

15 Humean Vice Epistemology

The Case of Prejudice

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15.1 Part One: Hume's Anatomy of Prejudice

In Section T 1.3.13 of the *Treatise*, “Of unphilosophical probability”, Hume attempts to understand why prejudices are so widespread and difficult to eradicate. Prejudices are unreasonable, according to Hume, and contrary to evidence. What is it about human nature that makes us vulnerable to making these unwarranted generalizations? And what can we do to correct this natural propensity?

According to Hume, a prejudice is, by definition, a pejorative term; it is a “rashly” formed general rule that connects social groups with negative traits (T 1.3.13.7; SBN 146). These generalizations are rashly formed, or lacking in careful consideration, in the sense that they are based on insufficient observations. Suppose that we observe a *small sample* of A's who are B's. The problem is that we do not feel any hesitation when expecting the next A to be B. Rather, we take this limited evidence as conclusive *proof* that all A's are B's and presume that social groups are completely homogeneous, such that there cannot possibly be a member of the A-group who lacks the property B. Prejudices take the logical form, therefore, of universal generalizations. Whereas laws of nature are unrestricted *true* generalizations, according to Hume, prejudices are unrestricted *false* generalizations.

Prejudices are also epistemically pernicious, according to Hume, insofar as they cause us to ignore counter-evidence at our disposal. Consider Hume's description of the types of ethnic prejudices that were prevalent in his lifetime.

An Irishman cannot have wit, and a Frenchman cannot have solidity; for which reason, tho' the conversation of the former in any instance be visibly very agreeable, and of the latter very judicious, we have entertain'd such a prejudice against them, that they must be dunces or fops in spite of sense and reason.

(T 1.3.13.7; SBN 146–7)

Even when the supposed universal generalization has been falsified, in other words, and we directly perceive a member of a social group who fails to exemplify the negative trait ($A \ \& \ \sim B$), our prejudices render us dogmatic and prevent us from revising our preconceptions.

Hume is clearly reporting the existence of these attitudes rather than endorsing them. After all, Hume goes out of his way to criticize these prejudices as “errors” (T 1.3.13.7; SBN 147) and explicitly states that philosophers such as himself condemn any rashly formed general rules (T 1.3.13.12; SBN 150). Indeed, Hume categorizes prejudices from the outset of this section of the *Treatise* as a species of *unphilosophical probabilities* that are not considered to be “reasonable foundations of belief and opinion” (T 1.3.13.1; SBN 143).

Hume argues that human beings are nevertheless susceptible to making this type of error. The reason for this is that our everyday social judgments are based on implicit associations rather than careful reasoning. Prejudices are formed when associative links are created in our imaginations between social groups and negative attributes. These associative connections also produce a type of *inertia* that maintains prejudices in the face of contrary evidence. Suppose that we encounter a novel member of group A who resembles previous instances in many respects but is dissimilar in terms of the lack of property B. We automatically assimilate this partially resembling instance to the general ideas stored in memory, according to Hume, and thus retain our prejudice in spite of the fact that this new member of the group logically refutes our universal generalization. We perceive this person *as if* they exhibited the negative trait, in other words, even if they do not really do so. Thus, the associative principles of the imagination are causally responsible for the fact that we succumb to hasty universal generalizations and persist in believing these prejudices even when they are “contrary to present observation and experience” (T 1.3.13.8, SBN 147; cf. T 1.3.13.12, SBN 148).

The fact that prejudices depend on associative principles entails that these propensities will be difficult to control or eradicate. The inference from *group membership* (“x is A”) to *negative traits* (“x is B”), as Hume puts it, involves a “natural transition, which precedes reflection, and which cannot be prevented by it” (T 1.3.13.8; SBN 147). Just as we immediately expect that a stationary billiard ball will launch on impact, on this account, so too we (or at least those who have acquired the relevant prejudice) will automatically infer that the next Irishman we encounter will lack intelligence. And we do so for the exact same reason: our social judgments are governed by the very same principles of custom and habit “on which all judgments concerning causes and effects depend” (*ibid.*).

We appear powerless, on this account, to avoid making such errors. But this is not the lesson that Hume draws. He does maintain that prejudices

are *sticky* in the sense that they operate automatically and unconsciously and thus will persist in the face of contrary evidence. But Hume proceeds to argue that human beings have the intellectual capacity to “correct” these associative propensities by carefully reflecting on the total evidence at our disposal (T 1.3.13.9; SBN 148). Hume’s official position is that our everyday or naive social judgments are based on principles of custom and habit; but he maintains that sophisticated judges rely on a different set of general rules, which he calls “rules for judging causes and effects”, in order to *screen off* illusory correlations. These rules enable judicious reasoners to discover the deeper regularities in our social world: when we observe a member of group A who lacks a negative trait B, for example, they direct us to conclude that this property is an accidental factor rather than a genuine or essential feature of this population. When we come into contact, for example, with Irishmen who are highly intelligent – such as Bishop Berkeley or Frances Hutcheson – we discover that there is no necessary connection between *being Irish* and being a *dunce*.

Hume is much less sanguine, however, about whether these reflective corrections will stop us from continuing to associate these groups and traits. Employing the rules for judging causes and effects does not eliminate these stubborn implicit biases, in other words, but rather leaves behind a *divided mind* where we simultaneously *imagine* that x is B while *judging* that x is ~B (T 1.3.13.9; SBN 148).

Hume illustrates this predicament with the well-known example of a man suspended from a high tower in an iron cage. This person “cannot bear trembling”, according to Hume, even though he judges that he is really safe and secure, since the solid iron bars beneath his feet will prevent his fall (T 1.3.13.10; SBN 148). Nevertheless, the perception of the ground below will trigger associated ideas of falling and death, and these ideas will in turn produce feelings of terror.

The man in the iron cage, like the person who corrects their prejudices, exhibits an opposition between imagination and judgment. Just as a scientist might conclude that superstitions are unjustified, yet feel a nagging sense of unease when walking under ladders, or stepping on sidewalk cracks, so too a judicious reasoner might decide that there is no predictive relationship between social groups and negative traits, yet continue to associate these properties at the level of custom and habit, and thus feel a “contrariety of sentiments” toward one and the same person (T 1.3.13.9; SBN 148).

One might object that it is Hume’s position that is contradictory: how can he maintain that we are able to *correct* our prejudices while saying at the same time that they are *incorrigible*? But this worry dissolves when we distinguish implicit biases and explicit judgments. Hume’s official position is that we cannot prevent these stubborn associations from occurring at

the level of custom and habit. But we are capable of reflectively acknowledging the pernicious influence that these biases have on our everyday social attributions. Even if judicious spectators cannot extirpate these illusory correlations from their minds, therefore, they can selectively ignore these spurious factors when making their considered social judgments.

15.2 Part Two: Hume's Broad Delineation of Intellectual Vice and Doxastic Responsibility

What factors determine whether a particular agent will regulate their implicit biases? Hume maintains that individual differences in terms of *intellectual character* account for whether one checks their prejudices and other unphilosophical probabilities.

Sometimes the one, sometimes the other prevails, according to the disposition and character of the person. The vulgar are commonly guided by the first, and wise men by the second.

(T 1.3.13.12, SBN 149)

A *foolish* person allows themselves to be guided by their propensities to make rash generalizations and ignore contrary evidence, in other words, whereas a *wise* person refuses to reflectively endorse these associative tendencies and embraces the corrective rules for judging causes and effects.

Whereas *wisdom* is an intellectual virtue, on Hume's account, *foolishness* is an intellectual vice. Hume maintains that *foolishness*, or lack of understanding, reduces our social esteem toward others.

Who did say, except by way of irony, that such a one was a man of great virtue, but an egregious blockhead?

(EMP A4.2)

Indeed, Hume regards *foolishness* as one of the most shameful traits. This personal quality is disposed to produce such intense feelings of "disgust" in spectators that it is capable of dissolving the bonds of friendship, and only the love of parents for their children can survive this type of condemnation (EPM 6.16; SBN 240).

Hume delineates a number of intellectual vices in his epistemological writings. Consider *credulity*, for example, which is defined as "too easy faith in the testimony of others"; this vice manifests itself in a particular propensity, according to Hume, to "believe what is reported, even concerning apparitions, enchantments, and prodigies, however contrary to daily experience and observation" (T 1.3.9.12; SBN 112–3). Beliefs about prodigies or apparitions are unjustified because they violate evidentialist

norms: we extend our assent “beyond what experience will justify” (T 1.3.9.12; SBN 113). And if we repeatedly make this type of mistake, this reveals something about our intellectual character, and we can be said to be credulous, or gullible when it comes to testimony. Hume includes intellectual *arrogance* as one of the “vices and follies” of our minds (EHU 5.1; SBN 40–1); he also describes *dogmatism* and intellectual *stubbornness* as “infirmities” of the mind that philosophers attempt to combat (EHU 12.24; SBN 161–2; cf. T 1.4.7.15; SBN 273–4).

Each of these character traits qualifies as intellectual vices, on Hume’s account, because they are apt to produce a range of condemnatory emotions in spectators. Once we apprehend that someone is *credulous* or *foolish*, for example, these “faults” are “instantly blamed” and produce a “sentiment of pain and disapprobation” (EPM 6.1; SBN 233). We do not direct our disapproval toward mental states such as false beliefs or hasty inferences; rather, we target the stable character traits that underlie this type of intellectual and prudential conduct. And we ultimately blame these character traits, and regard them as blameworthy faults, because of their harmful consequences. The problem with *obstinacy* and *credulity*, for example, is that these traits incapacitate us for action (EPM 6.1; SBN 233). Extreme *foolishness* is considered a serious flaw, moreover, because it renders one a “*useless* burden upon the earth” (EPM 6.16; SBN 240).

Hume recognizes that most philosophers in the early modern period would not go along with the notion that intellectual vices are blameworthy. Character traits such as *foolishness* and *credulity* and *arrogance*, on these accounts, should more properly be labeled cognitive “defects” rather than vices (EPM A4.1; SBN 312). But Hume maintains that there are no legitimate reasons to exclude these qualities from the catalog of vice. One possible reason for treating these qualities as mere defects, for example, is that they are involuntary and are not based on personal choice (EPM A 4.2; SBN 313). Nobody ever decides, after all, to become foolish or credulous.

But Hume argues that control over the acquisition of our character traits is not ordinarily regarded as a necessary condition of blaming agents. A quick survey of everyday intuitions of praise and blame across the globe, according to Hume, reveals that “almost all languages” treat personal qualities as vices even if they are not up to us (EPM A4.2, SBN 313; cf. T 3.3.4.4; SBN 609). These common intuitions are shared by ancient philosophers, moreover, who typically viewed “endowments” and “defects” of the mind as intellectual virtues and vices (EPM A4.11; SBN 318). Indeed, ancient philosophers condemned vices such as *folly* as “contemptible and odious”, even though this quality was believed to be “independent of the will” (EPM A4.20. SBN 321–2; cf. T 3.3.4.3, SBN 608).

Another possible reason for narrowly drawing the boundaries of vice is that only moral qualities such as *justice* and *malevolence* are genuinely deserving of praise and blame. But Hume maintains that this amounts to a distinction without a difference.

Should we lay hold of the distinction between intellectual and moral endowments, and affirm the last alone to be real and genuine virtues, because they alone lead to action, we should find, that many of those qualities, usually called intellectual virtues... had also a considerable influence on conduct.

(EPM A4.2; SBN 313)

There is no categorical basis, from a consequentialist perspective, for excluding intellectual traits from the domain of vices. *Credulity* might not be as harmful as *cruelty*. But this is a matter of degree rather than kind and only indicates that our sentiments of disapprobation lie on a continuum (EPM A4.2; SBN 314).

The question of whether to include intellectual character within the boundaries of vice, then, amounts to a *verbal dispute* which should be of little interest to philosophers (EPM A 4.1; SBN 313). Our feelings of disapprobation toward intellectual and moral vices are similar in nature. And we behave in analogous ways toward those who display these qualities; even if we do not formally punish someone for their *foolishness*, we do impose informal social sanctions and reduce our feelings of esteem, goodwill, and friendship (EPM A 4.5-5; SBN 316). The claim that intellectual vices should be labeled cognitive defects, then, is a merely grammatical rather than a substantive point (EPM A 4.1; SBN 313).

15.3 Part Three: Hume and Contemporary Vice Epistemology

Contemporary “vice epistemologists”, such as Quassim Cassam, understand intellectual vices in consequentialist terms. Character traits such as *gullibility* and *foolishness* and *prejudice* are epistemic vices, according to Cassam, because they obstruct effective inquiry (Cassam 2019, 5). Cassam would object to Hume’s broad account of doxastic blameworthiness, however, on the grounds that some type of control over the acquisition and retention of character traits is necessary to hold agents responsible. In contexts where these epistemic vices are not ultimately up to us, according to contemporary vice epistemologists, we should retract our attributions of blame and responsibility.

Consider Heather Battaly’s example of a young Pakistani man who has the bad luck of being indoctrinated by the Taliban (Battaly 2016, 100).

We would not say that this person is blameworthy for the *dogmatism* that results, since this character trait was not voluntarily acquired; the young man would presumably also not have any control over the fact that he remains close-minded, since his dogmatism would block him from even recognizing this characteristic as a vice in need of correction. In cases such as these, according to Cassam, where one lacks both acquisition control and revision control, it is unreasonable to attribute responsibility or blame (Cassam 2019, 20–1).

Cassam maintains that we are nevertheless justified in *criticizing* the Taliban recruit for his epistemic vice. Even if the young man lacked control over originally becoming or continually being dogmatic, this character trait is nevertheless properly considered to be a personal failing that casts “a negative shadow over him” as a thinker (*ibid.*, 138). Moreover, we would regard someone with this type of character trait as *reprehensible* (*ibid.*, 21–2). Thus, the necessary conditions of *blame* are stricter, on Cassam’s account, than those of *criticism*.

Hume would regard Cassam’s delineation between blame and criticism, however, as a grammatical rather than a substantive distinction. To say that someone’s intellectual faults are reprehensible and open to criticism, and to say that they reflect badly on someone as a thinker, is tantamount to saying that they are fitting targets of sentiments of disapprobation. Hume would agree with Cassam that we would not regard the Taliban recruit as blameworthy and responsible in the strong sense of these terms, where it implies that he is *accountable* for his dogmatism and exerts control over their acquisition or retention; after all, Hume’s position appears to be that none of us are *ever* in control over our characters. But Hume would assert that we are nevertheless blameworthy in the weaker sense that blame is *attributable* to us (Vitz 2009, 218).

It is simply not the case, according to Hume, that we ordinarily withdraw our disapprobation when we come to understand that agents were not in control of their character. Just as our feelings of disgust and hatred would not dissipate if we learned that Jeffrey Dahmer was not in control of his *cruelty*, so too we do not ordinarily care about whether someone like Donald Rumsfeld was ultimately responsible for his intellectual *arrogance* or *imperviousness to evidence*. And if that is the case, then the only genuine disagreement between Hume and Cassam concerns what label or appellation best describes our social disapprobation. And it is a purely verbal dispute whether to call them “blameworthy” or “reprehensible”, if the way we behave toward such agents, and the way we feel about them, are approximately the same.

A similar point can be made about Cassam’s claim that it would be excessively moralistic to describe intellectual vices as *morally* blameworthy.

On the face of it... there is a world of difference between genuine moral failings such as cruelty and mundane intellectual failings such as gullibility and wishful thinking. It would be excessively moralistic to regard all such failings as moral.

(Cassam 2019, 18)

Some intellectual vices, according to Cassam, are moral vices; but it would be wrong to regard every epistemic vice this way, since some of them are harmless-to-others and thus are only *epistemically* blameworthy because they obstruct inquiry.

But the distinction between epistemic and moral blame, at least for consequentialists, isn't as sharp as Cassam maintains. As we saw in part two of this paper, Hume denies that one can make a categorical distinction between intellectual and moral vices, on the grounds that intellectual vices have a "considerable influence" on actions. This reminds one of Clifford's critique of James: namely, that our beliefs cannot be considered a personal matter since they dispose us to act in ways that impact the welfare of others. And it should be pointed out that *foolishness* and *gullibility* and other epistemic vices are capable of causing enormous harm to society. And this would not of course be lost on Cassam, who wrote his book on epistemic vices as a warning of how dangerous such traits are to undermining democracies.

There is one point on which Cassam's vice epistemology, it should be pointed out, has a clear advantage over Hume's. Hume appears to deny that agents have any revisionary control over their character traits. He writes at one point, for example, that it is "almost impossible for the mind to change its character in any considerable article" (T 1.3.3.4; SBN 608). Contemporary vice epistemologists like Cassam are much optimistic, in any case, that intellectual character traits are *malleable* (Cassam 2019, 127). We ordinarily have some degree of *managerial control*, as Cassam puts it, over our character vices: someone who is intellectually *arrogant* can voluntarily expose themselves to superior intellects, for example, and those who are *dogmatic* can force themselves to engage with heterodox views (Cassam 2019, 129).

Hume's theory of human nature acknowledges, it should be pointed out, that we have motivation to change our intellectual characters. If we want to gain social esteem and approbation from others, and ultimately from ourselves when we reflect on our intellectual conduct, we need to inculcate the appropriate set of intellectual virtues that are valued in our community. Moreover, Hume is more sanguine elsewhere in the *Treatise* about the possibility of human beings changing their character traits. In Hume's discussion of justice as an artificial virtue, for example, he maintains that the threats of external sanctions from governmental institutions can motivate

us to curb our *impulsiveness* and develop *self-control*. So it would be open for him to assert that it would also be prudentially rational for us to submit ourselves to educational systems that inculcate critical thinking skills and offer ameliorative remedies that can help to correct the epistemic vices we absorb during our youth. Indeed, this is precisely the point, according to Hume, of teaching skepticism in the schools: it serves as an antidote to the stubborn *dogmatism* and superstitious *credulity* that are natural flaws of the human mind (EHU 12.24; SBN 161–2).

15.4 Part Four: Hume's Racial Prejudices

Hume maintains that we are blameworthy for intellectual character traits even if we lack control over them. We are culpable for the vice of *prejudice*, then, even if we learned these prejudices at our parent's knees and are unable to even recognize them as prejudices. The first problem with prejudices, according to Hume, is that one is *too quick* to believe them: one hastily infers from a small sample of A's that are B's to the conclusion that every member of social group A has the property B. The second problem with prejudices, according to Hume, is that one is *too slow* to correct them. When we continue to assent to prejudices in the face of counterexamples, on his view, we are intellectually *undiscerning* and unable to distinguish accidental and genuine regularities. But it does not matter that our hasty inferences can be traced back to automatic propensities of the imagination or that our failure to employ rules for judging causes and effects flows from a character trait of *foolishness* that we never chose and could not prevent. These are nevertheless personal failures that render us proper targets of blame and social criticism.

What would Hume's vice epistemology say, then, about his own racial prejudices about the intellectual abilities of Blacks? In a notorious footnote to the essay "On National Differences", Hume asserts that one cannot find a single Black person with a capacity for eminence in either speculation or action. And to say that no Blacks are capable of making significant intellectual contributions is logically equivalent, of course, to the universal generalization that all Blacks are incapable of this type of intellectual eminence. It seems that Hume has made exactly the same type of rash generalization that he condemns in his discussion of prejudice in T 1.3.13. Moreover, it appears that Hume also failed to correct this mistake when confronted with contrary evidence. Thus, he is morally blameworthy for this intellectual vice, according to his own normative standards, and would not get off the hook even if these prejudices were beyond his control.

Contemporary philosophers who work on the epistemology of prejudice argue that Hume would not be culpable for his rash generalizations about Blacks, so long as these beliefs were based on innocent mistakes

and skewed samples. Consider Nomy Arpaly's fictional example of Solomon, a boy raised in a "small, isolated farming community", who never encountered a woman who displays a talent for abstract thought; everyone in Solomon's local community, moreover, including the women themselves, believe that women are "not half as competent when it comes to abstract thinking" (Arpaly 2003, 103). Arpaly maintains that Solomon in these circumstances would not be considered epistemically culpable. We would ordinarily regard Solomon as ignorant because he holds false beliefs about the intellectual capacities of women. But this is not sufficient to make him blameworthy because there is no indication that his false beliefs were based on bad intentions; it would take the exceptional genius of a John Stuart Mill, moreover, for someone in Solomon's situation to recognize that his beliefs are false without any contrary evidence (*ibid.*, 104).

Our attitude toward Solomon would change dramatically, according to Arpaly, if we imagine him receiving a scholarship to a university where he encounters a number of brilliant female students and professors. If Solomon were to revise his belief about the intellectual capacities of women in the light of this new evidence, it would confirm that his earlier stereotypes are excusable as blameless ignorance. But if Solomon were to persist in ascribing to the intellectual inferiority of women, we would now regard him as culpably irrational (*ibid.*). The fact that he maintains his universal generalizations in the face of striking counterexamples would reveal that his commitments are not in fact based on evidence or reasons; rather, they reflect a motivated irrationality that is responsive to a deep-seated animosity toward women or a psychological need to protect his own ego.

What would Arpaly conclude, then, about Hume's footnote? Arpaly might be willing to excuse Hume's universal generalization on the grounds that his false belief reflects a widely held conviction of the time, whereby skin complexion was mistakenly thought to fix one's capacity for intellectual eminence. But Arpaly would not exculpate Hume from blame once it is revealed that Hume perseveres in endorsing this belief in the face of contrary evidence. Hume was clearly aware of the writings of the Jamaican scholar and poet Francis Williams, who was acclaimed by many at the time for his Latin verse (Popkin 1992, 71). Hume quickly dismisses these compositions as derivative and devoid of creativity, however, comparing Williams to a parrot that is praised for uttering a few simple words in English (Miller 1987, 208n). Hume reacts to this contrary evidence, then, in precisely the way that he condemns as unreasonable in the *Treatise*. Like Solomon at the university, he stubbornly refuses to change his mind. One is reminded of Thomas Jefferson's dismissive response to the writings of the great American poet Phillis Wheatley. Jefferson apparently shares

Hume's prejudice against the intellectual capacities of Blacks, and as a result, he maintains that her literary work is derivative and imitative rather than original (Gates 2009, 49).

Endre Begby objects to Arpaly's position on the grounds that Solomon cannot be reasonably accused of being epistemically irrational even after he has encountered a number of intelligent women. The problem with Arpaly's argument, according to Begby, is that it turns on a serious misconception about the "logical structure of prejudices" (Begby 2013, 90). The common prejudices that one encounters in the social world do not in fact take the form of universally quantified inductive generalizations; rather, they usually involve prototypical judgments about the negative attributes of social groups. Prejudices most frequently take the form of *generic statements* such as "used car salesmen are liars", in other words, where it is understood that there are rare exceptions to this general rule (Begby 2013, 91). So Solomon's prejudice should not be unpacked as the statement that "*all* women are half as intellectually competent as men"; rather, it should be understood as the claim "the *typical woman* is half as intellectually competent as the *average man*". The logical form of this prejudice allows for degrees of intelligence among both the male and female populations; it also makes room for exceptional cases, on the tails of these normal distributions, where some women will be more intelligent than the least intelligent men.

Begby argues that one would expect to find these exceptional women, moreover, studying and teaching at universities. It would not be epistemically irrational for Solomon to maintain his prejudicial beliefs, then, even while incorporating this new sample of data into his total body of evidence (Begby 2013, 93–4). Begby might be willing to excuse Hume from blame, therefore, in light of the minor revisions that Hume made to a second version of his footnote published in 1777. Hume slightly modifies the footnote to say that Blacks *scarcely ever*, rather than *never*, display intellectual eminence in the arts and sciences. This amendment suggests that Hume took into consideration the contrary evidence about the intellectual achievements of writers such as Wheatley, and perhaps, a notable philosopher such as Anton Wilhelm Amo. Hume's revised position is that Blacks are capable of intellectual eminence, then, but that these are exceptions rather than the rule. And stating his racial prejudices in terms of the logic of generics would entail, as Begby points out in the case of Solomon, that it is not epistemically irrational for him to remain steadfast and persevere with his racial prejudices even in the face of counterexamples. Hume would not be denying that it was possible for Blacks to achieve intellectual eminence; he would only be asserting that these cases are extremely rare, and that one would likely find them in exceptional circumstances, such

as that of Amo, who was trained from a young age to be a philosopher (Popkin 1992, 70).

There are independent reasons for thinking, however, that Hume's racial generalizations are epistemically irrational, even when weakened and hedged as they are in the 1777 revised edition of the footnote. On what evidentiary basis, after all, did Hume make this assertion? Hume bases his generalizations on purported facts about the ingenuity among African slaves. But as Hume's contemporary, James Beattie, points out, it is unreasonable to draw any conclusions about the intellectual capacities of Blacks from achievements of slaves, who were denied any formal education and were subjected to brutal lives of servility. To infer that Blacks are naturally inferior because they did not rise to intellectual prominence in these conditions, according to Beattie, is like concluding that a white European is "an inferior species, because he has not raised himself to the condition of royalty" (Harris 2004, 136).

Hume had reason to distrust his racial generalizations, therefore, given their inadequate empirical support. Moreover, Hume's own psychological theories, according to which human beings are naturally prone to making hasty generalizations about social groups, provide higher-order evidence that should have led him to suspend judgment about the intellectual capacities of Blacks, at least until he was able to gather sufficient anthropological evidence that would enable him to adequately screen off accidental factors. Indeed, this is especially true given his own theoretical approach to national differences, which privileges socio-cultural causes, such as access to education, over physical explanations (Valls 2005, 128). Hume does not adequately reflect on his rash generalizations, therefore, and is blameworthy for making social judgments without proper regard to the total evidence at his disposal.

Does the fact that Hume is a historical figure writing in the middle of the 18th century make a difference in terms of exculpating him from blame for his failure to properly correct his racial prejudices? Miranda Fricker's account of doxastic responsibility potentially absolves Hume from epistemic or moral blame on the grounds that he lived at a time when ideas of racial equality were only slowly beginning to emerge. Consider Fricker's evaluation of the character Herbert Greenleaf, for example, from the screenplay for the film *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. Greenleaf ignores the testimony of his son Dickie's fiancée, Marge Sherwood, about the role that Tom Ripley played in Dickie's death. Greenleaf commits testimonial injustice against Marge, according to Fricker, because he fails to assign her the credibility she deserves. He dismisses her testimony simply because she is a woman and is thus too emotional and hysterical to think straight about such serious matters (Fricker 2007, 168).

Fricker argues that Greenleaf is not culpable for his gender prejudices, since his attitudes toward women such as Marge are saturated by the sexism of the day (*ibid.*, 89–90). Fricker maintains that Greenleaf is non-culpably at fault, moreover, for his failure to reflectively correct and neutralize the impact of these negative stereotypes. The reason is that the screenplay takes place in the “historical context” of the 1950s, where the concepts required for Greenleaf to engage in reflective critical awareness about his gender prejudice were not available to him (*ibid.*, 89, *cf.* 101). Greenleaf is not blameworthy for his biases, then, because one would not reasonably expect someone in his socio-historical context to do better; Greenleaf was a victim of “circumstantial epistemic bad luck”, as Fricker puts it, that tragically prevented him from discovering the truth about his son’s murder (*ibid.*, 33).

Did Hume also succumb to bad epistemic and moral luck? Was he simply unfortunate to have been raised in an era where his preconceptions would be saturated by racial prejudices, and where the concepts of racial equality necessary for critical self-reflection would not be fully articulated until centuries later? It is difficult to understand how Fricker could absolve Greenleaf for failing to correct his gender prejudices in the 1950s but not exonerate Hume for unchecked racial prejudices in the 18th century. It seems that she would have to hold, for considerations of parity, that Hume is not blameworthy for his intellectual failures.

It should be noted that Fricker does not, however, let Greenleaf completely off the hook for his gender biases. There is another sense in which we can still reasonably criticize characters such as Greenleaf, according to Fricker, while acknowledging that their attitudes were commonplace in their historical contexts. Even if sentiments of anger and indignation are off the table, as Fricker puts it, there are other types of moral resentment that “remain in play” (*ibid.*, 103). We are apt to feel a sense of *disappointment* at the fact that Greenleaf failed to exceed the routine expectations of agents in his era and did not manage to amplify the limited concepts at his disposal to make an imaginative leap in our thinking about gender equality (Fricker 2007, 104). Even though we would not ordinarily *blame* someone for failing to extend the moral consciousness of their age, we would nevertheless feel a sense of sadness in response to their failure to rise above the prejudices of their day.

This sense of disappointment might seem particularly apt when directed at Hume, since he was such an exceptional thinker in nearly every other domain of thought and managed to question, revise, and extend so many philosophical concepts. Someone able to raise skeptical doubts about traditional concepts of causation, induction, and the external world should have been able to distrust his own assumptions

about the necessary connection between complexion and intelligence. One of the leading thinkers of the age of enlightenment could have done better, it seems, and been able to formulate new concepts that would have allowed him to reflectively evaluate his own racial biases. It is natural to feel that Hume could and should have been exceptional and risen above the common prejudices of his day.

The criterion for whether we should condemn someone as prejudiced, according to Hume, is whether they fail to correct their negative generalizations about social groups when presented with countervailing evidence. Thus, *Hume fails to pass his own test*. However, this does not amount to saying, as Popkin does, that Hume is a “lousy empirical scientist” (Popkin 1992, 72). Hume is the first philosopher to place systematic biases and errors of the mind at the center of his theory of human nature. And Hume offers an innovative account of the role that implicit biases play in explaining why we often fail to believe what we should. The problem with Hume is that he is an astute observer when it comes to the intellectual vices of others but has a blind spot when it comes to detecting his own faults. Hume acknowledges at one point that human nature is “very subject” to prejudices and concedes that this is true of his own nation, “as much as any other” (T 1.3.13.7; SBN 147). He should have added: and this is true of me as well. Unfortunately, this lack of self-knowledge stains what was otherwise an exemplary virtuous character.

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