, Vol. III, ed. Forrest E. Baird (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003), 23-25.

[4] Descartes, 24.

explained, for consciousness is simply a feeling or awareness accompanying knowledge of *objects* rather than a knowledge of *self* in its truest sense.[5] Granted, Descartes' theory does give us consciousness and knowledge of ourselves as thinking beings, but what we're really after, says Malebranche, is meaningful insight into our nature, and the direct inspection of consciousness alone does not allow for this.[6]

Locke also saw the need to make Descartes' original conclusion more robust. Upon consideration of what "person" represents, which Locke took to be a thinking, intelligent being, capable of reason and reflection, who can consider itself as itself, the same thing in different times and places,[7] he realized (1) consciousness is inseparable from thinking and (2) by reflecting on our conscious existence we arrive at the idea of personal identity. Persons are therefore not only subjects who can think, Descartes they can also be the objects of their thought.

And then there was David Hume. Departing from traditional thinking in two main respects in his *Treatise of Human Nature* and *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume's theory (1) does away with the assumption that singular qualities can be taken to be instances of identity and (2) advances the idea that we have no grounds either in experience or in reason for declaring the self to be an unchanging, simple substance.

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[5] Malebranche, Nicolas, The Search After Truth, ed. & trans. Thomas M. Lennon (Cambridge: University Press, 1997), 203-204.

[6] Malebranche, 205.

[7] Locke, John, Excerpt from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in Modern Philosophy (Fourth Edition, Vol. III), ed. Forrest E. Baird (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003), 210-213.

This project, while original in its own right, is hardly accidental within Hume's broader philosophy or divergent from his philosophical method. True to his empiricist conviction that all knowledge is arrived at through sensory perception, it is hardly surprising that Hume was sceptical about the nature of self, posing such questions as: Is self something that can be known empirically – its nature inferred or deduced through sense impressions? If we *can* perceive self, can we have an idea of its nature that endures through time?

To answer these questions Hume began by offering a theory of knowledge. For Hume, all knowledge is arrived at through the senses and comes to us in the form of impressions and ideas. Impressions are those sensations, passions and emotions as we first experience them, forcefully, vividly and unmediated by thought.[8] Though constantly changing in many respects, including subject-matter, intensity, vividness and endurance, impressions nevertheless share the commonalities of resemblance, contiguity in time or place, and cause and effect.[9] As for ideas, they are related to impressions inasmuch as they are their faint images involved in thinking and reasoning, having their origin in a prior impression.[10]

Extending this thinking to personal identity, we see that in order to have an idea of self that endures the same through time we must experience a preceding uniform impression throughout the whole course of our lives. Where

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[8] Hume, David, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. David Fate Norton & Mary J. Norton (Oxford: University Press, 2005), 1.1.1.1.

[9] Hume, 1.1.1.2.

[10] Hume, 1.1.1.5-6.

impressions are incapable of persisting, an idea of personal identity that endures the same though time must be impossible.

This is precisely what Hume intends to show when he tells us that personal identity consists in nothing more than a long chain of simple impressions, more or less closely related and between which there are no real bonds: "a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed one another with inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement."[11] It cannot be overemphasized that this account has radical implications for our understanding of self, pointing to the unsettling conclusion that we are mistaken in believing personal identity endures.

Of course, as human beings we realize that we change physically and psychologically over time. Surely, I am not exactly the same person to appearance, having the same interests and desires that I did when I was, say, two years old. This is not a problematic or unintuitive concession. The clincher is that Hume is telling us we are, strictly speaking, different people from one moment to the next.

If accurate, the puzzle that remains is a psychological one. What is it about human psychology that makes this mistaken belief in personal identity possible?

Little peace of mind is afforded by Hume's explanation that: because the majority of our perceptions[12] are causally related and resemble one another so closely, we tend to overlook their numerical diversity and ascribe identity to them

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[11] Hume, 1.4.6.4.

[12] Note that at times Hume uses "perceptions" and "impressions" interchangeably.

when it does not exist. Says Hume, you will surely discover the intelligibility of a conception of self invariably existing, one and the same throughout all the changes in our perceptions, can only be traced to a natural propension of the human mind that is brought into play by certain features of the order of perceptions.[13] If you consider philosophical attempts to justify our belief in identity, you will realize that they are either unintelligible or have no basis in the evidence of introspection, he explains.[14]

This, then, is the Humean nature of self. It is a reality known to us only by virtue of resemblance amongst our perceptions and impressions; a unity and a permanent existence which we cannot refrain from conceiving because of the remarkably perfect causal relations through the life of mind.[15]

Having set up Hume's account of personal identity in this, my introduction, Chapter 2 will take up where this one leaves off. Specifically, I will continue to develop and examine Hume's theory of personal identity and evaluate it with reference to some of the more challenging criticisms it has faced, particularly those of Terence Penelhum, Jane L. McIntyre and Barry Stroud.

Briefly here, Penelhum focuses on and takes issue with the sharp distinction Hume draws between identity and difference, while McIntyre and Stroud both take Hume's argument to presuppose and require the very idea of enduring self he is attempting to disprove. Perhaps too pointedly, it is my

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[13] Hume, 1.4.6.16.

[14] Hume, 1.4.6.16.

[15] Hendel, 214-15.

contention that none of these arguments successfully challenge or undermine Hume's theory, because the plausibility of each requires that they introduce their own preconceptions of the nature of mind and self into Hume's account (where they have no bearing on the argument at hand).

But this is not to suggest that Hume's theory of personal identity is free from or unthreatened by criticisms. Turning your attention to Chapter 3, with the help of William R. Carter, Harry Frankfurt, Richard Taylor, Peter van Inwagen and Randolph Clarke, I will examine Book II of the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* wherein Hume's moral theory is expounded.

Why am I concerned with Hume's moral theory?, you might ask. I am curious to see how a subject – a self that is always changing – can be evaluated. Perhaps this concern becomes most pronounced upon consideration of the question: *Who* can we hold responsible for a given action on Hume's line, and does it even make sense to do so?

As you can see, my interest in Hume's theory of personal identity is in its epistemological and ethical implications, especially their meeting point in moral judgement. Too abrupt? Let me elaborate.

Typically, we attempt to understand an action by tracing it back to its agent's motive, believing that the action, insofar as it is intentional, is the physical instantiation of a particular motive or quality of character. Helping us along in this process, Hume raises an important and controversial distinction in Book II, namely that between the liberty of indifference, which is essentially a negation of necessity and causes, and the liberty of spontaneity, which is opposed to

violence.[16] By raising this distinction he intends to show that the common conception of freedom (the liberty of indifference) actually undermines traditional ethics when it comes to moral evaluation and agency. That is because the absence of necessity and causes results in randomness or chance, according to Hume, and an action that is random does not follow from a person's character and so does not carry any moral weight or meaning.[17] Thus, for an agent and an action to be connected in a way required of freely chosen actions, free will requires determinism![18]

Not to get too carried away, Hume's determinism is a soft one. How it plays out is a "free" action is *determined* to the extent that it takes place within a given context and with respect to a particular agent's interests, desires, motivations and intentions.[19] What's therefore at stake is the assumption that we can never divorce ourselves from our surroundings and we are historical entities, inasmuch as our actions are influenced by our past and present experiences, and future goals.

So explained, determinism is not to be understood as akin to or even associated with coercion, but rather necessity. And necessity, unlike coercion, doesn't entail a total loss of freedom or control, but rather that there are limitations to our freedom – that it is not absolute.

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[16] Hume, 2.3.2.1.
[17] Hume, 2.3.2.6.

[18] Hume, 2.3.2.6.

[19] Ibid.

This, instead of absolving us from moral responsibility and evaluation, actually enables its proper attribution, Hume tells us. Any judgement of moral responsibility must presuppose the causal relation between motive and action, for we do not blame human beings for *particular* actions they perform, but for the qualities of character that motivated the action.[20]

There is therefore a strong sense in which Hume is telling us that a person is determined to act in a certain way by virtue of being the person he or she *is*. While there is certainly choice involved when it comes to deciding on an appropriate course of action, the *act* of choosing requires an historical self and must necessarily take place within a causally determined context.

This is where William R. Carter, Peter van Inwagen, Richard Taylor and Randolph Clarke come in, focusing on the implications Hume's theory holds for deliberation. Specifically, their arguments centre around the issue of whether freedom requires choice among real, or merely perceived alternatives for possible action. For Carter, van Inwagen and Taylor, an agent who deliberates requires a belief in freedom, because otherwise that deliberation would be pointless.[21] Holding the minority position, Clarke argues that while helpful it is not the belief in genuine alternatives that is necessary for freedom and deliberation; what is necessary is the belief that deliberation will not be pointless.[22]

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[20] Hume, 2.3.2.6.

[21] Taylor, Richard, "Deliberation and Foreknowledge," in American Philosophical Quarterly (Volume 1, 1964), 76.

[22] Clarke, Randolph, "Deliberation and Beliefs about one's abilities," in Pacific Philosophical Quarterly (Vol. 73, 1992), 107.

My thinking is that an agent may consistently believe that the causal chain determining her action includes deliberation and that deliberation can be effective in determining her action. What underlies and hopefully resolves this seeming counter-intuitiveness is the proposition that regardless of whether the universe is determined, the fact of the matter remains that the future is unknown and that a person's actions certainly help to determine that future.

Still, there remains the issue of how we are to evaluate a person's quality of character when their actions are determined. Granted, like Hume tells us, causal determinism does enable us to connect an action to its antecedent motive; however, the rationality of going through this process and evaluating a person's action is tied to figuring out what *might* have been. But if a person's action is determined, then there are no actual possibilities for action; there is simply the realization of the actual. Thus, if we suppose that selves are constantly changing, rendering, among other things, our knowledge of them approximate and contingent, and if all of our actions are determined, can we ever be justified in speculating as to what a person might have done in a given situation?

As I see it, Hume's theories of personal identity and free will seem to lead to the conclusion that we are not justified in evaluating another because : (1) If a person's identity is always changing, assessing it is not only unfeasible but also defeats the purpose of evaluation, which is to define or limit. (2) All that we can scrutinize are words and actions, so our evaluations must ultimately depend upon merely prevalent qualities of character. And (3) if a person's action was determined then she could not have done otherwise. With that, her action cannot

be evaluated along the lines of "She did x but could have done y," but rather "She did x and this is what it says about her *presently*."

Surely, this foundation lends itself to description of another rather than judgement. Does Hume offer an adequate method for evaluation elsewhere in the *Treatise*?

This leads me to Chapter 4. Resuming and building upon a theme from Chapter 3, my task will be to determine whether, when combined with his theory of self, Hume's theory of sympathy allows for moral *judgements* or simply moral *determinations*. It is important to point out that I take moral determinations to leave us with a means to distinguish between the good and the bad in a rudimentary and intuitive manner, whereas moral judgements enable us to justifiedly extend our determinations further, allowing us to say "Jane is *x* type of person" and regard her accordingly. This is not Hume's distinction, it is mine.

At the risk of spoiling the ending, it turns out that, for Hume, moral judgements are grounded in feeling rather than reason, and lack any rational justification independent of the moral sense.[23] More specifically yet cursorily here, he believes that moral judgements are grounded in the sympathetic emotional responses of pleasure and pain, which enliven the idea we have of another to the point where it is very much like the vivacity of an impression.[24] Thereafter, our judgements are refined by taking account of some general and stable points of view.

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[23] Hume, 3.1.1.26.

[24] Hume, 2.1.11.8.

Thus, sympathy plays a crucial role in both motivating and evaluating moral action, and it is a more or less sophisticated idea of *self* that evokes and engages our sympathy.[25] Only by finding a 'parallel in ourselves' can we come to appreciate, even vicariously experience another's feelings, says Hume.[26]

This is a point of contention for Norman Kemp-Smith and Don Garrett, who question whether Hume's theory of sympathy requires the idea of enduring self he denied in Book I. Kemp-Smith argues that Hume essentially substitutes our shared capacities and dispositions (sympathy) later in the *Treatise* for the idea of 'enduring self' he argued we could not have in Book I. Garrett disagrees, asserting the 'sympathetic self' Hume speaks of is not to be synonymous with the 'enduring self' from earlier in the *Treatise*. The 'sympathetic self' is simply the impressions or memories of ourselves that enable the mental mechanism of sympathy to be triggered.

Not unlike Garrett, I will argue that all Hume needs in his account of sympathy is that at any particular time when we are conscious there should be a complex impression we can identify as the impression of our own person. This impression need not remain unchanging, serving as the foundation for the idea of enduring self, but simply lend itself at all times during our conscious existence to represent the "self".

But this is rather incidental to my major concern in this chapter, which is the culmination of those raised throughout this thesis, namely: Are we justified in

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[25] Hume, 2.1.11.5.

[27] Ibid.

making binding judgements about another by virtue of sympathy and after having arrived at an impartial perspective?

For Hume the answer is yes. After having corrected for variations due to our particular situations, he explains, every normal person can arrive at the same moral stance. When this process is properly carried out, our moral judgements are justifiable.[27]

Seyla Benhabib and Hannah Arendt agree that moral judgement is properly carried out when a person consults with his common sense, essentially distancing himself from private interests and thereby achieving a generality or universality of outcome.[28] In so doing, he judges as a member of a community rather than a self-interested individual.

Though nice in theory, Lisa Disch believes that at the end of the day we can only ever achieve relative impartiality.[29] That is because we are ultimately left to draw our *own* conclusions from our consideration of the possible judgements of others. Having its basis in what *we* take to be another's interests and concerns, what we achieve through this process is impartiality which is not neutrality – a situated impartiality.

This criticism is further supported by Iris Marion Young, who believes that this method of evaluation, instead of giving us a more objective standpoint,

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[27] Hume, 3.1.2.3.

[28] Benhabib, Seyla, "Judgement and the Moral Foundations of Politics in Hannah Arendt's Thought," in Situating the Self: gender, community, and postmodernism in contemporary ethics (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 124, 305.

[29] Disch, Lisa, "More Truth Than Fact," in Political Theory (Vol. 21, Nov., 1993), 672.

requires and reinforces the assumption that all subjects are similar. It fails to take into account that we each have our own unique life-stories, emotional habits and values, and because of this our positions are unique and irreversible,[30] Young explains.

I take this to be precisely where Hume's theory leaves us. Let me qualify that by saying: If, as Hume holds, the passions are simple impressions and all simple ideas are copies of simple impressions, then I cannot form the idea of another person's emotion and sympathize with him or her unless I have first experienced the corresponding impression. It follows that I can only sympathize with experiences that I've had myself or were similar to my own. That being so, the moral point of view must call into operation at least one sentiment common to all (normal) persons, otherwise it would not succeed in bringing everyone's judgements into agreement.

Now, to my understanding, a situation we could all see similarly and agree upon would be rather trivial and arbitrary – a truism that need not be considered in the first place. While the *feelings* of pleasure and pain may be universal to all human beings, cultures differ very much on what they *define* as right and wrong. As a consequence, I believe that moral principles are only provisionally true, where they apply to most people, in most cultures, in most circumstances, most of the time.

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[30] Although relevant and helpful, I should mention this criticism was not directed at Hume's philosophy in particular but rather the moral stance generally.

Because Hume's moral stance ultimately has its basis in our *perceptions* of another, assumes that you or I can know what it is like to be that person by virtue of having had similar experiences sufficient to call sympathy into operation, I believe it is an inadequate basis for moral judgement. Moreover, supposing our knowledge of an individual's nature can only ever be approximate and our judgements vague, such that "Jane *may* be x type of person, but in a moment she may be another," the nature of Humean selves must necessarily elude comprehensive understanding. That said, the argument I will develop and advance herein is: Selves can only ever be described on Hume's line, not judged.

However, perhaps with the addition of Iris Marion Young's theory of asymmetrical reciprocity, we can allow for Hume's theory of self and for us to understand that very "self," even with its many facades and complexities. True, there are contingent aspects that affect our analysis in every situation, so we must factor in individual idiosyncrasies to arrive at any kind of understanding and moral stance. Still, by coming to know a person's character through its background history and thereafter framing it within its proper context, we can come to genuinely appreciate and evaluate a person's perspective and the actions it informs. But, I emphasize, only by reference to his or her revealed past. What we are left with, then, are not judgements, but rather *informed* descriptions.

Chapter 2: Unfolding Hume's theory and its Criticisms

> It's not enough to refute a beautiful idea, it must be replaced with something equally beautiful; otherwise, in my heart, unwilling to part with my feeling for anything, I will refute the refutation, even by force, whatever they may say.
>
> - Dostoevsky, *The Adolescent*

While some scholars have taken Hume to say that selves are constantly changing and through this change there isn't even an underlying *sense* or *intuition* of self that remains, I think quite the contrary is laid out in Book I part IV of the *Treatise*, wherein Hume tells us that the more our actions and temperaments resemble those of the past, the more coherent and consistent a picture of "self" we get.[31]

Equally misdirected are criticisms to the effect that Hume's account of personal identity is inconsistent – that he assigns various roles to 'self' later in the *Treatise* that his initial theory does not allow for. Perhaps the most persuasively argued are those criticisms raised by Terence Penelhum, Barry Stroud and Jane L. McIntyre. Fittingly, this chapter will be largely preoccupied with examining the subtleties of these arguments, why they are intuitively appealing and well-received, and why they should not be because they fail to truly engage with Hume's theory. First, however, let me begin by offering a detailed exegesis of Hume's account of personal identity, which I touched on in the previous chapter, so as to provide the reader with the fundamentals of Hume's argument and

[31] Hume, 1.4.6.6.

thereafter orient the criticisms within their proper context and evaluate them accordingly.

Let's begin. In Book I part IV of the *Treatise*, Hume offers two arguments aiming to prove that there can be no idea of an enduring self continuing the same throughout the whole course of a person's lived existence. The first argument depends on the contingent fact that there is no continual impression from which such an idea could be derived.

You'll remember that, for Hume, simple ideas are derived from preceding simple impressions, so in order to have an idea of a simple, unchanging self, we would require a simple impression that remained constant, even while all of our other perceptions changed. But this is impossible, according to Hume, because "pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations succeed each other, and never all exist at the same time...."[32]

This problematizes, if not frustrates, our attempts at knowledge of ourselves as enduring because it renders our foundation unstable. More specifically, supposing (1) our ideas are the building-blocks of knowledge, (2) ideas are derived from and owe their consistency and longevity to that of their antecedent sensory impressions, then (3) surely, if our impressions are subject to vary and pass (as Hume tells us they are), our ideas are contingent and our self-knowledge is approximate at best. And this is exactly what Hume means to prove when he says, "I never catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never

[32] Hume, 1.4.6.2.

can observe anything but the perception...."[33]

In short, our perceptions are constitutive of self-knowledge, our ideas, which inform our impressions, vary and pass in accordance with their antecedent impressions, thus knowledge of ourselves as enduring the same through time is impossible.

The second argument Hume advances in support of his theory rests on the claim that it is contradictory to suppose there could be an impression of self since self is what *has* impressions and is not *itself* an impression. In other words, in order to have an impression of self it is necessary that self be physically perceivable. But self is not physically perceivable, so a self-like impression of an immaterial self is a contradiction because it would require an impression of that which is distinct from any impression. And since we are aware only of impressions, none of which remain invariable and uninterrupted throughout our lives, it follows that that to which we seek to attribute a perfect identity is "nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in perpetual flux and movement."[34]

If Hume has it right, how are we to reconcile the common belief that self endures with his theory that self is nothing but a bundle of perceptions? How did we get so far off the mark? Perhaps it might be helpful to first question: How does the belief that self endures arise in the first place?

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[34] Ibid.

[34] Hume, 1.4.6.4.

The short answer is: Experience. Hume's longer answer follows. Much like the methodology involved in coming to understand the natural world, through observing human interaction we begin to infer connections between that which is constantly conjuncted, namely an apparent type of motive and a given behaviour.[35] This gives rise to a habit of thinking where upon any further experience of behaviour *A* we expect motive *B* to be behind it, inferring the "existence of one from that of another."[36] In this way, actions, as signs of a person's motives and intentions, take on an air of consistency, and, because of this, we come to believe that we can predict and explain a person's actions with relative ease, and know something about him as a person. Not unusual or unintuitive is the claim "Jim is *x* type of person." Interestingly, you'll notice that such a claim assumes a person's motives are physically expressible in his or her actions, that identity is consistent over time, and that persons are therefore knowable.

However, despite their intuitive ease and appeal, these assumptions are unwarranted according to Hume. They are the result of a conceptual error which is based on a confused understanding of the concepts identity and diversity. Identity, Hume explains, is properly assigned to an object which *persists* through a length of time without change or interruption. Diversity, on the other hand, applies to a *succession* of objects, even closely related ones.[37] Although a

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[35] Hume, 2.3.1.5.

[36] Hume, 2.3.1.14.

[37] Hume, 1.4.6.6.

seemingly obvious and trivial distinction, Hume nevertheless draws our attention to it so as to highlight the conceptual impasse that occurs when it comes to applying these concepts to selves.

The confusion arises because we have a distinct idea of an object that remains "invariable and uninterrupted thro' a suppos'd variation of time" and this is the idea of identity or sameness. We also have a distinct idea of several different objects that exist in succession which are connected together by a close relation; yet, this relatedness, if looked on properly, "affords as perfect a notion of *diversity*, as if there was no manner of relation among the objects." Thus, although the ideas of identity and diversity are perfectly distinct, even contrary, it's clear that in our common way of thinking we confound the one with the other.[38]

When it comes to selves, Hume tells us, we confuse the application of the ideas identity and diversity because the succession of perceptions we have about ourselves is so closely woven that it is difficult to tell there *are* different perceptions. Not unlike our belief in the identity of an external object, then, this belief is the result of our confusing the awareness we have of our related but ever-changing perceptions for the awareness of something unchanging.

The mistake in attributing personal identity to successive, distinct perceptions is not simply a verbal misnomer, then. It is also, and more importantly, a conceptual error; in believing in personal identity we believe that "self" actually refers to something consistent and knowable. But if Hume has it

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[39] Hume, 1.4.6.6-7.

right, "self" has no identical referent because there is nothing that binds our various perceptions together. We cannot run our many and varying perceptions into one coherent idea and make them lose their distinctiveness precisely because their distinctive qualities are essential to and constitutive of them.

Terence Penelhum disagrees, arguing we do have an idea of self and it is precisely that enduring object we take it to be.[39] He criticizes the sharp distinction Hume draws between sameness (identity) and series (diversity) on the basis that we tend to linguistically and conceptually collapse the two concepts when it comes to selves. For Penelhum, this tendency should not be dismissed or its implications trivialized. In case you're not convinced by imploration alone, he asks that you consider the unchanging single object, "X".

> X, we would say, is the same throughout. Let us call our succession of distinct but related objects A, B, C, D, E, F, etc. Here, if we count, we obviously have several, not one. But we can quite easily produce a class-name for the series of them, say ^, such that a ^ is, by definition, any group of things like A, B, C, D, E, F, etc. So there would be no contradiction in saying there are six objects and one ^; this is what a ^ is.[40]

Here Penelhum is suggesting that "change" should be understood as relative to the kind of thing we are talking about. By subsuming a person's various qualities under one class name we can thereby have many things and only one thing at the same time. This would allow for a person to undergo various 'changes' without necessarily compromising their identity, and without our

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[39] Penelhum, Terence, "Hume on Personal Identity," in Hume: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. V.C. Chappell (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 225-26.

[41] Penelhum, 226.

having to understand them as ceasing to exist and giving place to something else.[41]

By following through on Hume's notion of change Penelhum thinks we may come to appreciate this concern. Take a person who claims "I am the person who won the Grand Prix." Such a person is committed to saying he has in no way changed since the time of his victory, says Penelhum.[42]

I disagree. On my reading of Hume, unless the Grand Prix winner defines himself as such and believes that this single idea constitutes the whole or sum of his existence, he would not be committed to saying he hasn't changed since the time of his victory. If instead (and I think more likely) the Grand Prix winner most identifies with this idea of himself, yet still has other ideas about himself, he has simply failed to offer a comprehensive, definitive account, which, for practical purposes, is completely unfeasible and, I presume, undesirable anyway.

Interestingly enough, Hume too believed that change is commonly understood as relative to the kind of thing we are talking about. He tells us explicitly in both the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* that the mind feels very much the same when passing over related objects and impressions as it does when contemplating a single, abiding object, and that this is natural.[43] The difference between Penelhum and Hume's theories is therefore less about how we *commonly* understand change and more about its *proper* understanding. While

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[41] Penelhum, 225-26.
[42] Penelhum, 227.

[43] Hume, 1.4.6.5.

Hume thinks *any* perceptible change has implications for our understanding of the object in question, Penelhum sees change in relativistic terms.

Although they are working under different definitions of change, Penelhum and Hume are left with the same difficulty when it comes to moving from describing the nature of selves generally to understanding the nature of a particular self. Considering it is self-understanding Penelhum was attempting to improve upon, it is not only anti-climactic it is self-defeating that his theory, like Hume's, would require that we sort through our various ideas and impressions (subsumed under the class-name "self") and ultimately choose the most essential to constitute self's endurance.

True, Penelhum's theory has preserved our common understanding of self, yet without Hume's cautionary proviso that it is a *mistaken* understanding. Thus, where Penelhum's theory would leave us thinking the inadequacy in understanding ourselves as enduring was due to our limited capacity to understand such a complex entity, Hume points out that there can be no enduring idea of self to begin with, so any attempts to arrive at such an idea, let alone understand the nature of such a self, are futile. It would seem, then, that Penelhum, instead of arguing against Hume, actually furthers Hume's argument by showing us why there is the need to have a strict notion of identity in the first place.

Instead of focusing on Hume's strict notion of "change" and its implications for our understanding of one another, Jane L. McIntyre tells us Hume's theory requires exactly that which he is attempting to disprove.

Specifically, he needs a genuinely enduring empirical self to underlay the associative mechanisms that form the core of his theory.

> The concept of a self that is *affected by experience* and therefore must *persist through experience* is precisely the concept of the self that *cannot* be accounted for in the context of the theory of ideas presented in the *Treatise*.[44]

McIntyre seems to be suggesting that in order to be *affected* by experience we must persist through time such that there is something of the past that carries over into the present, enabling the occurrence of the *transition* from the one state to the other. While intuitive and convincing, I fail to see how this is a critique of Hume's theory of personal identity.

It shouldn't come as a surprise, given his empiricist leanings, that Hume assumes experience as the basis for knowledge claims when articulating his theory of ideas. He explains that we can never have reason to believe that any object exists, of which we cannot form an idea.[45] To have a reason for believing that *X* exists is therefore to have present those conditions which allow for a causal inference to be drawn, and no causal inference can be made unless one has had experience of the constant conjunction of similar objects.

Thus, like causes producing like effects have great implications not only for our explanations, but also for our explanatory power, pointing to our knowledge or our ignorance of the ways of the world and our place within it. That said, we do not have a reason for believing that an enduring self exists. But does this entail

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[44] McIntyre, Jane L. as quoted in Fogelin, Robert, "Hume's Scepticism", in The Cambridge Companion to Hume, ed. David Fate Norton (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 101.

[45] Hume, 1.4.6.2.

McIntyre's further charge that Hume is committed to saying enduring selves do *not* exist?

Taking the approach of Hume scholar, Wade L. Robison, I am inclined to reason that "[i]f the conditions for making a claim of existence do not exist, neither do the conditions for making a claim of non-existence."[46] Provided that we confine this reasoning to immaterial selves (rather than using it as a platform from which to draw parallels to such possible entities as, say ghosts, monsters, faeries or unicorns), instead of being naïve and superfluous, Robison's rationale is intuitively appealing and does some heavy lifting in pressing the issue.

To my understanding, what Hume has argued is that we cannot have an idea of ourselves as enduring the *same* through time. Now, this claim is independent of and does not entail the further claim that self cannot endure in some way. Rather, it entails consistency is not a part of self's essential nature, and, accordingly, a strict notion of personal identity does not apply to selves. Additionally, when we consider that knowledge, for Hume, is predicated on experience of like causes producing like effects, it would seem that any attempts to arrive at knowledge of an enduring immaterial self are futile, given that it is not subject to empirical observation or scrutiny. And this says little about the possible abidingness of selves and much about the human condition. Specifically, it points to our need to make meaningful that which tends to elude us and the grappling and negotiation involved in doing so.

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[46] Robison, Wade L. "Hume's Ontological Commitments," in The Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 26, No. 102, (Hume Bicentenary Issue, Jan., 1976), 45.

As I see it, when we cannot arrive at knowledge, it means we either lack the relevant information, which we may or may not one day possess, or that the nature of what we are investigating must prove elusory to the understanding. When it comes to an immaterial self what is contradictory, then, is not that there might *be* an immaterial self, but that we might have an impression and resultant idea of it. What lack of knowledge does not entail is that the object or subject in question does not exist, but rather that there is nothing *known* about the object beyond our perceptions.

That said, Hume does not require an idea of an enduring self to support his theory that we cannot have an idea of an enduring self. All he needs is to make plausible the idea that an accurate understanding of "self" must account for many more or less consistent and related perceptions – or selves if you like. I hasten to add that the idea of "self" to which my "selves" refer need not be enduring, but rather a class name for simplicity's sake, and so is quite unlike that which Penelhum speaks of. Essentially, then, we cannot have an enduring idea of self, but we can have an idea of a bundle of perceptions that are related by resemblance and causation, and this, for Hume, is "the true idea of the human mind."[47]

Barry Stroud presents a related concern, suggesting that Hume's theory reduces "mind" to something fictitious. If the mind or imagination is mistakenly led to think that there is an individual enduring mind and that belief is an illusion, since we are nothing but bundles of perceptions, Stroud wonders "*what*

[47] Hume, 1.4.7.22.

is mistakenly led to think that there is an individual enduring self"?[48] "To say 'the mind' or 'the imagination' is not very helpful, since strictly speaking there is no such thing; there is only a bundle of perceptions."[49]

Essentially, Stroud makes three claims here: (1) on Hume's line the individual mind does not endure, so (2) what we commonly take to be the mind is an illusion, leading us to the conclusion that (3) strictly speaking there is no such thing as mind. If I've read him correctly, I suspect Stroud has equated 'we have a mistaken *belief* in what constitutes mind' with 'if the mind is a bundle of perceptions, then the mind itself is *illusory*'.

I think this is an inaccurate interpretation of Hume, largely because the mind is active on Hume's line, playing a major role in apprehending and ordering experience from impressions into coherent ideas, and also reflecting on that very experience. Now, one's idea or theory of an enduring mind, like his or her idea of an enduring self is a different matter altogether, which may or may not properly capture the nature of mind itself. If, then, a given theory shows us that we have not or cannot understand the nature of mind, this points to nothing more than a failure to understand, not a lack of existence. I'm quite confident in thinking

Hume doesn't mean to say that the mind is illusory, but rather we've misunderstood its nature and this is what it really is: a bundle of perceptions that we may or may not understand as such. Thus, the problem Hume presents us with is not whether the mind exists, but rather how we are to understand the

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[48] Stroud, Barry, Hume (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 129.

[49] Ibid.

nature of something we have commonly taken to exist the same through time when in actuality it does not.

What I'm getting at, then, is it is not necessary for an abstract idea representing a class of things with a common quality to be preceded by an impression that is the separate and distinct impression *of* that quality.[50] Simply put, I think Stroud has failed to distinguish between our belief in the integrity of the concept "mind" and the nature of mind itself, which is not affected by whether we grasp it or not, though it may be understood with some struggle.

Unlike those of the scholars I have raised, my primary concern is not with misnomers or the uneasiness that comes with new ways of understanding the nature of self, but rather the implications Hume's theory of personal identity has for judgement, especially moral judgement. I want to begin by saying if Hume were simply pointing out that we are bound to be mistaken in believing in enduring selves, his theory would be little more than philosophically interesting. The problem is that he goes further, claiming we need not make this mistake at all, that our belief in identity is defective in meaning and can be suppressed.[51] If Hume has it right, it's important to challenge if not discard the belief that selves endure the same through time and are thus knowable, because it has implications for how we properly relate to and understand one another.

This concern best shows itself insofar as the judgements that we make are often binding and presuppose a self that endures. Typically in judging we are

[50] Garrett, Don, "Hume's Self-Doubts about Personal Identity," in The Philosophical Review, Vol. 90, No. 3 (pp. 337-358), July, 1981, 342.
[51] Hume, 1.4.6.7.

saying something like "Jane is *x* type of person" and we thereafter commit her to certain ends that may have great (be they positive or negative) implications for her quality of life. Not only does this highlight the need for our assessments to be accurate and representative, the practice of judging relies on a conception of selves as enduring and knowable.

To be sure, judgement certainly serves an important purpose. Demarcating and differentiating enables us to categorize based upon our shared needs and interests and subsequently arrive at a basis for censure or commendation. In fact, in theory there is nothing problematic about judging until we ask (a) whether or not reference to an object differs from the description of it; (b) whether truth pertains to reference or to description or to both at once; and (c) whether either reference or description applies to the object as cognized or to the object as real.[52] I suspect that when it comes to judging selves we need both reference and description; the referred real is the *subject* of characterization and the described real is the characterized *object*.[53]

Now, when we apply this to Humean selves, reference would be to something "real" but to the real as unspecified, because the identity of the person under scrutiny is constantly changing.[54] I don't think it's overstating to say such a judgement would be absurd and the practice of judging, when applied to Humean

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[52] Loewenberg, J., "The Paradox of Judgment," in The Journal of Philosophy (Vol. 25, No. 8, Apr. 12, 1928), 203.
[53] Loewenberg, 204.

[54] Loewenberg, 202.

selves, would be superfluous at best. Hume's "self" can only be captured for a moment in time and is subject to change from one moment to the next.

Of course, character is expressed in a person's actions, but each new act creates a partly new character, and character as already formed implies only a certain range of probabilities and possibilities for action. Each moment we shift, for good or ill, this range.[55] Considering judgement is, primarily, an attempt to define and limit something for the sake of understanding and Humean selves are always changing, judgement would be inconclusive and would lose its significance entirely.

Presuming judgements of selves (1) cannot refer to anything *enduring* and (2) lose their significance when they cannot be used as a tool for understanding, it would seem that the only justifiedness to be found is in describing, not judging another.

So argued, legitimation of judgement is not afforded by Hume's theory of personal identity alone. Let us see, then, whether his theory of free will, which I will take up in the following chapter, can serve to legitimate those judgements that his theory of personal identity alone would render inconclusive and thus inadequate.

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[55] Hartshorne, 210-11.

Chapter 3: Hume's theory of freedom and its implications for agency, responsibility, and moral judgement

The consequences of our actions take us by the scruff of the neck, altogether indifferent to the fact that we have 'improved' in the meantime.

- Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

I don't believe in the freedom of the will. Schopenhauer's saying, that a human can very well do what he wants, but can not will what he wants, accompanies me in all of life's circumstances and reconciles me with the actions of humans, even when they are truly distressing. This knowledge of the non-freedom of the will protects me from losing my good humor and taking much too seriously myself and my fellow humans as acting and judging individuals.

\- Albert Einstein

It has often been maintained that it is impossible, in principle, to give satisfactory causal explanations of all human actions. This is due, in no small part, to the belief that some human actions are free, in the sense that they are not causally determined and, as such, do not lend themselves to causal explanation. These undetermined or absolutely free actions, presumably, take place outside of the causal nexus, so any attempt to establish a theory that appeals to causal explanations must be at a loss when it comes to giving a satisfactory account of these actions. The theory of free will, in particular, has difficulty integrating human beings into the physical world-order. We are left asking: How can we be free if everything in nature is causally determined and *we* are part of nature?

Interestingly, many philosophers have chalked the freedom this theory affords up to randomness or chance. If an accurate characterization, freedom's instantiation wouldn't be meaningful, because if something occurs at random or

by chance, then it is unintentional, and unintended actions do not follow from a person's character, and, with that, do not carry any moral weight or meaning. Meaningless and irrelevant to moral theory, there is no need to worry about it, they say.

Suffice it to say, we do not want our freedom to be random or chance – we want it to issue forth from something within us, for it to be meaningful. What it seems we must look for, then, is a theory describing a sense in which freedom is compatible with the causal necessity assumed and required by the science of universal causation, i.e. that the same actions can at once be free and causally determined, and, as such, meaningful.

David Hume attempts to do just that in Book II part III of the *Treatise*. He begins by telling us that although we tend to (and like to) believe human actions are not determined – that they are, instead, instances of absolute freedom – there are no spontaneous actions or events.[56] Every action has at least one cause and causes determine their effects, such that given the occurrence of the cause-event, the effect-event is inevitable. Equally subject to causal determinism, we cannot divide actions into two mutually exclusive classes, the free and the determined.

Flying in the face of absolute freedom, Hume develops his criticism by applying his general analysis of causal necessity in Book I (which we saw in the previous chapter) to human actions. Specifically, he argues that if our judgements concerning human actions are causal judgements, which arise from the "constant conjunction" of two ideas, as well as an inference from one to the other, we must

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[57] Hume, 2.3.2.1.

attribute necessity to human actions. And that is because these inferences would have the same origin and structure as our other causal judgements.[57] It is important to note, that the necessity involved in the causal relation belongs to the mind that is thinking about or observing the sequences, not to the action itself.

Not only does Hume concede that necessity is in the mind, he goes further, speaking to and supporting our intuitions concerning the nature of freedom when he defines the will as "the internal impression we feel and are conscious of, when we knowingly give rise to any new motion of our body, or new perception of our mind."[58] However, Hume is quick to point out that 'feeling free' is quite unlike 'experiencing freedom'. This distinction is especially apparent when he tells us that this feeling of liberty is a "false sensation" that is made obvious when we consider that "a spectator can commonly infer our actions from our motives and character," or at least expects to be able to do so if he or she were "perfectly acquainted with every circumstance of our disposition and character."[59]

A possible and well-worn objection is that human actions do not display any such regularity. They are, instead, notoriously "inconsistent" and "capricious," often seeming irregular and uncertain to any observer, especially when compared to the operations of matter, which are supposedly equally subject to causal determinism.

[57] Hume, 2.3.1.4.

[58] Hume, 2.3.1.2.

[59] Hume, 2.3.2.2.

Anticipating this objection, Hume reminds us that we often encounter irregularities in a series of physical events and, upon proper consideration of such unexpected events, we conclude that they are not *random* but are rather the effects of "contrary and conceal'd causes."[60] When we extend this reasoning to human actions (which Hume thinks is a proper parallel), if we are unable to identify the motive for a particular action, we can safely assume that the action arose from a motive that is not immediately apparent to us, not that the action was random or a matter of chance.[61]

While human beings are undeniably part of nature and are therefore subject to causal determinism, this parallel will only carry us so far because, unlike the happenings of matter, an individual's temperament, inclinations and motivations also contribute to determining her actions.[62] Thus, the manner in which human beings apprehend, order, and interpret sense phenomena makes our actions more deliberate, sophisticated and complex to the understanding than those of the unintentional intermingling of matter.

Of course, the complexity and distinction is only an appreciable issue for the mind that is attempting to understand a person's action – to make it meaningful. Were we to have complete access to a person's inner workings, Hume believes we could read her actions just like those of nature, for "[n]o union can be more constant and certain, than that of some actions with some motives and

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[60] Hume, 2.3.1.12.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Hume, 2.3.1.4.

characters...."[63] This shows itself even in the general dynamics at play in our social roles and relationships. For example, typically, a prisoner who has nothing to offer a jailor discovers the impossibility of his escape just as easily from the "obstinacy of the jailor," as he does from the walls and bars he is surrounded by.[64]

What does this leave us with? Can we be said to act freely on any occasion if Hume's theory of universal causation is true? Not according to William R. Carter, who believes freedom requires genuine alternatives and universal causation does not allow for them.

> We never have [genuine] alternatives because each of our actions is such that it is (indirectly) caused by, and thus determined by, events that occurred before we are born. We have no control over such events; since those events determine all our actions, we have no alternatives to the actions we perform. Our present assumptions concerning causality point to the disturbing conclusion that we never act freely.[65]

If, as Carter suggests, we never have genuine alternatives, it would seem that deliberation (the process through which we decide a course of action) is unable to serve its intended purpose. This is further complicated by the fact that the deliberative process seems to "require a belief (or beliefs) that one can perform each of the actions under consideration."[66] Surely, any agent who deliberates about which of two mutually excluding actions to perform will, if she is consistent and rational, believe that she has the ability to do otherwise,

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[63] Hume, 2.3.1.13.
[64] Hume, 2.3.1.17.

[65] Carter, William R, The Elements of Metaphysics (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989), 32.

[66] Taylor, 76.

according to Richard Taylor and Peter van Inwagen. Otherwise, deliberation would be pointless and the deliberator would know this.[67]

Randolph Clarke disagrees. Although a belief in genuine alternatives is typically a part of the idea of freedom under which we actually deliberate, that fact alone does not show the belief is *necessary* for deliberation.[68] In fact, it is actually the absence of beliefs about *inabilities* that is necessary for deliberation, not the positive belief in freedom, in genuine alternatives.[69] What the deliberator must believe, Clarke explains, is that the activity of deliberating will not be pointless.[70]

While sympathetic to Clarke's, my own view is largely influenced by William James. I believe that an agent may consistently believe that the causal chain determining his action includes deliberation and that deliberation can be effective in contributing to determining his action. Though seemingly contradictory, the dissonance is resolvable by realizing that regardless of whether the universe is determined, the fact that the future is unknown and that a person's actions help to determine that future remain.[71] Because we cannot know the extent to which our actions are determined by deliberation, I think the most

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[67] van Inwagen, 156.
[68] Clarke, 102.

[69] Clarke, 103.

[70] Clarke, 103.

[71] James, William, "The Dilemma of Determinism," in The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy, ed. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, et al (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 53.

reasonable position to hold is that we are unequipped to comment conclusively on, let alone disregard its possible efficaciousness.

Focusing on the issue within Hume's philosophy, while a decision-making process exists in his theory of free will, this process is governed by a causal chain of events, such that a decision is *determined* by the conditions that existed prior to the decision being made.[72] Free will should not be understood as an absolute ability to have chosen differently under exactly the same circumstances, then, but rather a hypothetical ability to have chosen differently given a different psychological state or disposition.[73]

What Hume means by this is when I say I could either go outside for a run or continue writing this section, I don't really mean both choices are compatible with the complete state of the world right now (including my motivations and the context I find myself in). Instead, I mean that if I desired to go for a run I would have, even though as a matter of fact I actually desire to continue writing this paragraph, and therefore that is what will actually happen.

Having settled the problem of deliberation, the more thorny issue of reconciling the two extremes – i.e. our feeling of liberty and the fact that we are as determined as matter – remains. Hume's suggestion for the reconciliation is that we first realize our belief in freedom is the consequence of an error in judgement. As he sees it, what a person takes to be instances of chance, spontaneity or disorder in nature or in man is in actuality little more than the result of his or her

[72] Hume, 2.3.1.15.

[73] Hume, 2.3.1.15.

failure to trace effects back to their proper causes. So Hume's explanation goes, chance or indifferences "lies only in our judgment on account of our imperfect knowledge, not in the things themselves, which are in every case equally necessary, tho' to appearance not equally constant or certain."[74] What Hume is telling is, then, is that an uncaused action isn't in the world itself, but rather it is a product of mind, the result of failing to connect an effect to its proper cause (or causes).

If you ask me, instead of claiming an apparent instance of freedom *must* be an error in judgement, I think it's more precise (and intuitively appealing) to say: If actions can be uncaused, we can't have any proper or satisfactory understanding of them and of ourselves as free in this way. And that is precisely because understanding uncaused actions would require an ability to grasp what a break in the causal chain would be like. Given that satisfactory causal explanations are typically what we take to be indicative of understanding and we're habituated to understand events in terms of cause and effect, understanding a break in the causal chain and providing a satisfactory account of it, seems not only unfeasible but impossible.

But, unlike Hume, I think this inability to understand an uncaused action *doesn't* entail that we *must* be mistaken in our judgement that it's truly uncaused. What it *does* entail is that we're not *justified* in judging that we're free in this way, because justifiedness requires satisfactory causal explanations and this kind of

[74] Hume, 2.3.1.12.

freedom cannot be explained in this way. Thus, even though our judgement that we're free – that our actions can be uncaused – can't be *justified*, it doesn't follow we're necessarily *mistaken* in judging or believing that we're free. Perhaps this is helpful in explaining why many people continue to believe that they are free despite the fact that our understanding can only reveal that we're determined.

Semantics aside, more importantly for our purposes here is settling the matter of where exactly Hume's account of freedom leaves us with respect to moral responsibility. Personally, it leads me to question whether responsibility is compatible with or even sensible when it comes to an explanation purporting that all of our actions are determined.

If we accept the principle of alternate possibilities, which stipulates a person is morally responsible for an action only if he or she could have done otherwise,[75] it would seem that an individual is not responsible for actions that were determined to occur.

Harry Frankfurt clearly disagrees with this conclusion when he argues: Even those who are coerced – the quintessential 'could not have done otherwise-ers' – are morally responsible for the actions they perform, because there is always an alternative in any situation. True, some alternatives come with bleak ramifications, but "[o]ne's knowledge that he stands to suffer an intolerably harsh penalty does not mean that he, strictly speaking, cannot perform any action but the one he does perform."[76] Thus, at the end of the day it is still open to him to

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[75] Frankfurt, Harry G., "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," in The Journal of Philosophy (Vol. 66, Dec., 1969), 829.

defy the threat and accept the penalty his action would bring down upon him.[77] No matter the difficulty or ramifications, a person always has a choice in the matter.

Although I'm intrigued by the implications this argument has for moral responsibility, my focus is, first and foremost, on the assumptions the argument relies upon. Specifically, I'm uncertain as to whether Frankfurt is actually talking about coercion. To my understanding, coercion precludes choice inasmuch as an individual is *forced* to perform a certain action, whether physically, psychologically or both. In plain terms, the coerced *must* act and has no ownership over the action he performs. Indeed, the only control the coerced may have is in *physically* achieving another's desired end, she does not control what her body is *required to do.*

When coupled with the following considerations: (1) when making moral judgements we typically judge the motive behind the action and take it to point to a person's character, and (2) in the case of coercion the motive is not the coerced's, I am inclined to think (3) moral responsibility would not apply here and if it did it would be misdirected.

Interestingly enough, Hume too believed that the degree of constraint involved in a person's actions has implications for his or her moral responsibility. He was particularly careful to point out that determinism is not to be understood as akin to or even associated with coercion, but rather necessity. And necessity,

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[76] Frankfurt, 834.

[77] Frankfurt, 834.

unlike coercion, doesn't entail a *total loss* of freedom or control, but rather that there are *limitations* to our freedom.[78] Not surprisingly, there is no getting outside the chain of cause and effect for Hume, who believed that a constant conjunction of "circumstances, tempers and motives"[79] inform, if not direct, a person's every action. And because all actions and motives are causally and necessarily related, it is impossible to assert that the will is absolutely free. It follows that freedom consists in is being able to do what you want to do under the prevailing circumstances.[80]

From what has just been said, two important points need emphasizing: (1) human actions are free in the only possible sense when they are not subjected to external force and coercion, and (2) such 'free' actions are determined by little more than the beliefs and desires of the agent, because the instantiation of freedom takes place within a context it is empirically explainable in causal terms.

Now, you might think that this theory has negative implications for traditional ethics, many have. Most people are happy to accept that lack of coercion is a *necessary* criterion for free-will (that a coerced act is not free), but nevertheless doubt that it is *sufficient* for freedom (that an un-coerced act is free). They believe, therefore, that 'free will' refers to absolute, ultimate or genuine possibilities for beliefs, desires and actions, rather than merely counterfactual ones. I suspect the most striking reason for this belief is that in the absence of

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[78] Hume, 2.3.2.4.

[79] Hume, 2.3.2.6.

[80] Hume, 2.3.2.4.

such possibilities, the belief that free will confers responsibility appears to be false.

But this is not the case according to Hume, who believed his theory safeguards ethics for two reasons. First of all, we do not blame human beings for *particular actions*, but for the *qualities of character* that led them to perform the actions, so any judgement of moral responsibility must presuppose the causal relation between motive and action.[81] Without the causal relation between motive and action, we would have randomness, and if our actions are random they cannot be connected to our character in the way necessary for freely chosen actions. Thus, the regularities that exist between motive and action provide the basis for our inferences concerning human behaviour.[82] Motive, in effect, is the central explanatory principle involved in the interpretation of human action.

This shows itself in the following example. When we act hastily or unpremeditatedly we are blamed less than when the same actions are deliberate. Hume explains that the reason for this is that we only blame a man for his actions insofar as they seem to indicate something relatively permanent in his character. Accordingly, if actions are not in any way determined, they cannot properly be subject to evaluation.

Secondly, Hume's theory safeguards ethics by supporting the intuitions involved in every society's encouragement of moral action through rewards and punishments.[83] In rewarding and punishing behaviour we are essentially saying it

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[81] Hume, 2.3.2.5-6.
[82] Hume, 2.3.1.4.

is subject to modification if not reinforcement. As such, we constantly assume human behaviour is part of the causal nexus and is subject to change by virtue of incentives.

In sum, because it includes human behaviour as part of the causal chain and connects an individual's actions to his or her character, determinism allows for the proper attribution of rewards and punishments, and therefore safeguards ethics.

Tying in the previous chapter, if Hume has it right with his claim that character is subject to modify by virtue of incentives and that there can be no idea of self as enduring, it follows that I can only know myself and another to a point and never once and for all. This leads me to question whether we can be justified in speculating as to what a person *might* have done in a given situation when it comes to evaluating his or her character, considering that our knowledge of others does not extend beyond what we are and have been presented with; it can only ever be approximate.

Where I'm going with this is the assignment of praise or blame – the evaluation of another – only makes sense if it is possible for him or her to be able to do otherwise in a given situation. Surely if a person could not have done otherwise, his action is unworthy of praise or blame, isn't it? Why evaluate an action that was determined to come about? To further the point, even the most careful scrutiny of another's character is dependent upon consistency and

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[83] Hume, 2.3.2.5.

prevalence of apparent qualities, rather than *abidingness* of certain qualities over others.

Because all that we have before us to scrutinize is the actual (what *is* the case) it seems reasonable to assume that we are not justified in favouring any one possibility over another with respect to what might have been the case. By only giving us actuality – that which is determined by the satisfaction of antecedent conditions beyond one's ultimate control – rather than possibility, I think Hume's theory of free will fails to give us adequate grounds for moral evaluation.

Now, you might say "we can evaluate a particular person against the norm of human nature – what we know to be normal by virtue of custom and habit –, entitling us to say "'Jim could have done what Bob or Jane did and indeed what most of humanity would do, normally.'" But, I wonder, does this help or does it commit us to the same end yet with the benefit of a larger sample?

As I see it, this approach would reduce the individual to the average, abstracting and examining one with respect to the many rather than in his or her own light. This is problematic when you consider that it is our individual idiosyncrasies that lend themselves most naturally to evaluation rather than our commonalities. Idiosyncrasies are, by definition, instantiations of character that vary from one person to another and, with that, are how we are most markedly distinguishable with respect to our observable behaviour. Because they differ and stand out from the average, idiosyncrasies might well be taken to be signs of a character's true instantiation, the expression of which has survived the pressures

of socialization. Instead of anomalies set against the backdrop of the average, then, I think a person's idiosyncrasies go a long way in revealing character.

At the end of the day, regardless of the sample, we are left with actuality rather than possibility – what has been the case for Jim in particular and a sum-total of what has been the case for humankind at large. Thus, taking a larger sample does not help us to evaluate a person's character and neither does it give us possibilities. What it does is further explain our past actualities by contextualizing them on a larger scale.

For the sake of clarity, I must emphasize my criticism isn't that this is an antiquated system that needs to be overhauled – if anything this is as good as it gets if Hume has it right. Instead, my 'criticism' is more of a lingering question that may never be settled, namely: How are we to properly evaluate selves on the individual *and* interpersonal level if everything we do is determined?

A great Buddhist passage in line with my thinking reads something like:

> You say, 'He injured me, he insulted me, how terrible!' But this is writhing in delusion. Why so? ... It is delusion, first, because the self that insulted you has been partly superseded by a new concrete actuality, the other person now, which may be indefinitely different from the insulting self. It is delusion, second, because the insulted self has also been superseded. There is incomplete identity on both sides. But third, there is only incomplete non-identity between the two persons. The other's past has entered into your present being, your past into his, and both share a partly overlapping causal future. Each helps to create a new self in the other and will influence some of the same future selves. Finally, fourth, both you and the other, as individual animals, are passing phenomena, whose careers may cease at any time.[84]

[84] Hartshorne, 206.

As you can see, this thinking challenges if not opposes the everyday assumptions involved in how we relate to and interact with those around us, and the judgements that we continually employ to do so. As an apt characterization of the determined self who cannot be known as enduring, if this has anything to teach us, it is that we must overcome our need to define one another – to limit someone to his or her revealed qualities for the sake of 'understanding' – because we will never properly understand. Seeming to recognize this, Hume claimed

> from these variations of temper proceeds the great difficulty of deciding concerning the actions and resolutions of men, where there is any contrariety of motives and passions.[85]

* * *

By way of a summary, Hume's theories of personal identity and free will lead to the conclusion that we are not justified in making binding judgements about another because: (1) self is always developing and, as such, there are innumerable perceptions that must factor into its adequate assessment. (2) Our evaluations must depend upon prevalent rather than abiding qualities; all we can scrutinize are words and actions, given that we are not mind-readers. And (3) as I see it, if a person's action is determined then he or she could not have done otherwise. As such, a person's motive cannot be evaluated along the lines of "S/he did *x* but could have done *y*."

Is there hope for us yet? Does Hume's account of sympathy – of 'feeling with' the other – enable adequate judgement? Or does it simply leave us with

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[85] Hume, 2.3.4.10.

moral determinations – with a means for distinguishing between the good and the bad, but nowhere to go from there? I will now take up these questions in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Hume's theory of sympathy, its implications for moral judgement, and their possible reconciliation

> You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor
> Look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books,
>
> You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
>
> You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself.
>
> - Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*

As a moral sense theorist, Hume attempted to provide an alternative to both moral rationalism – which claimed that virtue and vice could be ascertained by reason alone – and the egoism of such philosophers as Thomas Hobbes, who theorized that one's self is (or should be) the motivation and the goal of all of one's actions. Bridging the divide between the objectivity of the rationalists and the extreme subjectivity of the egoists, Hume argued that moral judgements are grounded in feeling rather than reason, and lack any rational justification or foundation independent of the moral sense,[86] which is common to every human being. What this means is each of us possesses a moral faculty through which we detect good and bad moral qualities in people by virtue of how we feel about their actions and inferred motive.[87]

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[86] Hume, 3.1.1.26.
[88] Hume, 2.1.11.8.

It's worth emphasizing that this detection is an instinctive rather than a deliberative process,[88] aptly likened to the manner in which our senses detect qualities in external objects, such as colours and shapes. Not to be understood as part of, or even associated with rationality, then, moral approval and disapproval are not rational judgements about conceptual relations and facts; they are emotional responses.[89] Hence, for any moral action we examine we will never find a fact that we call "virtue" or "vice."[90]

To further his point that morality is "more properly felt than judged of,"[91] Hume criticises the claim that we rationally judge the fitness or unfitness of our actions with reference to eternal moral relations. A particularly striking example is in his use of arboreal parricide to show that a young tree that overgrows and kills its parent exhibits the same alleged relations as a human child killing his or her parent.[92] Now, if morality is a question of relations, we are committed to saying that the young tree is immoral. This, of course, is absurd, and so undermines the theory that moral approval and disapproval are rational judgements about conceptual relations and facts.

In keeping with this theme, for Hume there are four irreducible categories of qualities that exhaustively constitute moral virtue: (1) qualities useful to others, which include benevolence, meekness, charity, justice, fidelity and veracity; (2)

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89 Hume, 2.2.10.8.

90 Hume, 3.1.2.11.

91 Hume, 3.2.8.8.

91 Hume, 3.1.2.1.

92 Hume, 3.1.1.24.

qualities useful to oneself, which include industry, perseverance, and patience; (3) qualities immediately agreeable to others, which include wit, eloquence and cleanliness; and (4) qualities immediately agreeable to oneself, which include good humour, self-esteem and pride.[93] Interestingly enough, you'll notice the most morally significant actions seem to fall into more than one of these categories.

To be sure, Hume is not denying that there is instruction and incentive involved when it comes to *performing* a moral action. Rather, he intends only to advance the proposition that the fundamental characteristic of all our goods, whether natural, aesthetic or moral, is that they are immediately pleasing "as determined by the particular fabric and constitution of the human species."[94] This is to say the distinction between the good and the bad, taken in their widest scope, is founded on the pleasure and pain human beings universally experience, just by virtue of being human beings. Not to be understood in a hedonic sense, pleasures and pains are the efficient causes, not the objects or ends of actions.

The way it plays out, Hume explains, is motives or character traits in the mind of the agent extends through his or her action and the social consequences of that action, and ends with sympathetic feelings of pleasure or pain in the mind of a spectator.[95] Like "strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates

[93] Hume, 2.1.7-2.1.10.

[95] Hume, 3.2.8.8.

[95] Hume, 2.1.11.3.

itself to the rest, so all the affections readily pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature."[96]

What Hume is suggesting here is that an agent's action is taken to be a sign of his or her quality of character, the instantiation of which produces pleasure or pain within a given spectator by virtue of the communicative principle, sympathy, which operates universally in human beings. Thus, without the connecting like of sympathy, it would seem that the spectator can never experience feelings of pleasure or pain with respect to an agent's action, can never morally approve or disapprove of it.[97]

Although it may be a universal principle in human nature, sympathy's mechanization varies with the closeness of relations, and so it is not always impartial.[98] Our similarity as human beings allows a degree of sympathy to extend to everyone, but the extent to which it goes beyond this is "proportional to the operations of three associative principles,"[99] Hume explains. Sympathy will more naturally extend to someone similar to oneself in a relevant way, but also to those related by contiguity and causation.[100] This partiality best shows itself when you consider that we are naturally more affected by the plight of our friends and family than of strangers, say on the other side of the world.[101]

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[96] Hume, 2.1.11.4.
[97] Hume, 2.1.11.5.

[98] Hume, 2.1.11.7.

[99] Hume, 3.1.2.4.

[100] Hume, 3.1.2.5.

If this was Hume's last word on the matter, we would be left asking, perhaps more expletively: How can Hume claim that a principle which contributes to a biased view of qualities of character is the foundation of morality? Hume's response would be something like 'Sure, sympathy does play an important role in our moral judgements, however its partial determinations do not factor into the assessment of someone's character, at least not when moral judgement is properly carried out.'[102] To ensure the integrity of our judgements, in addition to the degree to which we sympathize with another, we must also consider some relevant, steady, general points of view, Hume explains. For,

> every particular man has a peculiar position with regard to others; and 'tis impossible we could ever converse together on any reasonable terms, were each of us to consider characters and persons, only as they appear from his peculiar point of view. In order, therefore, to prevent those continual *contradictions*, and arrive at a more *stable* judgement of things, we fix on some *steady* and *general* points of view; and always, in our thoughts, place ourselves in them, whatever may be our present situation.[103]

It is with experience, then, that we begin to draw a distinction between changes due to a change of qualities in the *agent* we are considering, and changes due to our special situation or *condition* which is perhaps not shared by others. When it comes to moral judgements, we, hopefully, form the habit of looking upon a person's situation in such a way as to take into consideration only those characteristics that are independent of the special situation in which we find ourselves. Truly 'moral' judgements are therefore those that any human spectator will arrive at under the same circumstances. Pronouncing similar judgements on

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[101] Hume, 3.1.2.5.
[102] Hume, 3.1.2.5.

[103] Hume, 3.2.7.11.

Hume's account of sympathy. Essentially, Kemp-Smith argues, Hume has substituted sympathy (i.e. our shared capacities and dispositions) later in the *Treatise* for the idea of 'enduring self' he argued we could not have. In so doing, he has smuggled the idea of self back into his theory, just under another name.[109]

> So far is Hume from denying the existence of a continuing self, that... he seeks the solution of his problems, both theoretical and moral, in that 'human nature' – determinant of our perceptions, propensities, instincts, feelings and emotions – which is but the self under another name.[110]

This is not only uncharitable it is also inaccurate, according to Don Garrett. He explains: In Book I of the *Treatise* Hume has simply denied the existence of an impression of self as something simple and individual that remains constant and invariable, from which the idea of an enduring self could be derived.[111] Even though there is no impression corresponding to a *substantial* self, there may still be "impressions of ourselves of some other kind, corresponding to the true idea of the human mind as a bundle of related perceptions."[112] This paves the way for a distinction between a 'sympathetic self' and an 'enduring self'. Unlike the enduring self from earlier in the *Treatise*, Garrett explains, the sympathetic self is simply our impressions or memories of ourselves that enable the mental mechanism of sympathy to be triggered.[113]

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[109] Kemp-Smith, Norman, The philosophy of David Hume (New York: Garland Pub., 1983), 556.

[110] Kemp-Smith, 98.

[111] Garrett, 341.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Garrett, 343.

similar actions, whether the agent is one's friend, enemy, neighbour or foreign inhabitant, is how we ensure impartiality, then.

This leads me to a point of contention raised by Terence Penelhum. He questions: If to sympathise with another is to be affected by his or her emotional experience such that I experience a parallel emotional state, isn't the idea of self essential to this process?[104] Penelhum believes that it is when he argues that sympathy is evoked *because* the idea I have of another is enlivened until it has the vivacity of an impression.[105] Emotional contagion is therefore rooted in a person's capacity to understand that other people experience similar emotions and have similar views to oneself.[106] Thus, to sympathize, one must have both an idea of self and other.

Does Hume concede the point when he says, "'[t]is evident, that the idea... of ourselves is always intimately present with us.... Whatever object, therefore, is related to ourselves must be conceived with a like vivacity of conception....[107]"? This may strike you as contradictory, considering Hume's earlier contention that we have no fixed idea of self (where "self" is taken to be the totality of a person's conscious existence).[108]

Norman Kemp-Smith takes the denial in Book I that we can have an impression and resultant idea of the 'self' as enduring to be incompatible with

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[104] Penelhum, 87.

[105] Penelhum, 87.

[106] Penelhum, 87.

[107] Hume, 2.1.11.4.

[108] Hume, 1.4.6.2.

What does Penelhum make of this? Although he thinks Hume has not been careful enough with his wording so as to rule out ambiguity and inconsistency entirely, he nevertheless agrees with Garrett that Hume's theories in Book II do not commit him to the denial of what he has said in Book I.[114] What Hume needs in Book II, says Penelhum, is to be able to use the idea of oneself as distinct from others. In other words, he needs mere individuation.[115]

I agree with Penelhum and Garret, but in slightly different terms. I believe all that Hume needs in his account of sympathy is that at any particular time, when we are conscious, there should be a complex impression we can identify as the impression of our own person. This impression need not remain unchanging, enabling the idea of enduring self, but simply lend itself at all times during our conscious existence to represent the title "self, or that individual person, of whose actions and sentiments each of us is intimately conscious."[116]

Rather than assume too much, let me conclude this issue by saying: Because Hume has not been explicit about the idea of self required for sympathy and it is uncharitable to accuse him of overlooking a glaring inconsistency between the books of his *Treatise*, I think his uses of 'self' in the later books would most properly be regarded as ambiguities and the interpretation most consistent with the books of the *Treatise* likely preserves his intended meaning.

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[114] Penelhum, 87.
[115] Penelhum, 87.

[116] Hume, 1.4.6.6.

Ambiguities aside, what really concerns me is settling the question of whether we are justified in making binding judgements by virtue of sympathy and after having arrived at an impartial perspective. First, I must remind you of a key point raised in the previous chapter, specifically Hume's contention that selves are subject to change one moment to the next. Why am I reminding you of this? Because I want to examine "self" in the light of its instantiation more fully and thereafter determine how we are to judge a particular self's unfolding by appealing to sympathy.

A good place to begin this section is with Hume's methodology with respect to evaluation. For Hume, we are never to consider any single action in our inquiries concerning the origin of morals, but only the quality of character from which the action proceeded. This is because a single action, considered in isolation, is not closely enough related to the person responsible for it, unless, of course, it is a legitimate sign of a motive or quality of character in him or her. Interestingly enough, his reason for holding this view is not that it is the motive, occurring in consciousness as a desire or a passion, that we either approve of or sympathize with, but rather that the quality of character from which the action proceeded must be *durable* enough to affect our sentiments concerning the person.[117]

Yes, the motive gives us information about the character of the person; however, the object of the approval or disapproval is not a motive but a person. It

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[117] Hume, 2.3.2.6.

follows that incidental or uncharacteristic actions do not determine our love or hatred, approval or disapproval of a particular person.

A point of interest I must draw your attention to is that *durability* of character seems very much like *endurance* of character, in that it suggests there is something of the past that remains, bridging the transition from one state to the next.[118] Now, which qualities remain unchanged and which qualities undergo change, as well as their respective implications for the stability or enduringness of one's character, are not always clear, not only to others, but also to oneself. Fortunately, Derek Parfit has proposed an interesting way to deal with this dichotomy.

For Parfit, the distinction between successive selves can be made by reference not to the branching of psychological continuity, but to the degrees of psychological connectedness.[119] Unlike psychological continuity, psychological connectedness admits of degree, and so the drawing of distinctions can be left to the choice of the speaker and may justifiably vary from one context to another.[120] Accordingly, the word "I" can be used to imply the greatest degree of psychological connectedness. And when connections are reduced – when there has been any marked change of character or style of life, or any marked loss of memory – Parfit suggests we could say, "It was not I who did that, but an earlier

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[118] You may remember that this was an argument raised by Jane L. McIntyre that I examined in the previous chapter but in a different, and in my opinion, more fitting context.

[119] Parfit, Derek A, "On the Importance of Self-Identity," in The Journal of Philosophy (Vol. 68, Oct., 1971), 689.

[120] Parfit, 689.

self." In addition, we could describe in what ways and to what degree we are related to this earlier self. 'He' explains,

> [i]f I say, 'It will not be me, but one of my future selves,' I do not imply that I will be that future self. He is one of my later selves, and I am one of his earlier selves. There is no underlying person who we both are. ... The question 'Are X and Y the same person?' thus becomes 'Is X at least an ancestral (or descendent) self of Y?'[121]

Giving credit where it is due, this does help to make the implications of Hume's theory of self more applicable and perhaps more appealing, inasmuch as it makes plausible the notion that we can still talk about selves even if they are not psychologically continuous. However, it does not help us to settle the question of whether we are justified in judging *selves* to be representative of "self," only how we are to think and talk about them. We must therefore look elsewhere on that head. I suspect the *Enquiry* might help us out. Therein, Hume tells us that

> we must be acquainted beforehand with all the objects, and all their relations to each other; and from a comparison of the whole, fix our choice or approbation.... If any material circumstances be yet unknown or doubtful, we must first employ our inquiry or intellectual faculties to assure us of it; and must suspend for a time all moral decision or sentiment.[122]

What I take from this is even though we cannot be wrong about whether the view of a particular characteristic or quality gives rise to pleasure or pain, it does not mean we cannot go wrong in our judgements of the subjective qualities of selves.

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[121] Parfit, 689.

[122] Hume, David, An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, ed. with intro. J.B. Schneewind (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1983), 290.

Indeed, says Hume, particular judgements can go wrong in a number of ways. (1) We can misinterpret a given situation and fail to see that it is one indicative of a certain quality in a person. (2) We can fail to be properly affected by a quality in a person due to mistaken beliefs or to psychological deficiencies. And (3) we can fail to achieve impartiality in our assessments, such as overrating a friend's virtue or an enemy's vice.[123]

In all of these ways it is important to remember that the assessment of a person's virtues or vices is faulty *because* it is not based on a moral sentiment, but is instead misinformed and/or partial. With that, the respective judgement that we make would not be a *moral* judgement because it is bound to be inaccurate and misrepresentative.

That said, for Hume moral judgements are not subjective and relative. Sure, the sentiments of approbation and disapprobation vary from person to person and situation to situation. However, in our *judgements* we try to arrive at stable and intersubjectively shared opinions of the qualities and persons we judge – an ideal equal sympathy (a complete disinterestedness) toward all persons regardless of time and place. As disinterested, each of us experiences the same degree of sympathy with all other persons. As fully informed we all consider the same conditions and consequences. Mistakes in "moral" judgements are therefore due to mistakes concerning matters of fact.

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[123] Hume, *Treatise*, 3.1.1.21-22.

It is only when we see things – including our own perspectives – correctly, and judge on the basis of our moral sentiments, after having corrected for variations due to our particular situations, that our moral judgements cannot be mistaken. And what underlies this, Hume believes, is that every normal person's mental faculties are alike, insofar as through them we can each arrive at the same moral stance.[124]

It is difficult to say what follows from this. On one reading, Hume does not deny an objective foundation of morality. His notions of common agreement and impartiality (grounded in instinct) assure us that a spectator's moral approval is not unique to him or her. Yet, on another reading, it seems Hume does deny an objective foundation of morality.

James Fieser takes the latter interpretation in suggesting a spectator's approval (although not unique to him or her) is still dependent upon the possession of certain human instincts which assure impartiality and common agreement. It follows mores and norms that are relative to a particular culture or society are going to be looked on differently. Moreover, Fieser adds, the very existence and nature of instinctive moral standards is a contingent matter, so it would seem strange to call such instincts "objective."[125]

True, a crucial part of what gives Hume's moral standards their objectivity is their instinctive ease and universal grounding in common sentiment, but that is not the whole of it. The moral point of view is inherently social and it involves

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[124] Hume, ECPM, 80.

[125] Fieser, James, "Is Hume a Moral Skeptic?" in Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Vol. 50, No. 1 (pp. 89-105), September, 1989, 104.

perceptual correction. In this respect, it is completely analogous to any 'general' point of view. Granted, the point of view *must* call into operation at least one sentiment common to all (normal) persons, otherwise it would not succeed in bringing everyone's judgements into agreement.[126] However, lack of common agreement does not imply that there is no objective foundation for moral judgement; rather, it implies that not everyone has made a 'moral' judgement. Remember, for Hume, it is only through overleaping the bounds of our own individuality that a moral judgement is possible.

This is the most charitable interpretation of Hume, according to James Baillie. It allows for a satisfactory compromise between, on the one hand, simplistic forms of subjectivism, which identify moral judgements with initial emotional responses, leading to a relativism in which no standard of adjudication is possible, and in which there is no difference between *being* morally right and *seeming* that way to X or Y.[127] And, on the other hand, it is not an extreme view entailing the metaphysical excess of theories asserting the existence of facts pertaining to moral properties holding independently of all possible human cognition or sensibility.[128]

Seyla Benhabib would agree with this merit of Hume's account. In her article, "Judgement and the Moral Foundations of Politics in Hannah Arendt's

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[126] Rawls, John, Lecture on the History of Moral Philosophy, ed. Barbara Herman (Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), 88-89.
[127] Baillie, James, Hume on Morality (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 197.

[128] Baillie, 197.

Thought," she argues our perspectives are symmetrical and reversible.[129] What she means by this is people are able to adopt one another's perspectives because we are all similar; we are all able to see ourselves "reflected in other people and find that they see themselves reflected in us."[130] Characterizing moral judgements in this way, she adapts Hannah Arendt's version of Kant's "enlarged thought."[131]

According to Arendt, when a person makes a moral-political judgement she consults with her common sense in order to distance herself from private interests, so as to achieve a generality, or universality of outcome. By "going visiting" or "thinking with"[132] another, a person essentially judges as a member of a community rather than as a self-interested individual. Through this process she better informs her own standpoint – determines whether something experienced as pleasant or displeasing is likely to be viewed similarly by others in the same situation.[133] By putting oneself in thought in the place of others, then, one can achieve a community-informed standpoint.

Although nice in theory, we can only ever achieve *relative* impartiality, Lisa Disch argues. Even if a person considers the possible judgements of others, she will ultimately come to her *own* conclusions, which have their basis in what *she* takes to be another's interests and concerns and are made with reference to

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130 Benhabib, Seyla, "Judgement and the Moral Foundations of Politics in Hannah Arendt's Thought," in Situating the Self: gender, community, and postmodernism in contemporary ethics (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 124, 305.

131 Benhabib, 305.

131 Ibid.

133 Arendt, Hannah, Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy, ed. & interpretive essay Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 74.

our own. What she achieves, then, is "impartiality which is not neutrality," a "situated impartiality."[134]

As I see it, this is precisely where Hume's theory would leave us. I say this for several reasons, but mostly because one cannot, on Hume's account, form the idea of another person's emotion unless one has had the corresponding impression. This follows from the claim that the passions are simple impressions and that all simple ideas are copies of simple impressions. Thus, one can sympathize only with experiences that one has had himself. In other words, sympathy's operation therefore depends upon relations and varies with the closeness of relations.

Hume himself points this out when he tells us that we sympathize more with those closely related to us than with strangers. Of course, he also emphasizes that these relations are supposed to be irrelevant when we evaluate people's actions and characters. So, a simple appeal to humankind's sympathetic nature can hardly suffice to explain evaluation for Hume. Yet, undeniably, the objectivity that this non-partial evaluation requires depends ultimately upon comparison – that of my situation in particular or of a human being generally. I know of no other measure.

Iris Marion Young agrees, arguing that this method of evaluation, instead of giving us a more objective standpoint, requires and reinforces the assumption that all subjects are similar[135]; and this is not the case. We each have our own

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135 Disch, Lisa, "More Truth Than Fact," in Political Theory (Vol. 21, Nov., 1993), 672.
136 Young, Iris Marion, "Asymmetrical Reciprocity," in Intersecting Voices: dilemmas of gender, political philosophy, and policy (Princeton, N.J.: University Press, 1997), 44.

unique life-stories, emotional habits and values, and, because of this, our positions are unique and irreversible.[136]

To be fair to Hume, his moral theory does enable the generation of some intersubjectively shared viewpoints and moral determinations, and for this to occur there must be an underlying sentiment involved that is common to us all. My concern is that although these viewpoints may be acceptable, they may not be satisfactory and meaningful. Perhaps too cynically, I suspect that something we could all agree upon – a situation we could all see similarly – would be rather trivial and arbitrary, a truism that need not be considered in the first place.

Oftentimes we conceive the problem of moral agency to be a problem of getting from the subjective to the objective, of gaining a clearer, better, impartial view of ourselves, our friends, and our actions.[137] We seek authority for our judgements, rather than simply settling for "well this is how it seems to me." But what we must consider is that the struggle for objectivity is followed by another, perhaps more difficult, challenge: that we not lose our subjectivity in our quest for justification. Ironically, I add, this position is informed by the Humean claim that we cannot *own* our actions unless we can make judgements not only about ourselves and our place in society and the world, but also the similarities and differences between our situation and the situations of others. Where I clearly diverge from Hume is in my thinking that it is only through considered

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[137] Young, 39.

[137] Tirrell, Lynne, "Storytelling and Moral Agency," in The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism (Vol. 48, No. 2, Spring, 1990), 124.

judgement afforded by discourse that our decisions and actions can be informed by human standards and in human terms, and with reference to particular human interests.

This is reminiscent of the view held by contemporary moral and political philosopher, Jurgen Habermas, who believes the best way to achieve a community informed standpoint is to bring our interests to the table by communicating them to others.[138] Because we are not mind-readers, Habermas explains, in order to arrive at any kind of shared understanding we must communicate our concerns, perspectives and interests to one another. Of course, ideas are not simply thrown out at random with the hope that something will catch on; there are specific epistemic rules as to how discourse should be carried out. Although these rules are outlined and detailed for us by Habermas, he says that they are based on our intuitive know-how in competent argumentation.[139] So it seems that our understanding of them is first aroused by reflecting on argumentation, and they actually make discourse morality possible in the first place. As such, they are not transcendental or *a priori* conditions of possibility.

Whether implicitly or explicitly, every speech act makes three universal validity claims, according to Habermas. (1) A claim to the truth of what is said or assumed, (2) a claim to the "rightness" of what's being said in a given context and (3) a claim to the speaker's truthfulness.[140] Hence, everyday linguistic interchange

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139 Habermas, Jurgen, Truth and Justification, ed. & trans. Barbara Fultner (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2003), 247.

140 Ibid.

141 Habermas, 247.

is a process of raising and recognizing validity claims.[141] However, it gets more sophisticated when it comes to discourse on morality, given that it requires some idealizing suppositions, such as: participants must be motivated only by the force of the better argument, all competent parties are entitled to participate on equal terms in discussion, and no relevant argument is to be suppressed or excluded.[142]

Argued thus, I suspect Habermas, like Hume, thinks that the goal of universalization is impartiality.[143] It is in arguing that a person's particular, relevant interests should factor into moral determinations, and that the adequacy of these determinations can only be ensured by argumentation actually being carried out amongst all concerned (rather than just in one's head), that Habermas clearly sets himself apart from Hume in particular and the Modernist tradition generally. With that, Habermas's philosophy carries the differing upshot that through discourse morality he intends to give us moral claims that are justified and validated by a procedure that is not only impartial, but also *satisfactory* to all rational agents *concerned.*

While I like the communicative model Habermas has proposed and think it does much heavy lifting in affording the generation of valid claims, it seems to reduce the claims to something cut and dry. I say this because for Habermas when we have a contested claim we appeal to discourse in order to seek rational and satisfactory agreement on it. So, in the end, the contested norm cannot be

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142 Habermas, 255.

143 Ibid.

143 Of course, he uses a different method to achieve this end, and has different considerations of what kinds of interests and inclinations should factor into our determinations.

more or less right or valid; it's either right or wrong – we either agree or disagree, and ideally we agree. In theory this seems like a good method because it is in everybody's best interests and through it we can generate more meaningful moral claims. But, practically speaking, it seems quite unfeasible and unrealistic to assume that we could ever come together and discourse in this way.[144]

Even if we grant it feasible, it would seem that the moral claims we could actually generate through this method would be trivial at best. On my reading of Habermas, you cannot bring conflicting *values* to the table because (1) you will not get an outcome that has universal legitimacy[145] and (2) where the process of discourse morality seems to be that of a give and take in coming to an understanding of and agreement on the overall best interests of those concerned, it seems plausible to assume that at least one person would have to compromise (if not sacrifice) their claim in order to achieve such agreement. Thus, though seemingly extending the sphere of what is to count as a legitimate and meaningful moral claim, I believe that Habermas actually makes it as limited if not more limited than Hume.

Furthermore, "moral views vary not only from one society to another but also from one individual to another in the same society."[146] Like Hume tells us, our actual sympathies are not only highly variable they are also highly partial and largely influenced by our affinities to persons near to us in space and time, similar

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[144] I recognize this is not of concern for Habermas, because he is not trying to *convince* anyone that they should adopt this system.

[146] Habermas, Jurgen, The Postnational Constellation: Political essays, ed. & trans. Max Pensky (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2001), 125.

[146] Mackie, J.L., Hume's Moral Theory, ed. Ted Honderich (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 67.

to us in language and culture and in shared interests and family ties.[147] Outside a small circle of family and friends, it seems unlikely that anyone will share the same concerns with anyone else.

What this suggests is that although the feelings of doing the right or wrong thing may be universal to all humans, cultures differ very much on what they define as right and wrong. As a consequence, moral principles are, in my opinion, only provisionally true, where they apply to most people, in most cultures, in most circumstances, most of the time.

Granted, with Habermas our interests are more "out there" than they are with Hume by virtue of their actually being lain on the table. However, what we could come to agree upon, given our unique interests and values, seems to me like it would be quite limited and trivial at best. Thus, I take issue with whether the claims we could actually generate through Habermas's discourse morality would prove *satisfactory*. From what has just been said, my conclusion is, quite simply: I think not.

But I intend to do more than critique, I want also to prescribe. What I think is needed is something that neither Habermas nor Hume's theories afford, a way to distinguish between the *background* and the *context* of a claim when it comes to making moral pronouncements.

In my opinion, there are contingent aspects that affect our analysis in every situation and we must therefore factor in individual idiosyncrasies, not to

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[147] Hume, 2.1.11.5.

arrive at a consensus – reducing or holding the individual to the collective standard – but to arrive at an understanding first and foremost. Background and context increase understanding inasmuch as the background helps to explain moral behaviour by taking account of individual idiosyncrasies and the context helps to properly assess the behaviour by enabling us to better relate to the particular agent given his differences from and similarities to us.

True, typically in judging an act we don't judge the entire background that contributes to the agent's lifestyle, but rather a particular act he performs. A.S. Cua argues that if "in order to judge the actions of a man, we must understand the system of meaning and reference that constitutes that world in which he dwells,"[148] no moral judgement would be possible, since every judgement would require an understanding of another's total existence.[149] This is based on the assumption that attempting to understand an act before we judge it would make our judgement impossible because we are required to understand the whole system of social, cultural and political beliefs that informed the action.

I agree that if we emphasized understanding alone when making moral judgements it would render them obsolete and completely unfeasible, but this emphasis is undue. Judgement and understanding must go hand-in-hand, receiving equal emphasis, for our judgements to be legitimate; for how can you rely on a moral judgement's accuracy if you do not truly understand the character of the moral agent in question? A judgement that does not require a

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[148] Cua, A.S., "Moral Judgement and Understanding," in Philosophy and Phenomenological Research (Vol. 30, No. 4, Jun., 1970), 615.

[149] Ibid.

comprehensive understanding is both possible and efficient, but it cannot necessarily be said to be adequate because it is likely uninformed and misrepresentative.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Stated directly, the focus of this thesis has been David Hume's theory of personal identity found in the *Treatise of Human Nature*. Watering it down with the hope that its intended meaning has already been adequately conveyed and preserved throughout, let me briefly reiterate by saying Hume's theory began with and built upon the assumption that humans are sentient beings whose knowledge is arrived at through sense impressions. How we understand ourselves and the world around us is therefore subject to change by virtue of the impressions we experience. If an accurate characterization, given that our impressions are many and varying, we cannot have one single impression and one derivative idea that constitutes a corpus of knowledge in any capacity, least of all when it comes to personal identity which, according to Hume, requires invariance.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, Terence Penelhum, Jane L. McIntyre and Barry Stroud each take issue with this theory. Specifically, Penelhum focused on the sharp distinction Hume drew between identity and difference, arguing "change" should be understood as relative to the kind of thing we are talking about. When it comes to "self" or "personal identity" we should understand them as allowing for and accommodating many changes, he argued, and, as such, they can endure through time.

While interesting and appealing, insofar as it speaks to our common intuitions about change and the nature of self, I argued that Penelhum has not engaged with Hume's argument. What Hume has denied is the possibility of any impression of a self remaining uniformly identical and underlying our various

interrupted and changing experiences. Subject to argument, then, is the claim that remaining the same person throughout our lives cannot be derived from an impression of self. Penelhum says nothing in the way of this.

His argument lost even more force given that his loose definition of self and Hume's strict one would leave us in the exact same predicament when it comes to knowing selves, and this is what Penelhum's project attempted to address and improve upon.

McIntyre, you'll remember, argued that Hume's theory of personal identity presupposes and requires the very idea of enduring self he attempted to disprove. By presenting us with a self that is *affected* by experience, Hume needs to explain how an immaterial self that doesn't endure can be affected, even if only insofar as something of the past must carry over into the present, enabling a transition from one state to the other to occur, McIntyre contends.

It struck me that McIntyre took Hume's proposition about *self-knowledge* to have implications for the *existence* of self. Accordingly, I argued: Hume's claim that we cannot have an idea or knowledge of ourselves as enduring the same through time is independent of and does not entail the further claim that self cannot endure in some way. What it does entail is that consistency is not a part of self's essential nature, and, as such, a strict notion of personal identity does not apply to selves. And this says little about the possible abidingness of selves, and much in the way of our inability to *know* anything about the self beyond our perceptions. This led me to conclude that Hume does not require an idea of an enduring self to support his theory that we cannot have an idea of an enduring

self. All he needs is to make plausible the idea that an accurate understanding of "self" must account for many more or less consistent and related perceptions.

Barry Stroud paralleled McIntyre's reasoning when he suggested Hume's theory reduces "mind" to something fictitious. Essentially, he questioned: If the mind or imagination is nothing but a bundle of perceptions and it is possible to recognize this, *what* does the recognizing? Responding with the 'mind' or 'imagination' doesn't help us, he reasoned, because there is no such thing; there is only a bundle of perceptions.

The source of Stroud's problem, I indicated, was in equating 'we have a mistaken *belief* in what constitutes mind' with 'if the mind is a bundle of perceptions, then the mind *itself* is illusory.' Thus, Stroud has failed to distinguish between our belief in the integrity of the concept "mind" and the nature of mind itself.

I was, and still am, quite confident in thinking Hume doesn't mean to imply that the mind is illusory, but rather the simpler and less contentious proposition that we have a mistaken understanding of its nature. I supported this interpretation by arguing that it isn't necessary for an abstract idea representing a class of things with a common quality to be preceded by an impression that is the separate and distinct impression *of* that quality.[150] Yes, it seems odd to say 'a bundle of perceptions – the mind – confuses certain sequences of perceptions with others in misunderstanding its own nature. But this is an issue of parlance rather than truth value.

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[150] Garrett, 342.

The major concern that I expressed in this chapter was (1) if Hume is correct in claiming our belief in identity is defective in meaning and can be suppressed, and (2) if we consider that the judgements we make are often binding and presuppose a self that endures, then (3) the practice of judging human beings is likely inadequate and our judgements misrepresentative, given that (4) our judgement would refer to something "real" but to the real as unspecified, considering the person under scrutiny is, strictly speaking, constantly changing to appearance and understanding.

True, character *is* expressed in a person's actions. But this is a minor and inconsequential concession given that each new act creates a partly new character, and character as already formed implies only a certain range of probabilities and possibilities for action. Considering judgement is, primarily, an attempt to define and limit something for the sake of understanding and Humean selves are always changing, judging one another would be inconclusive and would lose its significance entirely. Thus, legitimation of judgement was not afforded by Hume's theory of personal identity alone.

Looking elsewhere for judgement's legitimation, with the help of William R. Carter, Harry Frankfurt, Richard Taylor, Peter van Inwagen and Randolph Clarke, Chapter 3 examined Book II of the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* wherein Hume's moral theory was expounded. I quickly discovered that Hume's theory of free will has major implications for moral actions, responsibility and judgements.

William R. Carter, Peter van Inwagen, Richard Taylor and Randolph Clarke each focused on the implications Hume's theory has for deliberation. Holding the minority opinion, Clarke believed it is the absence of beliefs about *inabilities* that is necessary for deliberation, not the *positive* belief in freedom, in genuine alternatives, proposed by the others.

Although sympathetic to Clarke's view, my own view was informed by and closely aligned with that of William James. Like James, I argued that an agent may consistently believe that the causal chain determining his action includes deliberation and that deliberation can be effective in contributing to determining his action. The consistency of this position relies on the proposition that regardless of whether the universe is determined, the fact that the future is unknown and that a person's actions help to determine that future remain.

After much deliberation, I moved on to questioning where exactly Hume's account of freedom leaves us with respect to moral responsibility and evaluation.

Beginning by drawing an important distinction between the liberty of indifference (negation of necessity and causes) and the liberty of spontaneity (that which is opposed to force), Hume attempted to show that the common conception of freedom (indifference) actually undermined traditional ethics and that his theory (spontaneity) would safeguard it.

That which isn't subject to necessity and causality is random or chance, Hume explained. A random human action does not follow from a person's character and, as such, does not carry any moral weight or meaning. Thus, any meaningful instantiation of freedom requires determinism.

Nevertheless, Hume believed that the degree of constraint involved in a person's actions certainly has implications for his or her moral responsibility. As I indicated, he was careful to point out that determinism is not to be understood as akin to or even associated with coercion, but rather necessity. Unlike coercion, necessity doesn't entail a total loss of freedom or control, but rather that there are limitations to our freedom. Surprisingly, this, instead of absolving us from moral responsibility and evaluation, actually enables its proper attribution, Hume contended. That is because any judgement of moral responsibility must presuppose the causal relation between motive and action, because we do not blame human beings for particular actions they perform, but for the qualities of character that motivated the action. Moreover, Hume explained, we constantly assume human behaviour is part of the causal nexus and is subject to change by virtue of rewards and punishments.

In short, Hume's theorized: Because it includes human behaviour as part of the causal chain and connects an individual's actions to his or her character, determinism allows for the proper attribution of rewards and punishments, and therefore safeguards ethics.

Groundwork in place, I moved on to tie in the previous chapter. Supposing our knowledge of others can only ever be approximate and all of our actions are determined, as we find in Hume, I questioned whether we can ever be justified in speculating as to what a person might have done in a given situation. The reason I raised this was because, typically, we attempt to understand an action by tracing it back to its agent's antecedent motive, with the intention of figuring out what

might have been from the possibilities afforded by the situation and thereafter evaluate the motive and action accordingly. But if a person's action is determined, I reasoned, there are no possibilities for action, there is only the realization of the actual. Because it is realizing one possibility over another that makes one worthy of commendation or censure, in only giving us actuality – i.e. that which is determined by the satisfaction of antecedent conditions beyond one's ultimate control – I concluded that Hume's theory does not give us an adequate basis for moral evaluation after all.

When coupled with what was advanced in Chapter 2, then, I found that Hume's theories of personal identity and free will lead to the conclusion that we are not justified in judging one another because: (1) Self is always developing, so there are innumerable perceptions that must factor into its adequate assessment. (2) Our evaluations must depend upon prevalent rather than abiding qualities; all we can scrutinize are words and actions, given that we are not mind-readers. And (3) if a person's action was determined then he or she could not have done otherwise. Accordingly, a person's action cannot be evaluated along the lines of "S/he did x but could have done y."

I began Chapter 4 by explaining another important aspect of Hume's moral theory, his claim that moral judgements are grounded in feeling rather than reason and lack any rational justification or foundation independent of the moral sense. More specifically, moral judgements are grounded in the sympathetic emotional responses of pleasure and pain, which enliven the idea we have of another to the point where it is much like the vivacity of an impression;

thereafter, our judgements are refined by taking account of some general and stable points of view.

This was a point of contention for Norman Kemp-Smith and Don Garrett, who questioned whether Hume's theory of sympathy requires the idea of enduring self he denied in Book I. Kemp-Smith argued that Hume essentially substituted our shared capacities and dispositions (sympathy) later in the *Treatise* for the idea of 'enduring self' he argued we could not have. Garrett disagreed, asserting the 'sympathetic self' Hume speaks of is not to be equated with the 'enduring self' from earlier in the *Treatise*. The 'sympathetic self' is simply the impressions or memories of ourselves that enable the mental mechanism of sympathy to be triggered. Not unlike Garrett, I argued all Hume needs in his account of sympathy is that at any particular time when we are conscious there should be a complex impression we can identify as the impression of our own person. This impression need not remain unchanging, serving as the foundation for the idea of enduring self, but simply lend itself at all times during our conscious existence to represent the title "self".

What this chapter was most concerned with, however, was settling the culmination of questions I had raised throughout the thesis, namely: Are we justified in making binding judgements about another's quality of character by virtue of sympathy and after having arrived at an impartial perspective? For Hume, the answer was yes. After having corrected for variations due to our particular situations, he explained, every normal person can arrive at the same

moral stance, justifying our moral judgements when this process is properly carried out.

We found agreement in the philosophies of Seyla Benhabib and Hannah Arendt, who claimed that moral judgement is properly carried out when a person consults with her common sense, essentially distancing herself from private interests and thereby achieving a generality or universality of outcome. In so doing, a person judges as a member of a community rather than a self-interested individual.

Not universally agreed upon, Lisa Disch thought this was nice in theory, but held that at the end of the day we can only ever achieve relative impartiality. Ultimate, we draw our own conclusions from our consideration of the possible judgements of others; thus, this process has its basis in what *we* take to be another's interests and concerns. What we achieve, then, is impartiality which is not neutrality – a situated impartiality.

This criticism is further supported by Iris Marion Young who asserted that this method of evaluation, instead of giving us a more objective standpoint, requires and reinforces the assumption that all subjects are similar.[151] But this is not so. We each have our own unique life-stories, emotional habits and values, and, because of this, our positions are unique and irreversible.

And this is precisely what I think Hume's theory leaves us with. Rather bold and unsubstantiated until I explained this thinking follows from Hume's

[151] Although relevant and helpful, I should mention it was not directed at Hume's philosophy in particular but rather the moral stance generally.

own theory of ideas. If, as Hume held, the passions are simple impressions and all simple ideas are copies of simple impressions, I cannot form the idea of another person's emotion and sympathize with him or her unless I have first had the corresponding impression. I can therefore only sympathize with experiences I've had myself. Of course, I added the rider that sympathy's partiality is not supposed to factor into our moral judgements, so a simple appeal to humankind's sympathetic nature can hardly suffice to explain evaluation for Hume. But this does not take away from the fact that ultimately the objectivity that this non-partial evaluation requires depends upon comparison – that of my situation in particular or of a human being generally. The moral point of view must call into operation at least one sentiment common to all (normal) persons, otherwise it would not succeed in bringing everyone's judgements into agreement.

Equally cynical and realistic, this exposed my assumption that a situation we could all see similarly and agree upon would be rather trivial and arbitrary – a truism that need not be considered in the first place.

A further divergence from Hume is in my thinking that a moral stance can only be arrived at through discourse by virtue of our decisions and actions being informed by human standards in human terms, and with reference to particular human interests. In this way we may arrive at moral claims that are justified and validated by a procedure that is not only impartial, but also *satisfactory* to all rational agents concerned. This position, though largely informed by the philosophy of Jurgen Habermas, is importantly different.

Giving credit where it is due, a method like Habermas's is appealing, discourse morality serving as a platform through which we can communicate our interests and values, not our entire histories, just what is relevant to the discussion at hand and meaningful for us to acknowledge and preserve. However, left to its own devices, it reduces mores and norms to something cut and dry. Agreement would be on trivialities (not values) or it would be a matter of compromise, which defeats the purpose of coming to the table in the first place.

Further, I argued, while the feelings of pleasure and pain may be universal to all humans, cultures differ very much on what they define as right and wrong. As a consequence, I believe moral principles are only provisionally true, where they apply to most people, in most cultures, in most circumstances, most of the time.

Argued thus, when considered in isolation, Hume's theories lead to the conclusion that selves can only ever be described, not adequately judged. The information we garner about another through Hume's sympathy and the moral stance is an inadequate basis for understanding and judgement. Such inward activity ultimately has its basis in our *perceptions* of another, assumes that you or I can know what it is like to be that person by virtue of having had similar experiences that suffice to call sympathy into operation. Finally, supposing our knowledge of an individual's nature can only ever be approximate and our judgements vague, such that "Jane *may* be x type of person, but in a moment she may be another," the nature of Humean selves must necessarily elude comprehensive understanding and judgement.

With the addition of Iris Marion Young's theory of asymmetrical reciprocity, however, we can allow for Hume's theory of self and for us to appreciate that very "self," even with its many facades and complexities. Because there are contingent aspects that affect our analysis in every situation, we must factor in individual idiosyncrasies to arrive at any kind of understanding and moral stance. By coming to know a person's character through its background history and thereafter framing it within its proper context, we can come to genuinely appreciate and evaluate a person's perspective and the actions it informs, but, I emphasize, only by reference to his or her revealed past. What we are left with, then, are not judgements, but rather informed descriptions.

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