Character Development in Shaftesbury's and Hume's Approaches to Self

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Penultimate version

Forthcoming in Dan O'Brien (ed.), *Hume on the Self and Personal Identity*, Palgrave.

This essay examines the relation between philosophical questions concerning personal identity and character development in Shaftesbury's and Hume's philosophy. Shaftesbury combines a metaphysical account of personal identity with a normative approach to character development. By contrasting Shaftesbury's and Hume's views on these issues, I examine whether character development presupposes specific metaphysical views about personal identity, and in particular whether it presupposes the continued existence of a substance, as Shaftesbury assumes. I show that Hume's philosophy offers at least two alternatives. Moreover, I consider whether and how Hume's philosophy leaves scope for character development and how he departs from Shaftesbury's normative project of self-formation.

1. Hume's and Shaftesbury's philosophical projects

David Hume pursues an ambitious philosophical project in his *A Treatise of Human Nature*. By offering a detailed examination of human nature, he believes 'in effect [to] propose a compleat system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new, and the only one upon which they can stand with any security' (*Treatise*, Intro, 6; SBN xvi). For Hume, all sciences—including mathematics, natural philosophy, natural religion, morals, politics, among others—have a relation to human nature. Hence, he is confident that a close study of human nature will be of major significance for all the sciences.[1] Hume is not the first philosopher to emphasize the importance of studying human nature. Indeed, he acknowledges that his project is inspired by

[1] See Hume, *Treatise*, Intro 4–7; SBN xv–xvii.

the works of 'some late philosophers in *England* […] who have begun to put the science of man on a new footing, and have engaged the attention, and excited the curiosity of the public' (*Treatise*, Intro 7; SBN xvii).[2] In a footnote he specifies that these English philosophers are 'Mr. *Locke*, my Lord *Shaftsbury*, Dr. *Mandeville*, Mr. *Hutchinson*, Dr. *Butler*, &c.' (*Treatise*, Intro 7, n.1; SBN xvii). While Hume approaches human nature first and foremost through 'experience and observation' (*Treatise*, Intro 7; SBN xvi), some of his predecessors put more emphasis on normative questions concerning human nature and take interest in normative projects of self-formation and character development. Such normative questions are particularly present in the philosophical writings of Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713). Shaftesbury is concerned that the philosophical debates of his day have been dominated by speculative metaphysical questions that have little or no practical significance. Instead he believes that it is important that philosophy has a practical dimension and helps us improve our lives and manners. In this vein, he recommends shifting philosophy's focus 'by confronting this super-speculative philosophy with a more practical sort, which relates chiefly to our Acquaintance, Friendship, and good Correspondence with *our-selves*' (Shaftesbury 2001 [1711], 1:181).

This shift of focus towards practical questions also shapes his approach to philosophical questions of self and personal identity. As I will explain in more detail in the following, Shaftesbury supplements metaphysical questions of personal identity with normative questions concerning character development. Questions of character are also present in Hume's Book 2 account of selves, where he closely associates a self with sets of mental and bodily qualities, including character traits. By contrast, philosophical questions of character play little role in Locke's philosophy, at least in the *Essay concerning Human Understanding* and his discussion of personal identity.[3] This makes it possible that Hume's Book 2 account of selves, which differs from Locke's thinking about personal identity, builds on philosophical views developed by Shaftesbury and other British moralists.

The aim of this essay is to shed new light on the role that Shaftesbury's philosophy plays and could have played in Hume's approach to self.[4] Hume mentions Shaftesbury not only in the

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[2] A similar remark can be found in Hume, Abstract A2; SBN 646.

[3] See Locke (1975 [1690], II.xxvii). See also Boeker (2021, ch. 11).

[4] Throughout the *Treatise* Hume frequently speaks of 'self' rather than 'the self'. Here and in the following I adopt Hume's usage. It is possible that Hume does not use the definite article to give further support to his criticism of substance accounts that assume that a self exists that is invariable and has perfect identity.

Introduction to the *Treatise* but also in the section 'Of Personal Identity' in a footnote to *Treatise* 1.4.6.6. This footnote has attracted the attention of a few interpreters who disagree whether Hume praises or criticizes Shaftesbury. I will take a closer look at Hume's references to Shaftesbury in section 2, but for the rest of the paper I intend to shift the focus to other themes and examine the relation between philosophical questions of personal identity and character development. I will pay particular attention to the question of whether character development presupposes specific metaphysical views about personal identity such as the continued existence of a substance. Section 3 introduces Shaftesbury's thinking about the relation between personal identity and character development. As we will see, he combines metaphysical questions of personal identity over time with normative questions of self-improvement and character development. On this basis, I turn to the question whether and how Hume's philosophy leaves scope for character development. I will address two aspects of this issue. First, I want to examine whether the possibility of character development presupposes specific metaphysical views concerning personal identity. This is the topic of section 4. In particular, I ask whether the possibility of character development requires the continued existence of an unchanging substance. If it does, then Hume's philosophy will lack resources to account for character development, since he questions that we can have a meaningful idea of substance and hence is cautious to appeal to substances in his positive philosophical views.[5] However, another possibility is that Shaftesbury has overlooked other metaphysical options. A study of Hume's philosophy may help bring to light such other options. Second, I want to examine whether and how Hume's philosophy does and/or can accommodate a normative project that focuses on character development. This latter issue will be the topic of section 5.

2. Hume's references to Shaftesbury

Hume mentions Shaftesbury twice by name in his *A Treatise of Human Nature*.[6] The first occurrence is in the Introduction to the *Treatise*, where Hume situates his philosophical project in the context of other British philosophers who advanced the science of human nature. Since I already commented on this passage above, let us turn directly to the second occurrence. Hume

[5] See Hume, *Treatise*, 1.4.5, 1.4.6.1–4; SBN 232–253.

[6] Additionally, Hume refers to Shaftesbury in some of his other works, including Hume (1998 [1751], 1.4, 1975, SBN 170–171), Hume (1994, 90, 370).

also refers to Shaftesbury in a footnote to *Treatise* 1.4.6.6, which is part of Hume's Book 1 discussion of personal identity. There he argues that 'our propension to confound identity with relation is so great, that we are apt to imagine something unknown and mysterious, connecting the parts, beside their relation' (*Treatise* 1.4.6.6; SBN 254) such as the notion of a soul, self or substance. In this context, he adds the following footnote that mentions Shaftesbury:

> If the reader is desirous to see how a great genius may be influenc'd by these seemingly trivial principles of the imagination, as well as the mere vulgar, let him read my Lord *Shaftsbury*'s reasonings concerning the uniting principle of the universe, and the identity of plants and animals. See his *Moralists:* or, *Philosophical rhapsody*. (*Treatise* 1.4.6.6 n. 50; SBN 254)

This footnote targets arguments that Shaftesbury develops in *The Moralists, A Philosophical Rhapsody*,[7] which is one of the works included in Shaftesbury's major work *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. *The Moralists* is written as a dialogue narrated from the perspective of Philocles. One of the most important dialogue partners is Theocles, who is portrayed as a '*Heroick* GENIUS' (Shaftesbury 2001 [1711], 2:126), a well-educated Aristocrat, who lives an intellectual life devoted to the study of the arts, culture, and morality. Philocles, by contrast, tends to adopt a more sceptical stance and often brings the dialogue back down to earth by addressing concerns that ordinary human beings may have about Theocles's highly intellectual views.

Let us take a closer look at Shaftesbury's views that Hume's footnote targets. A major theme of *The Moralists* is the search for happiness and the good. Theocles invites Philocles on an intellectual journey and together they examine philosophical questions of how we can best reach happiness. For Theocles this includes understanding our place in the universe as a whole and at some stage their intellectual journey turns to reflections on beauty and order in nature. Guided by Theocles, the two friends reflect on the identity of trees as well as the identity, simplicity, and unity of individual selves. Theocles argues further that the order, beauty, and harmony of nature, presupposes a universal mind. By this he means that not only individual selves or minds exist, but that additionally there is a mind of the universe, which may also be called a 'self of nature'. Theocles is interested in understanding the relation between individual selves and the self of nature and describes it as follows:

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[7] See Shaftesbury (2001 [1711], 2:158–181, 191–218).

> Let us hear further, Is not this *Nature* still a SELF? Or, tell me, I beseech you, How are YOU *one*? By what *Token*? Or by virtue of *What*? "By a Principle which joins certain Parts, and which thinks and acts consonantly for the Use and Purpose of those Parts." "Say, therefore, What is your whole System a Part of? Or is it, indeed, no *Part*, but *a Whole*, *by it-self*, absolute, independent, and unrelated to any thing besides? If it be indeed *a Part*, and really *related*; to what else, I beseech you, than to *the Whole of* NATURE? Is there then such *a uniting Principle* in NATURE? If so, how are you then a *Self*, and *Nature* not so? How have you something to understand and act for you, and NATURE, who gave this Understanding, nothing at all to understand for her, advise her, or help her out (poor Being!) on any occasion, whatever Necessity she may be in? Has the WORLD such ill fortune *in the main*? Are there so many *particular* understanding active Principles every where? And is there Nothing, at last, which thinks, acts, or understands for *All*? Nothing which administers or looks after *All*?" (Shaftesbury 2001 [1711], M III.1, 2:200)

Theocles asserts further that individual selves are copies of the self of nature and "'That the *particular* MIND shou'd seek its Happiness in conformity with the *general-one*, and endeavour to resemble it in its highest Simplicity and Excellence.'" (Shaftesbury 2001 [1711], M III.1, 2:201) Theocles's arguments presuppose teleological views concerning the order and purpose of individual beings within the larger universe, which Theocles regards as a harmoniously ordered system.

Hume's footnote refers to 'Lord *Shaftsbury*'s reasonings concerning the uniting principle of the universe, and the identity of plants and animals' (*Treatise* 1.4.6.6 n. 50; SBN 254) in *The Moralists* and we can assume that it targets passages like the one quoted above. Hume's primary point is that there is a common tendency to postulate a uniting principle; and this tendency can be found not just among ordinary people, but also among philosophers as Shaftesbury's philosophy illustrates. Although Hume's note by itself need neither be read as a criticism nor an appraisal of Shaftesbury's view, it contains an ironic undertone, which suggests that Hume is inclined to criticize Shaftesbury.[8] Moreover, Hume's methodological commitments in the *Treatise*

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[8] The question whether the footnote criticizes or praises Hume, has received some attention in the secondary literature. Mijuskovic (1971) reads Hume as complimenting Shaftesbury and rejects the views of other interpreters, who thought that Hume criticizes Shaftesbury in the footnote. However, Corcoran (1973) identifies serious shortcomings of Mijuskovic's

conflict with the teleological views expressed by Theocles in Shaftesbury's *The Moralists*. In the paragraphs prior to the footnote Hume applies the copy principle to show that we cannot find an impression of a self understood as simple and as having perfect identity.[9] Theocles and Philocles, by contrast, are willing to accept the simplicity of individual selves and take for granted that a self is a substance.[10] Hence, there is good reason to assume that Hume's footnote is critical about Shaftesbury's views concerning unity.[11]

3. Shaftesbury's approach to selfhood

Both Shaftesbury and Hume offer approaches to selfhood which acknowledge the importance of a stable character. I will focus on Shaftesbury's view in this section, and then turn to Hume in the following sections. As will become clearer in a moment, stability plays a dual role in Shaftesbury's approach to the self. First, I take it that Shaftesbury shares the common view that stability and durability are prerequisites for personal identity in a metaphysical sense. However, Shaftesbury is not merely interested in addressing traditional metaphysical questions concerning personal identity, but he is also concerned with moral and practical questions, which leads him to ask how we can best become persons that live stable moral lives aiming at happiness. This means that on his view stability is not merely relevant in metaphysical contexts, but also has immediate moral significance. To understand what role stability plays in Shaftesbury's approach to selfhood, it is helpful to consider why he rejects bodily and psychological accounts of personal identity before examining his own positive approach to selfhood.[12]

Shaftesbury rejects bodily accounts of personal identity, because matter constantly changes. He writes:

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interpretation. According to Thiel (2011), 'the purpose of the footnote is neither to commend nor to condemn or criticise Shaftesbury' (391).

[9] See *Treatise* 1.4.6.1–2; SBN 251–252.

[10] See Shaftesbury (2001 [1711], M III.1, 2:197–198).

[11] Hence I question Mijuskovic's interpretation that the footnote praises Hume, because Mijuskovic fails to engage with the context of Shaftesbury's arguments for unity in *The Moralists* and neglects the methodological differences between Hume's and Shaftesbury's philosophical views.

[12] For further discussion, see Thiel (2011, 177–180), Winkler (2000).

> All is *Revolution* in us. We are no more the self-same Matter, or System of Matter, from one day to another. What Succession there may be *hereafter*, we know not; since even *now*, we live by Succession, and only perish and are renew'd. 'Tis in vain we flatter our-selves with the assurance of our Interest's ending with a certain Shape or Form. What interested us *at first* in it, we know not; any more than how we have *since* held on, and continue *still* concern'd in such an Assemblage of fleeting Particles. (Shaftesbury 2001 [1711], M II.1, 2:134)

The material particles that compose our body change constantly. We grow, eat, digest, breathe, loose hairs, some of our cells cease to exist and are replaced by new ones. In light of these and other physiological processes Shaftesbury regards material bodies as too fluctuating to ground personal identity.[13]

Shaftesbury also questions psychological accounts of personal identity. Although psychological accounts of personal identity need not be restricted to memory relations Shaftesbury mainly targets memory views and claims that memory is neither necessary nor sufficient for personal identity.[14] It is not necessary, because Shaftesbury believes that we can continue to be concerned with our past even if we have lost memories of past experiences.[15] Moreover, he argues that memory is not sufficient, because memory can be false.[16] Another reason for why Shaftesbury maintains that memory is not sufficient concerns radical changes of character. He illustrates this point with the example of an intimate friend who travelled through remote and foreign countries:

> Shou'd an intimate Friend of ours, who had endur'd many Sicknesses, and run many ill Adventures while he travel'd thro' the remotest parts of the East, and hottest Countrys of the South, return to us so alter'd in his whole outward Figure, that till we had for a time convers'd with him, we cou'd not know him again to be the same Person; the matter wou'd not seem so very strange, nor wou'd our concern on this account be very great. But shou'd a like Face and Figure of a Friend return to us with Thoughts and

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[13] See also Shaftesbury (2001 [1711], M III.1, 2:197).

[14] For further discussion, see Boeker (2021, 249–253).

[15] See Shaftesbury (2001 [1711], M II.1, 2:133–134).

[16] See Shaftesbury (2001 [1711], MR IV.1, 3:118).

> Humours of a strange and foreign Turn, with Passions, Affections, and Opinions wholly different from any thing we had formerly known; we shou'd say in earnest, and with the greatest Amazement and Concern, that this was *another Creature*, and not *the Friend* whom we once knew familiarly. Nor shou'd we in reality attempt any renewal of Acquaintance or Correspondence with such a Person, tho perhaps he might preserve in his Memory the faint Marks or Tokens of former Transactions which had pass'd between us. (Shaftesbury 2001 [1711], S III.1, 1:176)

Such a journey can first of all alter the outer bodily appearance of the friend. However, Shaftesbury argues that although changes in appearance can make it difficult to recognize a friend, a person can endure such changes. Shaftesbury further asks what happens if a friend radically alters their 'Passions, Affections, and Opinions' so that they have an entirely different character than prior to their travels. Shaftesbury can first of all be said to make an epistemic point that it is difficult to recognize a friend who so radically altered their passions, values, and beliefs. However, the text also states 'that this was *another Creature*', which can be interpreted as the metaphysical claim that radical changes of character can result in changes of personal identity even if one is still able to remember one's former beliefs and experiences.

Given Shaftesbury's criticism of bodily and psychological accounts of personal identity, what positive approach does he offer instead? There are passages that suggest that he is attracted to substance accounts of personal identity.[17] This is most explicit in the following passage from *The Moralists* where Philocles agrees with Theocles that the self is a substance:

> Truly, said I, as accidental as my Life may be, or as that random Humour is, which governs it; I know nothing, after all, so *real* or *substantial* as MY-SELF. Therefore if there be that Thing you call *a Substance*, I take for granted I am one. But for any thing further relating to this Question, you know my *Sceptick* Principles: I determine neither way. (Shaftesbury 2001 [1711], M III.1, 2:198)

Given Shaftesbury's claims about the self as substance, one may wonder how these claims can be reconciled with his other remarks about the self and, in particular, the

[17] See Shaftesbury (2001 [1711], M III.1, 2:198–199, MR IV.1, 3:118). Thiel (2011) argues that 'Shaftesbury falls back on the notion of a simple mind as that which guarantees personal identity through time' (245). For a critical discussion of Thiel's interpretation, see Boeker (2018).

considerations that he makes in the context of the traveller example. If Shaftesbury was wholeheartedly committed to a substance account of personal identity, then it seems that there would be no need to explore what role radical changes of character play, at least not if one approaches questions of personal identity from a metaphysical perspective.

To properly understand Shaftesbury's position I take it that we have to take seriously his criticism of purely speculative metaphysics as well as his view that philosophy is meant to be practical and help us improve our lives. Merely postulating that a self is a substance understood as a substratum is of little practical significance. A substance understood as a bare substratum is an empty vessel. The mere presence of a substratum is insufficient to help us live better lives and reach happiness. However, if one instead adopts a richer conception of a substance and considers not merely the substratum but also the character that inheres in the substance, then we can see how Shaftesbury is able to combine metaphysical questions of personal identity with normative questions of character development. Metaphysical persistence of a self is guaranteed by the continued existence of a substance. This is something that Shaftesbury is willing to take for granted. His unique contribution to the debates of his day is that he believes that we additionally should address the normative question of 'WHAT *I ought to be*' (Shaftesbury 2001 [1711], MR IV.1, 3:119). Given this interpretation, he can both accept that the self is a substance, but also take seriously that each self has a character that can be developed and improved.

Since Shaftesbury is willing to accept that a person continues to exist over time in virtue of the continued existence of a substance, he believes that we should turn to the philosophically and practically more interesting question of how a person's character can be improved and developed. For Shaftesbury character development is an ongoing long process that requires repeated practice, a strong will, and intellectual strength and willingness to acknowledge one's own weaknesses so that one can become master of one's own life.[18] An important step in this journey is a self's willingness to introspect and to enter into an inner dialogue with oneself. Shaftesbury calls this practice 'soliloquy'. He believes that when we properly introspect we will discover two persons, or two inner voices within ourselves.[19] He describes the relation between the two persons within oneself like that between a teacher and a pupil, or an agent and a patient.[20] He regards one of the persons within ourselves as the 'better' or 'nobler self' and

[18] See Shaftesbury (2001 [1711], S I.2, 1:107–118).

[19] See Shaftesbury (2001 [1711], S I.1, 1:97–100, S I.2, 1:106–118, S III.1, 1:174–177).

[20] See Shaftesbury (2001 [1711], S I.1, 1:98–100).

argues that this so-called better self should take on a guiding role and thereby help us to improve our character and become our own masters.[21]

Now the question arises whether it is up to the individual to choose a character that they aim to develop or whether there is an objectively best character that everyone should aim to develop. As the dialogue between Philocles and Theocles in *The Moralists* reveals, Shaftesbury—through the voice of Theocles—proposes that it is best to focus on developing the character of a genuine friend. Genuine friendship, as Theocles understands it, is love of humanity.[22] It would be naïve to assume that it is easy to become a friend of humanity. Indeed, Philocles questions whether he is capable of loving humanity. His self-doubts intimate that abstract love of humanity may be out of reach for many. At the very least, Shaftesbury acknowledges that it requires strong will to improve one's character and to become a genuine friend or lover of humanity.

Shaftesbury's philosophy can be seen as an invitation to join an intellectual journey that aims at character development and self-improvement. To progress on this journey one has to be willing to engage in practical exercises and intellectual reflections on who one is, how one can become a better person, and how one can best reach happiness. Some of those who have entered the journey will have managed to develop the character of a genuine friend and have become lovers of humanity. Once they have reached this phase of their personal development, they may want to understand what role they play within the universe as a whole. At this stage, Shaftesbury's reflections concerning the self of the universe and his claim that individual selves are copies of the self of the universe become relevant—these are the views I already mentioned in section 2. Shaftesbury's considerations concerning the self of the universe and its relation to individual selves can be seen as the final phase of a long and intellectually demanding developmental process. Hume's footnote suggests that he distances himself from Shaftesbury's position proposed during this final phase, which is based on questionable teleological arguments and assumptions. However, it does not follow from Hume's criticism of Shaftesbury's view (or, perhaps better, Theocles's position) in certain sections of *The Moralists*, that Hume is critical about all other aspects of Shaftesbury's developmental approach to selfhood.

4. Hume's approach to self and the metaphysics of personal identity

[21] See Boeker (2018, 2019) for further discussion.

[22] See Shaftesbury (2001 [1711], M II.1, 2:135–138).

The opening paragraphs of Hume's section 'Of Personal Identity' make clear that Hume is critical about philosophical views that assume that personal identity consists in the continued existence of a simple substance. Thus, there is little doubt that he would distance himself from Shaftesbury's metaphysical claims that substances ground personal identity. Nevertheless, it remains for us to examine whether Hume would share the broader underlying metaphysical belief that the possibility of character development presupposes personal identity. Thus let us see whether Hume's philosophy offers resources for understanding personal identity in ways that differ from Shaftesbury's position.

Hume begins the section 'Of Personal Identity' by criticizing 'some philosophers' (*Treatise*, 1.4.6.1; SBN 251) who assume that there is a self that is simple and has perfect identity. Hume challenges their view by applying the copy principle, namely the principle that every (simple) idea is derived from a (simple) impression.[23] He argues that there is no impression that is invariable and continues to exist uninterruptedly and, hence, there is no impression from which the idea of a self that is simple and has perfect identity can be derived.[24] However, it does not follow from this that Hume denies the existence of a self. As the text continues, Hume puts forward his own positive views about self and claims that when we introspect and look into ourselves we only find a succession of rapidly changing perceptions, namely impressions and ideas.[25]

Given that perceptions are in constant flux and that all I can grasp when I examine my self is a bundle of different perceptions, it seems that we may have to accept that a durable and stable self cannot be found within Hume's philosophical framework, at least not within the context of his Book 1 discussion. Indeed, such a conclusion is intimated by Hume's claim in Book 1 that our belief in identity over time is a fiction of the imagination.[26] Yet, as Hume himself acknowledges, his Book 1 account is incomplete, since it is restricted to 'personal identity, as it regards our thought or imagination' (*Treatise*, 1.4.6.5; SBN 253). This view is to be supplemented with an account of personal identity 'as it regards our passions or the concern we

[23] See Hume, *Treatise*, 1.1.1.7; SBN 4; Hume (2000 [1748], 2.5, 1975, SBN 19).

[24] See Hume, *Treatise*, 1.4.6.2–3; SBN 251–252. For more detailed discussion, see Garrett (2021).

[25] See Hume, *Treatise*, 1.4.6.3–4; SBN 252–253. Hume uses the term 'perception' in a broad sense to include both impressions and ideas.

[26] See Hume, *Treatise*, 1.4.6.6–7, 15, 21; SBN 254–255, 259, 262.

take in ourselves' (*Treatise* 1.4.6.5; SBN 253), which is a topic Hume turns to in Book 2 of the *Treatise*.[27]

Hume's Book 2 account of self will be my main focus for the rest of this essay, since the views that Hume develops there engage more closely with the philosophical questions that Shaftesbury's developmental approach to selfhood raises. Book 2 turns to the concern that we take in ourselves and adds a future-directed or forward-looking dimension that is absent in Book 1.[28] Given that Hume acknowledges that one can be concerned for one's future self, the question arises whether concern for one's future presupposes a belief in a continuously existing self and whether Hume has the resources to account for it. Although Hume, in contrast to Shaftesbury, has ruled out an appeal to the continued existence of a substance, I take it that he has at least two options to explain how a present self is related to a future self. The first option is to invoke the associative principles, namely resemblance, causation, and possibly also spatiotemporal contiguity. The second option is to accept that Book 2 selves are embodied human beings. Let us consider both options in turn.

When Hume returns to the examination of self in Book 2 he describes self as 'that succession of related ideas and impression, of which we have an intimate memory and consciousness' (*Treatise*, 2.1.2.2; SBN 277). This suggest that he continues to understand a self as a succession of related perceptions. In Book 1 Hume has claimed that the only candidates for explaining how the different perceptions are related with each other are the three associative principles, namely resemblance, causation, and spatiotemporal contiguity. Among these three candidates he has singled out resemblance and causation as the only principles relevant for explaining our belief in personal identity.[29] He states that contiguity 'has little or no influence in the present case' (*Treatise*, 1.4.6.17; SBN 260), but does not further elaborate on it in *Treatise* 1.4.6. It is possible that he puts contiguity aside, because he accepts that some perceptions lack a spatial location.[30] It is less clear whether contiguity remains irrelevant in the context of his discussion of selves in Book 2, since there the focus of the debate has shifted from the mental realm in Book 1 towards the social realm.[31]

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[27] See also Hume, *Treatise*, 1.4.6.19; SBN 261.

[28] For helpful further discussion, see McIntyre (1989, 2009).

[29] See Hume, *Treatise*, 1.4.6.17–19; SBN 260–261.

[30] See Hume, *Treatise*, 1.4.5.10–16; SBN 235–240. See also Baier (1991, 142) and Garrett (1997, ch. 8).

[31] For further discussion, see Baier (1991, ch. 6).

Let us consider how his view that the associative principles provide relations among different perceptions can help explain how a present self is related to a future self. Hume turns to sympathy to explain how a self in the present can be concerned about their future. For Hume sympathy is a psychological mechanism. When we sympathize we enter into another person's feelings and make the other person's feelings our own.[32] Hume further believes that we can not only sympathize with another person in the present moment, but that we can also sympathize with future selves.

> Sympathy being nothing but a lively idea converted into an impression, 'tis evident, that, in considering the future possible or probable condition of any person, we may enter into it with so vivid a conception as to make it our own concern; and by that means be sensible of pains and pleasures, which neither belong to ourselves, nor at the present instant have any real existence. (*Treatise* 2.2.9.13; SBN 385–386)

How exactly can I sympathize with my future self? I have various motives and intentions in the present moment. Moreover, I have several character traits. Based on my present motives, intentions, and character traits, I can anticipate future actions that follow from them. This enables me to put myself into the position of a future self and anticipate the feelings of my future self and make them my present concern. This means that by sympathizing with my future self I become concerned for my future self.[33]

It may be worth noting that concern for my future can come in different degrees, since I can be more or less concerned for my future. This is further corroborated by Hume's view that sympathy comes in degrees. He argues that 'the relation of cause and effect … must be assisted by relations of resemblance and contiguity, in order to feel sympathy in its full perfection' (*Treatise*, 2.1.11.8; SBN 320). This suggests that sympathy increases in proportion to the strength of the relations of resemblance, causation, and contiguity between different persons or between my present and future self. Furthermore, it intimates that contiguity plays a role in Hume's Book 2 account of selves.[34]

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[32] See Hume, *Treatise*, 2.1.11, 2.2.5.21, 3.3.1.7, 10–11, 3.3.6.1; SBN 316–324, 365, 575–579, 618.

[33] For further discussion, see McIntyre (1989, 553–556, 2009, 190–195).

[34] See Boeker (2015) for further discussion as to why it is likely that contiguity plays a role in Hume's Book 2 account of selves.

Given the current proposal that present and futures selves are related by means of resemblance, causation, and most likely also contiguity, one may worry that the boundaries between different persons, say between you and me, vanish. At the very least, I do not only sympathize with my future self, but also with other people like you. Putting it differently, the worry is that it is not clear whether this view is suitable to explain personal identity, namely what makes me the same person with my future self, since I am not only related by relations of resemblance, causation, and contiguity to my future self, but also to many other people.

One may simply accept that this is a consequence of Hume's view. However, Book 2 of the *Treatise* can also be read in another way. Book 2 selves can be seen as embodied human beings, who interact with each other in physical and social realms. Annette Baier offers such a reading. Her interpretation of Book 2 rests on the view 'that human persons are essentially incarnate, that they are flesh and blood, generated, born of women, coming into the world complete with blood ties, and acquiring other social ties as they mature, grow and with others' help acquire self-consciousness' (Baier 1991, 140). On her view, Book 2 goes beyond Hume's account in Book 1 and the Appendix 'by seeing persons as other persons see them, as living (really connected) bodies, with real biological connections to other persons, in a common social space' (Baier 1991, 141). Although Baier emphasizes that Book 2 selves are biological creatures, the exact biological constitution of Book 2 selves does not seem to be too important for Hume's account of personal identity 'as it regards our passions or the concern we take in ourselves' (*Treatise* 1.4.6.5; SBN 253). Instead it may be preferable to formulate the second interpretative option in broader terms, namely as the view that Book 2 selves are embodied human beings without taking a stance as to what the exact metaphysical constitution of embodied human beings is. The important aspect of Hume's account is that Book 2 selves interact with each other and many facets of social interaction presuppose that oneself and others are spatially extended beings located in space.

I now want to consider these two possible interpretations by contrasting them with Shaftesbury's view that character development presupposes a metaphysical account of personal identity, which for Shaftesbury consists in the continued existence of a substance. Both interpretations of Hume's view offer alternatives to Shaftesbury's view. The second option can be said to come closer to Shaftesbury's view, because it replaces Shaftesbury's appeal to substances with the continued existence of embodied human beings. The first option offers a more radical departure from traditional metaphysical thinking, since it focuses on perceptions and the relations among them. While Shaftesbury's view and the second option can both accommodate metaphysical distinctions between substances and the qualities that inhere in

substances, such a distinction is absent from the first option. I want to acknowledge that the details of the first option can be developed in different ways. For instance, it is possible to consider selves from an epistemic point of view or merely to offer a psychological description of selves as they are given to us in experience. In light of such readings Hume can be understood as remaining agnostic or perhaps sceptical about the metaphysics of substances and qualities. For the time being, let us explore another way of spelling out the details of the first option. Instead of drawing a metaphysical distinction between substances and the qualities that inhere in them, and in particular substances and the character that inheres in a substance, as Shaftesbury does, it can be argued that there is no need to distinguish a metaphysical account of personal identity from the character that a person has. The succession of related perceptions can be said to both explain personal identity and to account for a person's character. On this view, a person's character expresses itself by means of perceptions and these perceptions are part of the succession of related perceptions that constitute a person's history.

If this reading is correct, then Hume's view comes closer to Buddhist metaphysics than the metaphysical views held by many of his predecessors and contemporaries in Western philosophy.[35] However, is there sufficient textual support for ascribing to Hume metaphysical views that overcome metaphysical distinctions between substances and their qualities? Had he intended to defend such a view, he should have made it more explicit. Moreover, a closer look at the textual evidence calls such a reading into question. When Hume introduces the so-called double relation of impressions and ideas that governs the indirect passions of pride and humility as well as love and hatred, he has no reservations in distinguishing subjects from qualities and to state that qualities inhere in subjects.[36] Of course, it is possible that this is a conceptual rather than metaphysical distinction. Hume illustrates this point with the example of a beautiful house.

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[35] As Gopnik (2009) has shown, it is possible that Hume came in contact with Buddhist views during his stay in La Flèche. See Siderits (2007, ch. 3) for further discussion of Buddhists views about self.

[36] See Hume, *Treatise*, 2.1.2.6, 2.1.3.1; SBN 279–280. It is worth noting that Hume does not use 'self' and 'subject' interchangeably in this context. His remarks about the subject and its qualities concern the causes of the indirect passions of pride or humility. These causes are closely associated with self, which Hume calls the 'object' when he describes the double relation of ideas and impressions, but cannot be assumed to be identical with it. For further discussion of the double relation of impressions and ideas, see *Treatise*, 2.1.5–11, 2.2.2, 2.2.9, 2.2.11; SBN 285–324, 332–347, 381–389, 394–396.

If I am the owner of a beautiful house, the beautiful house can be the cause of pride directed towards my self. He writes:

> Here the object of the passion is himself, and the cause is the beautiful house: Which cause again is sub-divided into two parts, *viz.* the quality, which operates upon the passion, and the subject, in which the quality inheres. (*Treatise*, 2.1.2.6; SBN 279)

As this example shows, Hume accepts that causes like a beautiful house can be divided into subject and quality. This claim cannot easily be reconciled with the first interpretative option.

Moreover, the double relation of ideas and impressions is not only caused by external possessions such as beautiful houses, but can also be caused by qualities of mind such as memory, wit, courage, or integrity as well as bodily qualities such as beauty or bodily strength.[37] On this view character traits such as courage, generosity, or integrity are closely associated with self, but Hume does not go so far as to claim that a self is identical with a set of character traits. At the very least, he acknowledges a conceptual distinction between a self and its character traits. This suggests that Hume is not wholeheartedly committed to the first option, at least not to its metaphysical version, and the second option remains a viable alternative.

Given that neither interpretation commits Hume to Shaftesbury's view that character development presupposes the continued existence of a substance, Shaftesbury's understanding of the self as substance appears to be dogmatic. In any case, it seems fair to say that Shaftesbury has not sufficiently considered plausible metaphysical alternatives.

Yet one may wonder whether Shaftesbury would find these options satisfying. Just like he criticizes bodily and psychological accounts of personal identity, Shaftesbury would likely question whether these other options are stable enough to ground personal identity. This worry is particularly pressing if the first option concerns a self as Hume describes it in Book 1, namely a succession of related and rapidly changing perceptions. Perceptions change over time and lack the stability that Shaftesbury believes an account of personal identity is supposed to have. This worry may be partially addressed by pointing out that the passions that Hume considers in Book 2 last longer than the rapidly changing perceptions that are his focus in Book 1.[38] Moreover, there is convincing evidence that Hume's own philosophical commitments in Book 2 require that Book 2 selves are sufficiently stable. For instance, Hume believes that moral praise and

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[37] See Hume, *Treatise*, 2.1.2.4–6; SBN 278–279.

[38] McIntyre (1990) proposes such an interpretation.

blame for actions are only appropriate if the actions in question arise from a stable character.[39] Since Book 2 selves are closely associated with sets of character traits via the double relation of impressions and ideas, it is plausible that Book 2 selves have greater stability than Book 1 selves. However, some Hume scholars offer good arguments that Hume can only account for the stability of Book 2 selves if he steps back from the Book 1 view that selves are bundles of related perceptions and instead regards Book 2 selves as bundles of dispositions; these dispositions express perceptions when the dispositions are exercised, and include dispositions that express the various character traits a person has.[40] The advantage of this reading is that dispositions have stability that fleeting perceptions lack.

What would Shaftesbury say with regard to the second option, namely that Book 2 selves are embodied human beings? There is no textual evidence that suggests that Shaftesbury would call into question whether selves are embodied human beings. I take it that the question of whether personal identity in grounded in the continued existence of a human being rather than the continued existence of a substance hinges on the question of whether personal identity is to be understood as perfect identity, namely whether it requires invariable and uninterrupted existence of the person over time. Shaftesbury does not comment on these issues in detail. Hume's Book 1 account invokes conceptions of perfect identity.[41] This issue brings to light that Hume will have to distance himself from his Book 1 discussion of perfect identity if the second option is plausibly ascribed to him. It is worth noting that there are other Book 1 claims that Hume seems willing to give up in the context of Book 2 such as his Book 1 claim that contiguity plays little role in beliefs about personal identity. Hence, Hume may simply be willing to accept the consequence that his views about personal identity in Book 2 do not meet the criteria for perfect identity. Indeed, he may add that no account of personal identity can be found that satisfies these criteria.

5. On the possibility of changes of character in Hume's philosophy

On this basis, it is time to turn to the question whether—and, if so, in what ways—Hume's philosophy can account for changes of character. This question is not settled in Hume

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[39] See Hume, *Treatise*, 2.3.2.6, 3.3.1.4–5; SBN 410–411, 575.

[40] Qu (2017) defends such a dispositional interpretation. See also Frykholm (2012).

[41] See Hume, *Treatise*, 1.4.2.24, 33, 36, 1.4.6.1, 6, 8; SBN 199, 203, 205, 251, 254, 255.

scholarship. While some scholars point out that his philosophy leaves very little, if any, scope for changes of character,[42] others have offered explanations for how changes of character are possible.[43] Let us take a closer look at these controversies and the textual evidence for both positions in turn.

Donald Ainslie claims that 'Hume denies the possibility of character change. The associative mechanism involved in character trait ascription always leads to our thinking of the person as having had the trait throughout his lifetime' (2007, 106). James A. Harris makes a slightly weaker claim and ascribes to Hume the view that '[w]e are unable to alter to any significant extent the characters we happen to have been born with' (2011, 41–42). Interpreters that deny or limit the possibility of character change often cite Hume's claim that 'it being almost impossible for the mind to change its character in any considerable article, or cure itself of a passionate or splenetic temper, when they are natural to it' (*Treatise* 3.3.4.3; SBN 608). It is worth noting that this passage makes a claim about character traits and tempers that are *natural* to the mind. Furthermore, Hume makes this claim in the context of a discussion of natural abilities and virtue.

If we turn to other passages in the *Treatise* Ainslie's reading that Hume denies the possibility of character change becomes questionable. In the section 'Of Personal Identity' Hume compares personal identity with a republic and writes:

> And as the same individual republic may not only change its members, but also its laws and constitutions; in like manner the same person may vary his character and disposition, as well as his impressions and ideas, without losing his identity. (*Treatise* 1.4.6.19; SBN 261)

This passage offers clear textual support that Hume is willing to acknowledge that a person can change her character and such changes of character need not result in loss of personal identity.[44]

Moreover, we have textual evidence that Hume accepts that repentance can lead to 'a change of life' (*Treatise*, 2.2.3.4; SBN 349). He explains this further in the following passage:

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[42] See Ainslie (2007, 106), Harris (2011, 41–42), Qu (2017, 653).

[43] See Frykholm (2012), Reed (2017), Waldow (2014).

[44] For further discussion, see McIntyre (1990), Waldow (2014, 224).

> Again, repentance wipes off every crime, especially if attended with an evident reformation of life and manners. How is this to be accounted for? But by asserting that actions render a person criminal, merely as they are proofs of criminal passions or principles in the mind; and when by any alteration of these principles they cease to be just proofs, they likewise cease to be criminal. (*Treatise*, 2.3.2.7; SBN 412)

While I admit that there is some scope for debate as to whether all changes of life or manners count as changes of character in Hume's philosophy, there is sufficient textual support that for Hume some changes of character or manner are possible.

This brings me to the further question of how these changes are possible. If a person successfully changes her character or manners this will mean that she has acquired the disposition to reliably act in a way that is typical for someone with the character trait in question whenever she is in a situation where it is feasible to express this character trait. For example, if Kate has acquired the character trait of cheerfulness, she is someone who tends to laugh and smile in situations where such expressions are feasible.

Hume would argue that reason alone cannot bring about changes of character, since he is committed to his claim that '[r]eason is, and ought to be the slave of the passions' (*Treatise*, 2.3.3.4; SBN 415). Since reason alone cannot change our actions and since changes of character commonly lead to changes of actions, namely when one expresses the newly acquired character trait, it seems more promising to consider in what ways the passions are involved in changes of character. One particularly promising candidate seems to be the psychological mechanism of sympathy. For instance, Waldow (2014) argues that sympathy plays an important role in helping selves to become critical of character traits that are disapproved by others in sympathetic interaction. If a self is confronted with the disapproval of others in their social circles this can prompt her to refine and improve her character.

While I do not want to deny that the passions, and sympathy in particular, play an important role in improvement of character, I am in agreement with Reed (2017) and other interpreters that custom or habit are additionally important.[45] If an action is regularly repeated through custom then one can develop an inclination to act in this particular way. Making actions habitual is important, because it cancels out other conflicting passions that could otherwise prevent one from acting in this way. In this vein, Hume writes that 'nothing has a greater effect both to increase and diminish our passions, to convert pleasure into pain, and pain into pleasure,

[45] See Hume, *Treatise*, 2.3.4–5; SBN 418–424. See also Frykholm (2012) and Wright (1994).

than custom and repetition' (*Treatise*, 2.3.5.1; SBN 422). He further notes that 'custom not only gives a facility to perform an action, but likewise an inclination and tendency towards it' (*Treatise*, 2.3.5.5; SBN 424). It is only after it has become habitual for a person to act in a certain way that one can say with confidence that she has acquired a new character trait.

I want to end by considering differences and similarities between Shaftesbury's and Hume's approaches to character development. For Shaftesbury changes of character can be brought about by an interplay of practical exercises and intellectual reflection on who one is, how one can best reach happiness, and what one's place in the universe is. He regards soliloquies, namely inner dialogues with oneself, as important practical exercises that can help a person to improve her character and manners. Hume, like Shaftesbury, accepts that character development is not merely a theoretical task, but also and importantly involves repeated practice. More precisely, custom and habit play an important role in the formation of character traits for Hume. In contrast to Shaftesbury, Hume puts more emphasis on how the passions shape who we are, especially through sympathetic interaction with others. Shaftesbury takes a more intellectual approach and his moral realism leads him to propose that it is best to cultivate the character of a genuine friend. As we have seen he is committed to a normative project that aims at character development and of self-improvement. Hume is more reluctant to offer specific normative recommendations, probably because he is convinced that a careful study of human nature provides an important foundation for '*practical morality*' (*Treatise*, 3.3.6.6; SBN 622).

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