

1 The Soft Science

Through his soft revisionist lens, Hume presents us with a study of ‘mankind’ that is scientifically valid without lapsing into crude scientism. His observations are empirical, not metaphysical, yet he takes great care to clarify the precise nature and meaning of every concept he appeals to, rejecting any for which a sense cannot be found. We thus find in Hume a rare combination of conceptual clarity and empirical alertness, which is absent from much of the history of philosophy, as well as our own times of academic overspecialisation. His philosophical exploration of humanity is not, however, an interdisciplinary one. While he will often appeal to what he takes to be general truths about human nature, Hume is not in the business of collecting statistical data to justify metaphysical hypotheses, or vice versa (cf. Brun 2009: 55ff.). Rather, he presents us with an overarching human science in its own right. While by no means complete, it would be unfair to call this skeletal. We would do better to call it *impressionistic*, thereby also acknowledging the Copy Principle upon which it is built. In what follows, I re-present Hume’s ‘cautious observation of human life’ as one that is centred around ‘men’s behaviour in company, in affairs, and in their pleasures’ (T Int. 10/xix; cf. Harris 2015: 81–85).

1.1 Action and Its Causes

Actions, for Hume, are external objects in the sense of being things that we can observe through our senses. Our knowledge of them is therefore not *a priori* but empirical, mediated as it is through perceptual impressions. Accordingly, Hume believes that purported explanations of action, be they singular or general, are to be tested through experience, either directly or through testimony, for ‘we can give no reason for our most general and most refin’d principles, beside our experience of their reality’ (T Int.10/xviii). This does not entail that the *reasons* for which we act are themselves external, observable, objects. Rather, they are either observed in the behaviour which gives expression to them or are, in less straight-forward cases, to be *inferred* from it (see Chapter 7). As for motives and character traits, we acquire our knowledge of them inductively:

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[I]n judging the actions of men we must proceed upon the same maxims, as when we reason concerning external objects. When any phaenomena are constantly and invariably conjoin'd together, they acquire such a connexion in the imagination, that it passes from one to the other, without any doubt or hesitation. But below this there are many inferior degrees of evidence and probability, nor does one single contrariety of experiment entirely destroy all our reasoning. The mind balances the contrary experiments, and deducting the inferior from the superior, proceeds with that degree of assurance or evidence, which remains. Even when these contrary experiments are entirely equal, we remove not the notion of causes and necessity; but supposing that the usual contrariety proceeds from the operation of contrary and conceal'd causes, we conclude, that the chance or indifference lies only in our judgement 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. No union can be more constant and certain; than that of some actions with some motives and characters; and if in other cases the union is uncertain, 'tis no more than what happens in the operations of body, nor can we conclude anything from the one irregularity, which will not follow equally from the other. (T 2.3.1/403–404)

The prediction and explanation of action thereby forms part of the *science* of human nature that Hume seeks to establish. Actions are no different from other events¹ in being susceptible to scientific laws. As with natural science, explanation in social science is *inductive* not deductive and, thus, largely a matter of empirically informed *conjectures* (Chapter 7.1), the limitations of which Hume famously exposes. These conjectures may be based on patterns of reasoning as well as patterns of non-rational connections. What *degree of certainty* any given pattern entitles us to assume depends on whether one emphasizes Hume's positive account of inductive reasoning over his sceptical account, or vice versa (see Chapter 3.3).

Reasons why people thought and acted as they did appear on almost every page of all six volumes of *The History of England* (see Chapter 7). Hume also mentions such reasons in his philosophical works, both explicitly (e.g., T 2.2.5.4/358 & T 3.2.1.9/379) and implicitly (e.g., T 1.3.4.2/83). He describes reasons we *have* for acting (e.g., T 1.3.9.13/133), making no *ontological* distinction between the latter and the former kinds of reason. Throughout these remarks, his view of human nature is highly sensitive to our tendency to over-rationalise the actions, beliefs, and passions that are typically a matter of habit, custom, or sentiment (see, for example, T 2.2.3.9/351 & 1.3.7.6/97). Indeed, as we shall discover in due course, his naturalistic concept of what contemporary philosophers call 'normative reasons' is proto-Wittgensteinian insofar as it is to be explained by human forms of life and related practices, e.g., expectation and induction, rather

than the other way around (T 1.3.6.3/88; see Chapters 3.3 & 4.4, cf. B. Smith 2016 & nd).

Conjectures are to be confirmed or refuted through the abovementioned ‘cautious observation of human life’, the most systematic form of which is historiography (see EHU 83/65 (8.1.7), quoted in Chapter 7.1). The work of Hume as a historian reveals the motivating influence of character (see Chapters 4 & 6). He embraces a moderately Stoic virtue epistemology according to which the historian is in the emotionally privileged position of correctly evaluating past actions. He does so by approaching the golden mean between involved *empathy* (covered by Hume’s use of the term ‘sympathy’) and disinterested *detachment* (see Chapter 7 for details).

Hume believed that the correct approach to the evaluation of action is that of evaluating the *character* that the action reveals, it being a blatant falsehood that ‘all characters and actions [are] alike entitled to the affection and regard of everyone’ (EPM 169–170/133 (73.2)). The important role that character plays in T II & III, EPM, EMPL (I, III, XVI, XXII, & XXII and withdrawn essays VII & VIII), and H, suggests that it would be myopic for any account of Hume on the self and personal identity to ignore it (see Chapters 4 & 5). As we shall see, Hume’s scepticism about personal identity would not have prevented him from agreeing with David Knowles’ pronouncement that ‘a life is not a bundle of acts; it is a stream or a landscape; it is the manifestation of a single mind and personality that may grow more deformed or more beautiful to the end’ (Knowles 1963: 10).² Indeed, for Hume, a correct explanation of action will appeal to the agents’ character (Chapter 5).

1.2 Motive and Necessity

Hume thinks that actions may accord with more than one motive, just as Davidson later claimed that they may accord with one or more reasons that the agent has for acting. According to Davidson, the determining criterion for which of the numerous reasons an agent has for acting is a causal one (in a way which has proved highly problematic).³ By contrast, Hume thinks, more pragmatically, that the correct method for attributing motives to any given individual is to ask which ones(s) would reveal him as acting *characteristically*, a fact to be determined on the purely empirical grounds of past regularity:

[A]s the *union* betwixt motives and actions has the same constancy, as that in any natural operations, so its influence on the understanding is also the same, in *determining* us to infer the existence of one from that of another. If this shall appear, there is no known circumstance, that enters into the connexions and productions of the actions of matter, that is not to be found in all the operations of the mind; and consequently we cannot, without a manifest absurdity, attribute necessity to the one and refuse it to the other [...] a spectator can commonly infer

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our actions from our motives and character; and even where he cannot, he concludes in general, that he might, were he perfectly acquainted with every circumstance of our situation and temper [...] in judging the actions of men we must proceed upon the same maxims, as when we reason concerning external objects [...] No union can be more constant and certain; than that of some actions with some motives and characters. (T 2.3.1–2/403–404)

The most irregular and unexpected resolutions of men may frequently be accounted for by those who know every particular circumstance of their character and situation. (EHU 88/68 (8.1.15); cf. EMPL XVI)

What neither reason nor human nature can explain is thereby attributed to character, which divides human beings into *sorts* (Baier 2008b: 12). Christine Korsgaard has objected that the suggestion that agent-causation may be achieved ‘when the person’s character serves as a kind of filter in the causal chain, making the outcome turn one way rather than another’ seems to ‘lose track’ of the ‘fact’ that ‘nothing counts as an *action*’ unless a person ‘is the cause of an intentional movement, or something of that sort’ (Korsgaard 2008: 292). Yet Hume’s agents not only meet Korsgaard’s criterion, and others like it (Chapter 5): they are capable of steering the entire course of history (Chapter 7).

None of this makes Hume oblivious to competing non-psychological causes of human action, as made clear in the following remark on political life and human nature:

So great is the force of laws, and of particular forms of government, and so little dependence have they on the humours and tempers of men, that consequences almost as general and certain may sometimes be deduced from them, as any which the mathematical sciences afford us. (EMPL 16)

The case of law and government renders political events as close as human behaviour can come to naturally approximate events observed in controlled experiments. But Hume’s deterministic science of behaviour can only be understood in the light of his understanding of causation and necessary connexion, interest in which is doubly determined by the fact that the beliefs we act upon everyday are themselves often causal in nature (see Harris 2015: 94). In Chapters 2 and 3, I explore in some detail whether Hume espouses a ‘regularity’ theory of causation, but it is nevertheless worth noting from the outset just how weak Hume’s definitions of ‘cause’ and ‘necessity’ actually are:

I define necessity in two ways, conformable to the two definitions of cause, of which it makes an essential part. I place it either in the constant union and conjunction of like objects, or in the inference of the mind from one to the other. (T 2.3.2/409)

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Hume's rejection of the doctrine that we possess a liberty of *indifference* (which he thinks of as the illusion that one's actions are not causally necessitated by one's motives) is thus more or less tantamount to a trivial truth. He writes:

After we have perform'd any action; tho' we confess we were influenc'd by particular views and motives; 'tis difficult for us to persuade ourselves we were govern'd by necessity, and that 'twas utterly impossible for us to have acted otherwise; the idea of necessity seeming to imply something of force, and violence, and constraint, of which we are not sensible [...] We may imagine we feel liberty within ourselves; but a spectator can commonly infer our actions from our motives and character; and even when he cannot, he concludes in general, that he might, were he perfectly acquainted with every circumstance of our situation and temper, and the most secret springs of our complexion and disposition. Now this is the very essence of necessity, according to the foregoing doctrine. (T 2.3.2/407–409; cf. Baier 2008d: 226–227)

Human behaviour is as much the product of an unobservable causal necessity as any other natural event. The only difference between these events is *epistemic*: our knowledge of the principles of human nature that bind motion to action is less precise than that of the 'universally allowed' deterministic laws that bind physical force to motion. This is partly owing to the fact that the former laws are considerably more complicated, but it is equally a result of the fact that it is all but impossible to perform extensive controlled experiments involving human action (though Hume would have certainly been interested in the work of Benjamin Libet). Be all this as it may, our imperfect psychophysical knowledge is nonetheless sufficient to enable us to predict individual and social behaviour in an indefinite number of situations.

None of this prevents Hume from pursuing his 'reconciling project' of demonstrating that necessity (as he has defined it) is compatible with free will, which Hume equates to the liberty of *spontaneity* to do as one desires. Far from being an obstacle to moral responsibility, the necessity that binds character to action is *required* for its existence, at least given Hume's account of the virtues, according to which the viciousness or virtue of any given act arises from 'some *cause* in the character and disposition of the person who performed them' (EHU 98 (8.2.29)). Another corollary of Hume's position is that freedom increases in proportion to madness:

'Tis commonly allow'd that mad-men have no liberty. But were we to judge by their actions, these have less regularity and constancy than the actions of wise-men and consequently are further remov'd from necessity. Our way of thinking in this particular is, therefore, absolutely inconsistent; but it is a natural consequence of these confus'd ideas and

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undefin'd terms, which we so commonly make use of in our reasonings, especially on the present subject. (T 2.3.1/404)

Given Hume's definitions, the claim that free will and morality are compatible with causal necessity is unobjectionable. Hume asserts that 'if anyone alters the definitions, I cannot pretend to argue with him, 'till I know the meaning he assigns to these terms' (T 2.3.2/409). Whether it is Hume or his opponents who are playing with words is, of course, another matter.

1.3 Reason Enslaved

Hume famously claims that '[r]eason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them' (T 2.2.3.4/414). This remark, in tandem with Hume's 'influence argument' to the conclusion that the rules of morality 'are not the conclusion of our reason' (T 3.1.1.7/457), has spawned a hideous number of theses in moral psychology as diverse (and incompatible) as error theory, quasi-realism, expressivism, emotivism, prescriptivism, projectivism, non-cognitivism, reasons internalism, instrumentalism, hypotheticalism, contextualism, scepticism, egoism, relativism, subjectivism, motivation internalism, sentimentalism, and the Humean theory of motivation. In what follows, I focus on the last of these, only touching upon the others (which are primarily concerned with issues relating to what has come to be called the nature of moral judgement)⁴ as and when they relate to everyday motivation.

Hume repeatedly emphasises the limitations of reason as a motivating power:⁵

Reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will (T 2.3.3.1/413); [abstract] or demonstrative reasoning, therefore, never influences any of our actions, but only as it directs our judgement concerning causes and effects (T 2.3.3.2/414); impulse arises not from reason but is only directed by it (T 2.3.3.3/414); reason alone can never produce any action, or give rise to volition [...] the same faculty is as incapable of preventing volition (T 2.3.3.4/414 5); reason has no influence on our passions (T 3.1.1.7/457); I have prov'd, that reason is perfectly inert, and can never either prevent or produce any action or affection (T 3.1.1.8/458); reason can never immediately prevent or produce any action by contradicting or approving it [...] Reason is wholly inactive. (T 3.1.1.10/458)⁶

Passages such as those quoted above have inspired the Humean theory of motivation, according to which an agent cannot be motivated by belief alone, but only by a belief-desire pair. More particularly, the Humean theory states that an agent is motivated to act if and only if she:

has an intrinsic desire for the world to be a certain way and a belief that her acting in the relevant way, a way which represents an option available to her, will result in the world's being the way she intrinsically desires it to be. (M. Smith 2010: 153, cf. M. Smith 1987: 12)

Humeans about motivation thereby claim that their theory is pre-supposed by 'all of the other explanations that we commonsensically give' (M. Smith 1987: 157), maintaining that the only difference between actions and (mere) bodily movements is that the former may always be explained in Humean terms that reveal the agent's intention (cf. Davidson 1978: 7–8).

Hume's *science* of humanity, outlined in Section 1.1, gives a far more central role to *character* than the Humean theory of motivation might have us imagine (cf. Baier 2008a & 2010, and Sandis 2009). Indeed, his historical explanations are so unlike those produced by the Humean theory that we should question whether the latter is really to be found in Hume's philosophical work at all. Baier considers specific explanations offered by Hume and concludes that they cannot be reconstructed into a Humean story. One could argue that there is simply a deep inconsistency between Hume's practical work as a historian and his philosophical theories, one that possibly reflects Hume's own meta-philosophical outlook (T 1.4.7.2/264). But this would be uncharitable since, as already noted, Hume reflects on the nature of human action in his writings on historiography. Moreover, none of his philosophical views lend any direct support to the Humean theory. Here are some reasons for thinking this, anticipating the full-blown argument of Chapter 6.

In the much-quoted passages referred to at the start of this section, the term 'belief' is conspicuous in its absence. More to the point, Hume does not equate belief with reason across his philosophical writings. Rather, he uses the term 'reason' in a number of interrelated senses, describing it as a faculty of discovery (e.g., T 3.1.1.9/458, cf. EHU 28 (4.1.7)), an instinct (e.g., T 1.3.16.9/179), as an equivalent to the general properties of the imagination (T 1.4.7.7/267), and 'an affectation of the very same kind as passion' (T 2.3.8.13/437).⁷ The last quotation derives from a passage in which Hume makes the following subtle distinction between reason and passion:

What we commonly understand by *passion* is a violent and sensible emotion of mind, when any good or evil is presented, or any object, which, by the original formation of our faculties, is fitted to excite an appetite. By *reason* we mean affectations of the very same kind with the former; but such as operate more calmly, and cause no disorder in the temper: Which tranquillity leads us into a mistake concerning them, and causes us to regard them as conclusions only of our intellectual faculties. (T 2.3.8.13/437)

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In other places, reason is contrasted with experience (e.g., EHU 28 (4.1.7)), sentiment (e.g., EPM 170/134 (1.3)), and imagination (e.g., T 1.3.9.19n22/117n.1, cf. EHU 49 (5.2.12)), but never desire. Reason, it would seem, is too calm an affectation to be called an emotion, but hardly a product of the intellectual faculties.

The conclusions of reasoning, then, are objects of belief (viz., simple ideas), which may or may not be believed (depending on the extent to which they are believed). Judgements derived from reason alone are not *felt*. Conversely, opinions that are felt are not judgements derived from reason alone. Are they nonetheless *judgements* of truth and falsehood? Only in the limited senses given in Hume's fork. Reason may tell me that the future will not necessarily resemble the past, or that the external world may not exist as I perceive it, but these are not conclusions that I can bring myself to believe. They are conceptions I hold before my mind, and I may even form a calm *judgement* that (it is true that) the conclusion follows from the premises, but I need not *believe* (or, if you like, *judge*) the conclusion to be true. Even when one correctly infers an entailment, the conclusion reached through the reasoning process falls short of being a belief. One may go through a reasoning process yet fail to actually *believe* the conclusion reached.

At most, reason might be seen as a specific (but by no means the only) *source* of belief, namely one capable of *discoveries*, as limited by Hume's fork:

Reason is the discovery of truth or falsehood. Truth or falsehood consists in an agreement or disagreement either to the *real* relations of ideas, or to *real* existence and matter of fact.⁸ Whatever, therefore, is not susceptible of this agreement or disagreement, is incapable of being true or false, and can never be an object of our reason [...] our passions, volitions, and actions [...] are original facts and realities, compleat in themselves, and implying no reference to other passions, volitions, and actions. 'Tis impossible, therefore, they can be pronounced either true or false, and be either contrary or conformable to reason.⁹ (T 3.1.1.9/458; cf. T 2.3.2/413)

Such discoveries may result in belief, but they are not its only source. *Mutatis mutandis*, not *all* beliefs are inert on Hume's view. After all, Hume believes that 'any thing may produce any thing' (T 1.3.15.1/173). At most, it is only those beliefs reached through reason alone that cannot motivate (see Pigden 2009b & Sandis 2009). But even this will prove to be a misleading way of putting things, since (as we shall see) Hume cannot even allow that reason can alone produce beliefs of any kind.

For Hume, beliefs and/or opinions are *lively* ideas: 'An opinion or belief is *nothing but a strong and lively idea deriv'd from a present impression related to it*' (T 1.3.8.16/119, emphasis in original; cf. T 1.1.1.1/1–2 & 1.3.7.5/96). Given that ideas differ from impressions only in their degree of vivacity,

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Hume naturally supposes that lively ideas, such as beliefs, exhibit the same effects as impressions, to an appropriately fainter degree (cf. T 1.3.5.7/8). In fact, without the influence of belief all of our actions would be at the complete mercy of our impressions (T 119, see also Owen 1999: 165). In a section entitled 'Of the Influence of Belief', he writes:

[T]he ideas of those objects, which we believe either are or will be existent, produce in a lesser degree the same effect with those impressions, which are immediately present to the senses and perception. The effect, then, of belief is to raise up a simple idea to an equality with our impressions, and bestow on it a *like* influence on the passions. (T 1.3.10.3/119)

The context makes it clear that by 'like influence' Hume means 'brings about the *same* effect to a lesser degree'. The degree in question here is proportionate to the degree to which the idea in question is fainter than the impression of which it is a copy, beliefs being the *liveliest* of all ideas. As Annette Baier put it,

Hume does not exactly subscribe to a 'belief + desire' analysis of motivation, since desires are only among the passions and sentiments which lead to action, and for him a main role for belief is to cause passions, as well as to instruct us on how to satisfy them. (Baier 2010: 514–515; cf. Korsgaard 2009: 64, n. 6)

In addition, while Hume *contrasts* reason with sentiment he explicitly *identifies* belief with it:

[B]elief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures. (T 1.4.1.8/183)

Belief is nothing but a peculiar feeling [...] or sentiment [...] 'Tis felt rather than conceived, and approaches the impression, from which it is deriv'd, in its force and influence. (T App. 3–9/624ff.)

So conceived, belief is an act of mind consisting of a 'strong and steady conception of any idea' (T 1.3.7.5, n. 20/96–97, n.1). To conceive of an idea in such a way, one which 'approaches in some measure to an immediate impression', is to be 'perswaded of the truth of what we conceive' (ibid.). Such persuasion does not merely *accompany* the simple conception (that would render the persuasion equivalent to an impression), but is a modification of it into something firmer.

Hume felt that the account of belief outlined in his *Treatise* had been misunderstood, dedicating the first half of his *Appendix* to clarifying his notion of belief (whose previous expressions had 'not been so well chosen') in the hope of 'guarding against all mistakes in readers' (T App.1/623).

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Here, Hume distinguishes more explicitly between simple conceptions (viz., ideas) and firm conceptions (viz., the *feeling* that an idea is true). Beliefs are neither new ideas, nor impressions accompanying simple conceptions but, rather, firm conceptions of the very same idea that one may have previously conceived simply:

[I]f belief consisted merely in a new idea, annex'd to the conception, it wou'd be in a man's power to believe what he pleas'd. We may, therefore, conclude, that belief consists merely in a certain feeling or sentiment [...] when we are convinc'd of any matter of fact, we do nothing but conceive it, along with a certain feeling, different from what attends the mere *reveries* of the imagination. And when we express our incredulity concerning any fact, we mean, that the arguments for that fact produce not that feeling. Did not the belief consist in a sentiment different from our mere conception, whatever objects were presented by the wildest imagination, wou'd be on an equal footing with the most establish'd truths founded on history and experience. There is nothing but the feeling, or sentiment, to distinguish the one from the other [...] there is a greater firmness and solidity in the conceptions, which are the objects of conviction and assurance, than in the loose and indolent reveries of a castle-builder [...] They strike upon us with more force; they are more present to us; the mind has a firmer hold of them, and is more actuated and mov'd by them [...] In short, they approach nearer to the impressions, which are immediately present to us. (T App. 2 & 3/ 624–625)

Rejecting the view that a belief might be 'annex'd' to a conception without modifying it 'after the manner that will and desire are annex'd to particular conceptions of good and pleasure' (T App. 4/625), Hume concludes that what distinguishes beliefs from simple conceptions is but a feeling or sentiment. To simply conceive something is not to hold it true, but merely to have a possible truth present in one's mind. By contrast, to believe that *x* is true is to *feel* that it is true. Tito Magri puts it well when he writes that to believe is 'to have an idea present to the mind as if it were an impression' (Magri 2008: 191). By so *modifying* simple conceptions, beliefs have the power to influence action: 'The *effects* of belief, in influencing the passions and imagination, can all be explain'd from the firm conception' (T App. 7/ 626; emphasis in original).

What moves us to act, then, is not a simple conception but a belief. Reason alone cannot produce such a feeling. It may give rise to conceptions of matters of fact, or the relation of ideas, but it cannot *produce* belief, let alone passion or action.¹⁰ A judgement may result in either knowledge or (mere) opinion or belief, but reason alone cannot cause it to do so, which is not to say that it cannot play an important *role* in the production of our beliefs and actions.

Karl Schafer (2010: §1) argues that Hume's claim that reason is inert must be understood as a claim about the inability of the faculty *itself* to generate new volitions, passions, or actions. The view presented here is sympathetic to this insight, but would add beliefs to the list of things that reason cannot produce on its own. This is incompatible with Schafer's claim that 'beliefs about pleasure and pain' may be the product of abstract reasoning as well as his further suggestion that some other faculty (*viz.*, a moral one) is required for motivation. The impotence of *reason* to (alone) initiate or prevent any action or volition, I have urged, should not be conflated with the impotence of *belief*. Karl Schafer additionally maintains that while such non-Humean interpretations of Hume are intuitive, they do not go far enough and consequently miss Hume's real point. Schafer argues that since Hume primarily views reason as a belief-forming faculty, his claim that reason is inert must be understood as a claim about the inability of the faculty *itself* to generate new volitions, passions, or actions, and not the inertness of some subset of beliefs that it produces. Schafer takes this to better explain why 'beliefs about pleasure and pain appear to retain their motivational significance for Hume whether or not they are the product of immediate sensation or more abstract reasoning' (*ibid.*).

On this reading, Hume's claims about the inertness of reasons should be read not as claims about the impotence of certain beliefs to produce actions, passions, or volitions, but as a statement of the altogether different thesis that our moral faculty is distinct from our faculty of reason (for only the former can generate new passions, volitions, and actions, as well as beliefs). The upshot of all this is that 'we must conceive of our moral faculty not as a form of moral or practical reason, but rather as a sort of moral sense' (*ibid.*) Schafer's Hume is thus a 'moral sense' empiricist, attacking those who attempt to ground the moral sense upon such things as *a priori* reason (S. Clarke), *necessary truth* (R. Cumberland), 'constant and never-failing' entities that exist in the mind of God (R. Cudworth and H. More), and *common sense* (T. Reid). So understood, Hume's view is closer to the (earlier) sentimentalist tradition which simply appealed to a moral *conscience* (J. Butler), *sense* (Lord Shaftsbury, F. Hutcheson), or *faculty* (Butler and Hutcheson).

Hume does indeed use the term 'moral sense' in his *Treatise*, but only to signify to the capacity to feel approval or disapproval towards a person and/or their actions (T 3.2.2.24/499). *Pace* Schafer, he does not take 'moral sense' to be a faculty of any sort (the term's complete absence from the second *Enquiry* suggests that he had already been misinterpreted on this point). Hume consequently rejects the views of both the aforementioned schools, preferring to think of morality as a matter of having the right *sentiments* rather than intuitions (no matter how derived), a view that was to indirectly influence the utilitarian philosophers, Bentham and Mill. We have already seen that such sentiments will include beliefs (which Hume does not always

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distinguish from judgement, though, as we have seen, he does not appear to have a unified concept of the two).

Just as Lewis Carroll would later demonstrate that entailment and inference are not the same thing (Carroll 1895), so Hume shows that inferential judgement does *not* amount to a belief: in each case the latter may result from the former, but it need not do so (nor *ought* it to, Hume would say). *Pari passu*, one can judge that the truth of *q* follows from the truth of *p*, without coming to form the belief that *q* is true, *even if* one believes that *p*. Conversely, one can believe *q* to be true, without judging that its truth follows from that of anything else one believes. Such possibilities underlie the compatibility of sceptical judgements with non-sceptical beliefs (and vice-versa, albeit less frequently). This is the sense in which human nature is stronger than reason.¹¹ Hume goes to great lengths to show that this does not make our beliefs unreasonable (see Owen 1999: 144–146). On the contrary, what is unreasonable is the thought that all our beliefs are the conclusions of reason alone.

The above would seem to suggest that Hume does not equate beliefs and opinions with judgements. Unlike the latter, the former are not judged or conceived but *felt*. More to the point, while *beliefs* can alone cause action, judgements can only do so in combination with a passion:¹²

The action may cause a judgement, or may be *obliquely* caused by one, when the judgement concurs with a passion [...] reason, in a strict and philosophical sense, can have an influence on our conduct only after two ways: Either when it excites a passion by informing us of the existence of something which is a proper object of it; or when it discovers the connexions of causes and effects, so as to afford us means of exerting any passion. These are the only kinds of judgment, which can accompany our actions, or can be said to produce them in any manner; and it must be allowed that these judgments may often be false and erroneous. (T 3.1.1.11–12/459)

Hume is no Humean about motivation, but nor does he quite maintain that ‘an action essentially is nothing more than a movement caused by a judgement or idea that regularly has an effect on the will’ (Korsgaard 2009: 63–64). After all, no idea could have an effect on the will unless it was sufficiently vivid to qualify as a belief and our beliefs do not arise from pure reason but are typically explained by our character (see Chapters 5 & 7).¹³

On the other hand, it is worth recalling that beliefs – being ideas rather than impressions – are not ‘complete in themselves’, and thereby remain susceptible to the cogitations of reasons and capable of truth or falsehood. Unhelpfully, though, here and elsewhere, things are not helped by the fact that Hume makes no attempt to distinguish between one’s *believing* something and *what* one believes. To complicate things further, recall that for Hume, reason is itself an affection, differing from passion only in its degree

of tranquillity. He accordingly also characterises the 'ideas of the judgement' as he does sentiments:

it is something *felt* by the mind which distinguishes the ideas of the judgement from the fictions of the imagination [...] and renders them the governing principles of all our actions. (T 1.3.7.7/97)

Norton and Norton parse 'ideas of the judgement' as 'ideas believed' (T 454, n.7), but this is somewhat rash. The only reason to suppose that Hume might use the words 'judgement' and 'belief' interchangeably is that he does not make a song and dance about their differences. In fact, Hume never offers a proper account of judgement (see Stroud 1993: 268), thereby forcing the reader to either (a) assume it is to be identified with belief, or (b) reconstruct the notion out of Hume's distinction between simple and firm conceptions of ideas. Judging by his footnotes and appended clarifications, it is certainly plausible that judgements fall somewhere between the two:

The error consists in the vulgar division of the acts of the understanding into *conception*, *judgement*, and *reasoning*, and in the definitions we give of them. Conception is defined to be the simple survey of one or more ideas; Judgement to be the separating or uniting of different ideas: Reasoning to be the separating or uniting of different ideas by the interposition of others, which show the relation they bear to each other. But these distinctions and definitions are faulty in very considerable articles [...] these three acts of the understanding [...] all resolve themselves into the first, and are nothing but particular ways of conceiving our objects. (T 1.3.7.5, n. 20/96–97, n.1, emphasis in original)

[T]he mind has a firmer hold, or more steady conception of what it takes to be a matter of fact, than of fictions. (T App. 5/626)

A judgement is neither a simple conception nor a feeling or sentiment but the *thought* that something is true. Hume tells us precious little about what it is to judge that something is a matter of fact but the conception in question is arguably more vivid than imagining and fainter than belief. Such an outlook would not only allow for the possibility (valuable to Hume's scepticism) of judging that something is the case without believing it to be so, but it would also help to explain his controversial account of human morals.

Numerous books and articles have been devoted to Hume's account of the nature of moral judgement (e.g., Foot 1963 & Brand 1992) yet Hume never actually mentions moral *judgement* and, if anything like the picture outlined above is correct, he takes morals to be not judgments but beliefs. For morals, like beliefs but unlike judgements, have great motivational influence:

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Morals excite passions and produce or prevent actions. Reason of itself is utterly impotent in this matter. The rules of morality therefore, are not conclusions of our reason. (T 3.1.1.6 /457)

This allows Hume to assert that it is more correct to speak of moral sentiments than of moral judgements:

Morality, therefore, is more properly felt than judg'd of; though this feeling or sentiment is commonly so soft and gentle, that we are apt to confound it with an idea, according to our common custom of taking all things for the same, which have any near semblance to each other [...] To have a sense of virtue is nothing but to *feel* a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of character. The very *feeling* constitutes our praise and admiration [...] We do not infer a character to be virtuous because it pleases: But in feeling that it pleases after such a particular manner, we in effect feel that it is virtuous. (T 3.1.2.1–3/470–471)

Given his idiosyncratic philosophy of mind, the question of whether or not Hume is a non-cognitivist is fatefully anachronistic. What is clear is that there are no textual reasons to suppose that when Hume states that belief includes a motivating capacity he is working with a different notion of belief to that explored so far. Nor is Hume interested in meta-ethical questions about the nature of morality. Rather, his investigation focuses on *how* we come to reach our moral persuasions. His answer is that we do so not (merely) by discovering anything through either intuition or demonstration since our persuasions are *sentiments*. Commentators have equated moral sentiments with indirect passions (see, for example, Cohon 2008b: 160ff. & 174–179). But this cannot be right, for the moral sentiments are ideas whereas all passions are impressions of a particular kind (see Chapter 5 for Hume's Influence Argument).

When Hume states that *morals* motivate alone, he may well be conceiving of morals as sentiments/beliefs, but not judgements/conclusions of reason. Given that contemporary non-cognitivism may be phrased in terms of either judgements or beliefs, there is an important sense in which the question 'was Hume a non-cognitivist?' is an unintelligible one. Be that as it may, we have seen how Hume can allow that moral beliefs may be true or false. In this respect, he belongs squarely in the cognitivist camp. The trouble is that what contemporary philosophers mean by 'belief' is best captured by Hume's use of the term 'judgement'. We shall see below that what Hume calls 'belief' is something altogether different.

Beliefs for Hume are ideas, while it would appear that morals are not. This is odd, given that being 'more properly felt than judged of' does not

suffice to make moral beliefs different from lively ideas. At this point in the exegetical debate, it might not be so uncharitable to hold that Hume contradicts himself, getting tangled up in his own fragile terminology, or (at best) changes his usage (if not his mind) without alerting the reader. It all boils down to whether or not beliefs are impressions or ideas. Hume seems to want to have his cake and eat it too: beliefs are lively ideas that are more properly *felt* than *judged* of. But if that is so, then there is an importance sense in which beliefs are cognitive: in contrast to *how* I feel (e.g., tired), *what* I feel (e.g., that it would be inappropriate to act in a certain way) can be true or false in principle. And it is the nature of moral thought and belief that Hume is interested in – not morality itself (as already noted, Hume is no meta-ethicist trying to establish whether or not there can be moral truths).

What Hume cares about is *how* we arrive at our moral persuasions. His answer is that such convictions are not reached entirely through the use of reason, owing to which they do not qualify as rational discoveries (indeed, they are not discoveries of any kind). Judgements derived from reason alone are not *felt*. Conversely, opinions that are felt are not judgements derived from reason alone. Are they still *judgements*? It's not clear what hangs on this, since we've already allowed that beliefs may be true or false. Perhaps the debate becomes merely verbal at this point.

Conscious of possible confusion, Hume dedicates the first half of his Appendix to his notion of belief in the hope of 'guarding against all mistakes in readers'. He does this by clarifying thoughts whose previous 'expressions have not been so well chosen' (App. 1). Here, Hume distinguishes between simple conceptions (*viz.*, ideas) and firm conceptions (*viz.*, the *feeling* that an idea is true). Beliefs are firm conceptions and, on Hume's view, these are not ideas that are somehow accompanied by feelings. Rather, a belief just *is* the feeling or sentiment accompanying an idea. This much is evident from the Appendix passages previously quoted on p.18:

[I]f belief consisted merely in a new idea, annex'd to the conception, it wou'd be in a man's power to believe what he pleas'd. We may, therefore, conclude, that belief consists merely in a certain feeling or sentiment [...] when we are convinc'd of any matter of fact, we do not but conceive it, along with a certain feeling, different from what attends the mere *reveries* of the imagination. And when we express our incredulity concerning any fact, we mean, that the arguments for that fact produce not that feeling. Did not the belief consist in a sentiment different from our mere conception, whatever objects were presented by the wildest imagination, wou'd be on an equal footing with the most establish'd truths founded on history and experience. There is nothing but the feeling, or sentiment, to distinguish the one from the other. (App. 2)

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But it is the *conceptions* themselves that become more forceful, i.e., firmer when accompanied by a certain feeling or sentiment:

[T]here is a greater firmness and solidarity in the conceptions, which are the objects of conviction and assurance, than in the loose and indolent reveries of a castle-builder [...] they strike upon us with more force; they are more present to us; the mind has a firmer hold of them, and is more actuated and mov'd by them [...] In short, they approach nearer to the impressions, which are immediately present to us. (App. 3)

Hume seems torn between saying that belief is composed of a conception and its accompanying feeling, on the one hand, and saying that belief is merely the accompanying feeling, on the other. But he ultimately rejects the view that belief might be 'annex'd' to a conception without modifying it ('after the manner that will and desire are annex'd to particular conceptions of good and pleasure' (App. 4)).

But are firm conceptions themselves beliefs? No. Beliefs *modify* conceptions, thereby rendering them *firm*. Owing to this, conceptions can themselves animate actions, but only once they have been modified by belief. Simple conceptions cannot move anything. As Hume explains, '[the] *effects* of belief, in influencing the passions and imagination, can all be explain'd from the firm conception' (App. 7). In other words, beliefs influence action by *modifying* simple conceptions. Beliefs are more properly felt than judge'd. Nevertheless, a firm conception consists in feeling *that* something is the case. Reason alone cannot produce such a feeling. Reason can point to either simple conceptions of matters of fact or to relations of ideas, but it cannot produce belief. As hinted at by Carroll (1895), logic can tell you what to believe, but it cannot force you to believe it. Reason, similarly, leads us to simple ideas (viz., objects of belief), which may or may not be affirmed. If the question is 'what causes us to believe anything?', then the answer cannot be 'reason (alone)'.

Hume thinks that what distinguishes beliefs from simple conceptions is but a feeling or sentiment. This raises the question of whether this feeling is identical to a firm conception or is rather something that gives rise to it. Hume opts for the former. To believe that *x* is true is to feel that it is true. This feeling is but a firm conception. Otherwise it would just be an impression accompanying a simple conception, and firm conceptions would be the union of the two. But beliefs, Hume thinks, cannot be impressions. To feel that *x* is wrong one must conceive of *x* in a particular (viz., firm) way.

One answer is that the firm conception is itself a feeling. We have already seen how Hume's distinction between beliefs and judgements enables him to assert that while *beliefs* can alone cause action, judgements can only do so

in combination with a passion (T 3.1.1.11–12/459, quoted above),¹⁴ without this committing him to the view that judgements cannot *motivate* alone.¹⁵ This renders it difficult to ascertain whether or not there is any contemporary sense in which Hume may be said to be a non-cognitivist about beliefs. Judgement for Hume is a particular *form* of conception, one that cannot be reached through pure reasoning (T 1.3.7.5, n. 20, quoted above).

1.4 Ruling Passions and the Will

Hume presents his theory of the passions in Book II of the *Treatise*, eventually transformed into 1757's *A Dissertation on the Passions* (originally published as the essay 'Of The Passions'). The former divides into parts on (i) pride and humility, (ii) love and hatred (including benevolence, anger, malice, envy, and lust), and (iii) the relation of passions to the will.

Passions, for Hume, are *secondary* impressions of *reflection* as opposed to *original* impressions of *sensation*, such as bodily pain and pleasure (T 2.1.1.1/275). Secondary impressions arise either from original impressions of immediate sense-perception or from their ideas, e.g., the memory of a past sensation or the expectation of a future one. I may feel sad because I directly perceive something distressing or, just as often, because I recall (or merely believe or imagine) this had been the case. Both direct and indirect passions are 'founded on pain and pleasure' (T 2.3.9.1/438). The former require only this *cause*, whilst the latter also require a related *object*.

Hume's notion of a *reflective* impression is inspired by the Hellenistic thought that emotions may contain – or be closely related to – a cognition that is not discoverable by reason (see EMPL). Still, Hume's own conservative stance is that 'passions can be contrary to reason only so far as they are accompany'd with some judgement or opinion', a thought that leads swiftly on to the infamous remark about it not being contrary to reason 'to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger' (T 2.3.3.6./416). Hume further divides such passions into those that are, respectively, *calm* and *violent*. The former are said to include 'the sense of beauty and deformity in action, composition, and external objects'. By contrast, 'the passions of love and hatred, grief and joy, pride and humility' are all of the latter, violent kind (T 2.1.1.3/276). Hume is careful, however, to note that this 'vulgar and specious' division 'is far from being exact', noting that 'the raptures of poetry and music frequently rise to the greatest height' while 'other impressions, properly call'd *passions*, may decay into so soft an emotion, as to become, in a manner, imperceptible' (ibid.).

Hume's final division is between *direct* passions, which 'arise immediately from good or evil [...] pain or pleasure' (T 2.1.2.3/276), and *indirect*

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passions, which ‘proceed from the same principles, but with the conjunction of other qualities’ (ibid.). Parts I and II of Book II of the *Treatise*, and much of *Dissertation on the Passions*, focus on the latter. These passions involve a reciprocal relation between sentiments and ideas and include such vices and virtues as pride, humility, ambition, vanity, love, hatred, envy, pity, malice, and generosity (though Hume sees passions as the *effects* of vice and virtue, see, for example, T 2.1.7.2/295). The third part of the *Treatise* relates *the will* to direct passions, it being somewhat of a puzzle why Hume does not also allow for indirect passions to influence action on their own. The answer lies in Hume’s idea that a person only desires to act (or omits from acting) in relation to perceived good and evil (T 2.3.9.7/439), which he appears to equate with pleasure and pain (T 2.3.3.3/414 & 3.1.1.12/459, see also Karlsson 2006: 246–247). As Rachel Cohon (2008b: 172–173) persuasively argues, *indirect* passions cannot be motives to the will because they are not expectations of pleasure or pain but, rather, evaluative responses of those who do not directly relate to ‘the good or the absence of the evil that may be attain’d by any action of the mind or body’ (T 2.3.9.7/439). If that is right, then not *all* moral sentiments are motives to the will either. Direct passions, such as desire, aversion, grief, joy, hope, fear, despair, and security, are akin to – yet distinct from – the will (see Chapter 5.4).¹⁶

Hume labels the will as the most *remarkable* of the ‘immediate effects of pain and pleasure’ (T 2.1.3.2/399), employing that term to indicate the feeling of initiation of force or effort (see Chapters 1.3, 3.4, & 5.4–5.5). As noted above (Section 1.3), Hume believes that the will cannot be moved by reason alone, without the assistance of sentiments or passions (but see Chapter 6). Among the *influencing motives* of the will, the most puissant are the violent passions, although it remains true that ‘the calm ones, when corroborated by reflection, and seconded by resolution, are able to control them in their most furious movements’ (T 2.3.8.13/437–438). As with all other aspects of the nature of will and the direct passions, Hume states that these causes are the same in animals as they are in humans (see T 2.3.9.32/448), thereby reminding the reader that the difference between humans and other animals is not as large as many rationalists would have us believe.

Hume’s account of the virtues is Aristotelian insofar as it recognises, *pace* Stoicism, that morality is largely a matter of having the right passions, at the right time, and to the right degree.¹⁷ His principle of association entails that certain impressions will invoke particular passions, be they direct or indirect, and that there may also be associations between passions of either kind (see Alanen 2006: 188–192 for detail). Whilst this does not guarantee a unity of the virtues, it suggests that they are very closely connected. In the *Treatise*, Hume declares that the principle of *sympathy* is ‘the chief source of moral distinctions’ (T 3.3.6.1/618), allowing us to ‘enter into the sentiments of the rich and poor, and partake of their pleasure and uneasiness’ (T 2.2.5.14/362). However,

the principle plays no comparable role in the second *Enquiry*, a drastically modified version of Book III of the *Treatise*, which places a greater emphasis on the sentiment of approbation (Chapter 7.1 & 7.3).

Having sketched out the broad parameters of Hume's soft science of humanity, I now turn to explore the issues discussed above in greater exegetical depth and contextual breadth. I begin with Hume's concept of a cause, since without it, as well as his related concept of necessity, we cannot even have the concept of an action, let alone its study and explanation.

Notes

- 1 Hume does not use the word 'event' all that frequently in relation to actions, and when he does it is in the loose, everyday sense that would make the term more or less interchangeable with the word 'fact' (cf. Austin 1961: 156).
- 2 One way out would be to follow Christine Korsgaard's suggestion that perhaps Hume's 'notion of the person as the object of pride or love is not the same as the notion of the person as a bundle of successive perceptions' (Korsgaard 2008: 290).
- 3 I am thinking here of deviant causal chains, whose challenge Davidson conceded to be problematic (see, for example, Davidson 1978: 87).
- 4 See further below for whether Hume actually takes morals to be judgements.
- 5 Hume never talks of motivation *per se*, but only 'motives', which he takes to 'produce' or 'influence' action. Contemporary technical jargon is Humean insofar as motivation is understood as a causal notion, but the motivation (or influence) of action is different from its production. We are frequently motivated to perform actions that never take place (cf. Sandis 2012b: 73–76).
- 6 Note that, unlike a number of his interpreters, Hume only ever capitalises the word 'reason' when beginning a new sentence. Note, furthermore, that while Hume explicitly states that reason as a *faculty* is 'incapable of preventing volition' (T 2.3.3.4/414–415), he also states that 'the action may cause a judgement, or may be *obliquely* caused by one, when the judgement concurs with a passion' (T 3.1.1.11/459, quoted more fully below). By itself, reason can neither initiate nor prevent any action or volition; but it can indirectly affect our moral sentiments and judgements in profound ways (e.g., by showing that some object of desire is either non-existent or unobtainable). And reason performs a crucial service in acquainting us with all the facts relevant to moral appraisal.
- 7 David Owen writes: 'Locke is happy to use the same term for a faculty, the characteristic activity of that faculty, and the result of that faculty' (Owen 1999: 48). The same might be said of Hume's use of terms like 'reason', 'judgement', and 'passion' although, as Owen points out, reason is, for Hume, at most a 'sub-class of the imagination', and even this characterisation is problematically loose (ibid: 75–76).
- 8 Hume notes in his Appendix that 'an inference concerning a matter of fact is nothing but the idea of an object, that has been frequently conjoin'd, or is associated with a present impression' (T App. 6/626).
- 9 As shall become evident, this is not obviously true of the reflective impressions, particularly passions that are indirect (cf. Kemp Smith 1941: 166).
- 10 It is worth noting that this is not a view about the ontology of so-called motivating reasons. Contrary to what is assumed by both sides of the contemporary

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debate between psychologistic and non-psychologistic accounts of so-called 'motivating reasons', the consideration I act upon, and the belief that motivates me to act upon it, are not one and the same thing (for a detailed argument, see Sandis 2009; cf. Karlsson 2006: 246–254).

- 11 The Early Modern distinction between demonstrative and probabilistic reasoning (relating to knowledge and belief respectively) should not be conflated with the distinction between deductive and inductive reasoning (Owen 1999: 30ff & 83ff.)
- 12 This only amounts to the view that judgements cannot *motivate* alone if we conflate causation with motivation, and there is no reason to suppose that Hume did so (see note 5 for why the conflation should be avoided).
- 13 We saw in Section 1.1 that Korsgaard is considerably more sensitive to this aspect of Hume's account of action, though not ultimately persuaded by it.
- 14 Just as reason and its judgments are not, in Hume's terminology, identical to beliefs, so we should be weary of assuming that passions are identical to desires.
- 15 See notes 5 and 12.
- 16 For whether or not volition (which Hume at times identifies with the will) should count as a passion see Magri (2008) and Radcliffe (2018: 24–28).
- 17 But see Baier (2009), Cohon (2008), Greco (2013), and Swanton (2009a & 2015) for discussions of the precise nature of the distance between Humean and Aristotelian virtue ethics.