

*Hume on Rational Final Ends*¹
Adrian M.S. Piper

Abstract

Historically, the view, prevalent in contemporary economics and decision theory as well as philosophy, that rational action consists simply in satisfying one's desires, whatever they may be, as efficiently as possible, is to be found first in Book II of Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*. This view has counterintuitive and self-refuting implications, in that it recognizes as rational behavior that may reveal a clear degree of irresponsibility or psychological instability. Accordingly, many Hume scholars have tried to show recently that this view was not Hume's; and that, on the contrary, Hume did supply an account of rational final ends - in his discussion of the calm passions, the "steady and general view" that corrects the biases and contingencies of an individual's desires and perceptions, and elsewhere. But a detailed reconstruction of Hume's views on these matters that assembles *all* the relevant texts does not support this thesis. Instead, it undermines it. Hence the counterintuitive and self-refuting implications of Hume's view of rational action must be allowed to stand.

According to what I shall call the *traditional view*, reason functions to make inferences and categorical and hypothetical judgments, formulate hypotheses, and derive conclusions from evidential statements, deductive premises, and syllogisms. Reason on the traditional view is a logical arbiter, a calculator and discoverer of the relations between abstract concepts and states or events in the world. There is a certain model of rational action, call it the *utility-maximization model of rationality*, which many have taken to be a direct consequence of the traditional view of reason. The basic premise of the utility-maximization model is that rationality is a purely theoretical or logical capacity which consists in ascertaining, through investigation and calculation, the most efficient means possible of achieving our desired final ends, whatever these may be. "Efficient means" typically include whatever resources happen to be available to us, i.e., time, energy, physical labor, and material goods, expended with as little cost as possible. Call this basic premise the *positive utility-maximization thesis*.

Hence reason has two tasks, according to this thesis. Its primary task is to maximize utility; to discover the relations among phenomena such that they can best be utilized to satisfy our desires. Its secondary task is the

¹ This discussion is excerpted from a longer manuscript in progress, *Rationality and the Structure of the Self*. A protodraft originally formed the Appendix to my dissertation, "A New Model of Rationality" (Harvard University, 1981). I am grateful to John Rawls for persuading me of the importance of dealing with Hume straight off, and for his criticisms and encouragement throughout. I also would like to thank Marcia Baron for comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

examination of these phenomena themselves, for the purpose of discovering those objects or states of affairs that satisfy our desires. Such examination may run the gamut from methodologically rigorous scientific inquiry in general, i.e., the discovery of what phenomena there are, to a more restricted and informal scrutiny of particular objects, in order to discern or infer whether, or to what extent they have the qualities we desire. I call this task 'secondary' because it is a special case of the primary task of reason, i.e., the utilization of our intellectual capacities in the service of our final ends. Clearly the discovery of possible objects of desire is itself an end which reason may be used to achieve. Thus on this view we are *thinking* rationally if we successfully and appropriately perform those intellectual operations characteristic of theoretical reason. We are *acting* rationally if we successfully deploy these operations in achieving our final ends.

An immediate implication of the utility-maximization model of rationality as I have stated it is that reason has nothing to say about whether these final ends themselves are rational. Call this the *negative utility-maximization thesis*. This thesis does not follow from the traditional view of reason, but it does follow from the utility-maximization model of rationality. For this model regards reason itself as *nothing* more than a means for achieving our ends. Of course reason may enable us to discover what ends we genuinely want, and may enlarge the scope of ends from which we may choose. But it provides no criteria for identifying those ends themselves as rational, independently of their efficiency as means for promoting further ends to which they may be subordinate. Reason functions solely as the unique second-order means for determining the logical or material first-order means to our ends, whatever they may be. The positive and the negative utility-maximization theses are jointly necessary and sufficient conditions of the utility-maximization model of rationality.

By itself the negative utility thesis has counterintuitive implications. It is easy to think of examples of final ends that intuitively seem to be irrational in some further, unexplicated sense of the word "rational". Rawls' man who wants nothing more than to count blades of grass is one such example.² Another might be the system of final ends embraced by the late Howard Hughes in his last years: to maintain a permanently narcotic-induced state of drugged semi-awareness, watch old movies continually, remain permanently isolated from all human contact in a bed in a dark, dirty room sealed permanently against light and fresh air, and accumulate vast quantities of

² John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 432.

land and money.³ A third might be to spend one's evenings howling at the moon.⁴ Each of these ends in itself seems patently irrational. That all conjointly would be as well is uncontroversial. But the utility-maximization model of rationality can yield no explanation of why this is so. Hence either our rationality does not play the normative role in determining our conception of ourselves as human agents that so many philosophers have thought it did, or else the utility-maximization model of rationality as stated is flawed by the negative thesis. For it implicitly classifies as "rational" by default behavior to which we are intuitively reluctant to apply that term, i.e., efficient actions the final ends of which are patently irrational in some further sense that is not explained by that model.

The negative utility-maximization thesis engenders methodological difficulties as well. Many moral philosophers have deployed this model in order to provide an instrumentalist justification of their favored moral theory.⁵ Rawls, Brandt, Gauthier, Darwall, and Harsanyi are only the most recent proponents of a tradition that includes Hobbes, Locke and Sidgwick among those who attempt to demonstrate the objective validity of their respective moral theories, by arguing that their theory would be chosen, under certain special conditions, by a rational chooser concerned to promote her ends efficiently, whatever those ends might be. The putative objectivity of the instrumentalist justification derives from its claim to demonstrate that the set of arrangements prescribed by the moral theory in question is instrumentally rational to *anyone's* ends. But then it cannot provide a *moral* justification of the theory, since it is then presumably instrumental to immoral final ends as well. If, on the other hand, the range of ends to which the theory is instrumental is restricted in order to exclude immoral final ends - for example, by an assumption that the rational chooser is benevolent, or has a motivationally overriding interest in developing and exercising her moral personality, then the instrumentalist justification obtains moral status at the expense of objectivity. So the utility-maximization model of rationality, and in particular the negative utility-maximization thesis, is methodologically unfit

³ See Bartlett and Steele, *Empire: The Life, Legend, and Madness of Howard Hughes* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1979).

⁴ This example is discussed, and an unHumean solution to the problem of identifying rational final ends proposed, in Section V of "Two Conceptions of the Self", *Philosophical Studies* 48, 2 (September 1985), 173-197; reprinted in *The Philosopher's Annual VIII* (1985).

⁵ The ideas in this paragraph are developed more fully in "Instrumentalism, Objectivity, and Moral Justification", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 23, 4 (October 1986).

to provide an objective moral justification of any moral theory. The negative thesis, then, generates problems for this model on at least two counts.

The positive and negative theses of the utility-maximization model of rationality is explicated in greatest detail in Hume's *Treatise*⁶, and the negative thesis defended most forcefully there. Hume's most celebrated passages include those in which he characterizes reason as nothing but the "slave of the passions", (T 415) and as wholly silent on the question of whether I should "chuse my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an *Indian* or person wholly unknown to me. 'Tis as little contrary to reason", Hume continues, "to prefer even my own acknowledg'd lesser good to my greater, and have a more ardent affection for the former than the latter". (T 416) These claims certainly seem counterintuitive in the ways just described, and commentators on Hume have not been happy about taking them at face value. We are often told that Hume took a perverse pleasure in attention-getting hyperbole,⁷ and that we should therefore take them with a grain of salt. However, if the only evidence given for Hume's putative perversity were the passages we are instructed to disregard, it would not be evidence enough; nor would it be consistent with the honorable convention of showing respect for a thinker by assuming that she means what she says. But some of Hume's commentators have attempted the more ambitious project of finding positive and substantive evidence that Hume did not mean what he said in these passages, in a more constructive account of reason's role in constraining us to rational final ends elsewhere in the *Treatise*; and hence that the two objections to the negative utility-maximization thesis mentioned above are misplaced.

However, I want to show that a detailed reconstruction of Hume's arguments on these matters does not support these well-intentioned defenses of Hume, and that he means *exactly* what he says in the controversial passages; and consequently, that the two objections mentioned above must be

⁶ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968). Henceforth all page references to the *Treatise* will be in the text, preceded by *T*. All references to the second Enquiry [David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966)], will also be in the text, preceded by *E*.

⁷ See, for example, Henry David Aiken, "An Interpretation of Hume's Theory of the Place of Reason in Ethics and Politics", *Ethics* 90 (October 1979), 68; D.D. Raphael, "Hume's Critique of Ethical Rationalism", in William B. Todd, Ed. *Hume and the Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh Press, 1974), 19; David Fate Norton, *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 100; David Miller, *Philosophy and Ideology in Hume's Political Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 40, 47.

allowed to stand. I begin by demonstrating that on the face of it at least, Hume's view of rationality is straightforwardly identifiable as the utility-maximization model. I then argue in Sections II and III that this is fully consistent with his larger project of denying the motivational efficacy of reason. Sections IV and V are devoted to elaborating in considerable detail a particularly compelling version of an argument claiming to show that Hume does impose restrictions on the range of final ends identifiable as rational, and Section VI to refuting that argument.

I

That Hume accepts the traditional view of reason described above is not difficult to ascertain. His conception is first introduced in Book I of the *Treatise of Human Nature*, where he divides reason into three kinds: (1) knowledge, which he describes as a feeling of certainty or assurance produced by the comparison of ideas, (2) proofs, or arguments derived from causal relationships about whose soundness we feel no doubt or uncertainty, and (3) probability, which is that evidence about which we continue to feel uncertainty. Probability is then subdivided into chance, which Hume defines as the negation of a cause, and causes, which he characterizes as a constant conjunction of events which produces in us a habit of associating the idea of the one with the idea of the other. (T 124)⁸

However, categories (2) and (3) partly collapse into each other, for Hume has earlier argued that certainty arises solely from the comparison of ideas and the discovery of unalterable relationships such as resemblance, proportion in number and quantity, contrariety, etc.; and that none of these are implied in the claim that whatever has a beginning has a cause. (T 79) Causal relationships are therefore neither intuitively nor demonstrably certain. Therefore nothing satisfies Hume's description of a proof (2), and causal relationships are a species of probability. This conclusion is partly confirmed by Hume's claim, a few pages later, that

The gradation . . . from probabilities of proofs is in many cases insensible; and the difference betwixt these kinds of evidence is more easily perceived in the remote degrees, than in the near and contiguous. (T 131)

Hence the basic categories of reason are knowledge, consisting in the comparison of ideas which gives rise to a feeling of certainty, and probability, i.e., that uncertain evidence arising from the observing of actual events.

⁸ This characterization of what I call the "traditional view" is, I think, consistent with what Barbara Winters describes as the "naturalistic conception". See her "Hume on Reason", *Hume Studies* V, 1 (April 1979), 20-35.

Hume's later treatments of reason change his terminology but not this basic twofold division. In Book II, Section III ("Of the Influencing Motives of the Will"), Hume distinguishes between abstract or demonstrative and probabilistic reasoning. (T 413-14) The first concerns only the abstract relations of ideas, which we may assimilate to Hume's earlier description of knowledge as consisting in the comparison of ideas; the second consists in an inquiry into the relationship between and among objects of experience, i.e., their causal relations. And as we have already seen, causal relations can be ascertained only with varying degrees of probability. This is then later confirmed, by implication, when Hume characterizes reason as consisting in two basic operations of the understanding: (1) the comparing of ideas; and (2) the inferring of matters of fact. (T 463)⁹

Hume also characterizes reason as the discovery of truth or falsehood. This consists in the agreement or disagreement to the actual (Hume uses the term "real") relations of ideas, or to actual existence and matters of fact. (T 458) Hume's intent in this passage is to argue that our actions, passions, and volitions can disagree with neither. What *can* agree or disagree, either with the real relations of ideas or with real existence and matters of fact, i.e., what can conform to reason in this way? Hume has already argued that this role is filled by our prior, unreflective ideas and impressions. (T 415) These must conform or fail to conform to the ways in which ideas or events are in fact related.

⁹ Thus I find no evidence for David Miller's contention that in Book II, Hume uses the term "reason" to cover all the operations of the understanding, including imagination, judgment, and belief (Miller, pages 40 and 47; *op. cit.*, Note 7). Miller earlier refers to the passage in the Treatise in which Hume states that "When I oppose the imagination to the memory, I mean the faculty, by which we form our fainter ideas. When I oppose it to reason, I mean the same faculty, excluding only our demonstrative and probable reasonings". (T 117-18). Miller remarks on this passage that "In the last sentence 'reason' is expanded to include the rule-governed imagination, which forms all 'probable' judgements (i.e., judgements concerning matters of fact not immediately present to the senses), and contrasted with the 'fanciful' imagination. In seeking to eliminate one source of confusion, Hume has inadvertently introduced another (the broader sense of 'reason' is frequently used by Hume in expounding his moral philosophy)". (Miller, page 27 fn.) But I fear the muddle here is not Hume's. Surely Hume means to say that imagination is the faculty by which we form our fainter ideas *except for our demonstrative and probable reasonings, which are formed by the faculty of reason*. Presumably the point of the contrast between reason and imagination is to distinguish between those faint ideas which are formed by non-rational mental processes and those which are formed by "demonstrable and probable reasonings". I do not see that Hume has expanded his use of the term "reason" at all.

Hume charts the relations between demonstrative and probabilistic reasoning in Book II, Section III of the *Treatise*, and there we find the relation to be essentially one of means to ends:

Mathematics, indeed, are useful in all mechanical operations, and arithmetic in almost every art and profession: But 'tis not of themselves they have any influence. Mechanics are the art of regulating the motion of bodies to some design'd end or purpose; and the reason why we employ arithmetic in fixing the proportions of numbers, is only that we may discover the proportions of their influence and operations... Abstract or demonstrative reason, therefore, never influences any of our actions, but only as it directs our judgment concerning causes and effects, which leads us to the second operation of the understanding. (T 413-14)

Hume then goes on to describe how, when we are confronted by an object that causes us pleasure or pain, we feel an attraction or aversion to it, which in turn makes us "cast our view on every side, comprehend[ing] whatever objects are connected with [the] original one of the relation of cause and effect". (T 414)

Thus Hume's conception of reason is a hierarchically-structured series of means to the ends we adopt. At the top of the hierarchy, we find abstract or demonstrative reasoning; the comparison of abstract ideas which characterizes mathematics and arithmetic. But abstract reasoning is merely a means enabling us to calculate probabilities more accurately. At the second level in the hierarchy, then, we find probabilistic reasoning; that brand of calculation that is concerned with causal relations between events. However, this too is merely a means to the further end of pursuing pleasurable objects and avoiding painful ones. We thus find this goal at the first and bottom level of the hierarchy, for it itself is not a means to any further end. The general appetite to good (or pleasure) and aversion to evil (or pain)¹⁰ "arises originally in the soul, or in the body, whichever you please to call it, without any preceding thought or perception". (T 276) So for Hume, abstract reasoning is a means to probabilistic reasoning; probabilistic reasoning is a means to the rational manipulation of empirical conditions; and this in turn is the means to the objects of our desires. Thus Hume not only accepts the traditional view of reason as essentially inference and calculation, but also, apparently, the positive utility-maximization thesis.

Hume makes his adherence to this thesis clear in a number of places. Directly after limning his hierarchical picture of reason, he goes on to explain how, when we incline or are averse to some particular object, based on the amount of pleasure or pain we expect from it, we utilize our reason in order

¹⁰ Hume identifies them at T 276 and 439.

to discover the causal relations that lead to or away from it, and design our actions accordingly.

Here then reasoning takes place to discover this relation; and according as our reason varies, our actions receive a subsequent variation... It can never in the least concern us to know, that such objects are causes, and such other effects, if both the causes and effects be indifferent to us. (T 414)

Later, in Book III, Section I ("Moral Distinctions Not Deriv'd From Reason"), Hume articulates this view of reason's function even more explicitly.

[R]eason, 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 connexion of causes and effects, so as to afford us the means of exacting any passion. (T 459; emphasis added)

That reason can function only as a means to achieve objects we desire, either by alerting us to the existence of such objects, or by charting the causal path to their attainment, implies not only Hume's acceptance of the positive utility-maximization thesis, but indeed the negative one as well. For that reason can only be a means to our ends clearly implies that it does not function to circumscribe those ends themselves.

Both of these theses are buttressed further by Hume's claims in the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. His adherence to the positive thesis is supported by his claims that

nothing but [reason] can instruct us in the tendency of qualities and actions, and point out their beneficial consequences to society and their possessor. (E 285)

and that it

directs only the impulse received from appetite or inclination, by showing us the means of attaining happiness or avoiding misery. (E 294)

As in the *Treatise*, Hume is quite explicit on the point that, just as reason discovers causal means for the realization of particular ends, similarly reason itself is the means by which we discover those causal relationships most suitable to their attainment.

Hume is most explicit in his affirmation of the negative utility-maximization thesis in the *Enquiry*. There he maintains quite clearly that

the ultimate ends of human actions can never, in any case, be accounted for by reason, but recommend themselves entirely to the sentiments and affections of Mankind, without any dependence on the intellectual faculties. (E 295)

Similarly, he argues that we require the sentiment of humanity, i.e., a feeling of the happiness of mankind and a resentment of their misery, in order to be motivated to promote these ends, for

were the end totally indifferent to us, we should face the same indifference to the means... *reason* instructs us in the several tendencies of actions, and humanity makes a distinction in favor of those which are useful and beneficial. (E 286)

In both passages the point is the same: It is not reason, but rather our passions and sentiments, which determine the ends that reason helps us achieve. Thus Hume's view satisfies the two essential conditions of the utility-maximization role of rationality.

II

The view I have attributed to Hume can be understood in two ways, and the discussion so far has emphasized only one of them. I have been concerned to show that for Hume, there can be no conception of rational final ends, i.e., ends that conform to the prescriptions of reason. Its purview is confined solely to the discovery of means to those ends, and imposes no criteria of rationality on those ends themselves. The passages adduced so far seem clearly to point to this conclusion. But Hume's intention was more comprehensive. He wanted to show not only that reason could not determine rational ends of action, but also that it could not motivate action either.

This project was fueled by an interest in refuting the position, championed by Samuel Clarke and William Wollaston, that the conclusions of theoretical reason - i.e., the capacity to analyze and to perform logical operations - concerning the meaning of moral propositions were sufficient to incite one to morally virtuous action. Samuel Clarke offered an analysis of morally right actions as those which are self-evidently fitting or suitable to the circumstances in which they occur. This suitability or fitness is generated by natural proportional relations and uniformities that obtain among natural objects and events, just as they do among geometrical and mathematical entities. Hence, he argues, it is self-contradictory to will acts which are recognized to be unsuitable to their circumstances, i.e., immoral.¹¹ Wollaston, on the other hand, rejected Clarke's analysis of rightness as fittingness. Instead he held that moral actions are those which assert logically true

¹¹ Samuel Clarke, *A Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion*, Ed. LA. Selby-Bigge, *The British Moralists, Vol. II* (New York: Dover, 1965), 4-6. See the discussion of Clarke by Rachel Kydd, *Reason and Conduct in Hume's Treatise* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), Chapter 1.

propositions, while immoral actions are self-contradictory.¹² Thus his conception of moral rightness is equivalent to that of truth. However, both Samuel Clarke and William Wollaston concurred in the belief that these convictions were discoverable *a priori* by theoretical reason, i.e., that a simple examination of the nature of action and its circumstances would reveal those actions which were morally right. And significantly, both believed that mere recognition of these "moral facts" placed the agent under obligation to act in conformity with them.¹³

Against this view, Samuel Clarke's two foremost critics, John Clarke and Francis Hutcheson, argued that moral propositions did not analyze the nature of moral action, but rather were concerned with moral obligation. For since the mere recognition of fittingness or self-consistency had no conative force, such propositions could not move an agent to do or refrain from any act, hence could not be central to a true analysis of moral propositions.¹⁴ The central topic of moral philosophy was thus what we are obligated to do. Conflating what we are obligated to do with what we are compelled or *obliged* to do, both then conclude that an action cannot be called obligatory unless the agent feels impelled to perform it. So either reason had to be rejected as the source of morality, or else reason itself had to discover its own special motive to action.¹⁵

Hutcheson is clearest on this latter requirement, and most pessimistic about its fulfillment. He maintains that we can only be moved to action by "exciting reasons", and these are dependent on our desires. But (as Kydd points out) since our desires are empirical, *a priori* rational analysis cannot of itself incite us to action:

As if indeed reason, or the knowledge of the relation of things, could excite to action when we proposed no end, or as if ends could be intended without desire or affection.¹⁶

Hutcheson's claims bear further consideration. His point in this passage is twofold. First, rational *a priori* analysis bears no relation to desires and emotions, and only these can motivate us to action. But second, the reason

¹² William Wollaston, *The Religion of Nature Delineated*, in Selby-Bigge, *Ibid.*, 362-4. See Kydd, *Ibid.*

¹³ Clarke, *Op. Cit.*, 12-14, 16-17, 23-4, 31-3; Wollaston, *Ibid.*, 370-1; Kydd, *Op. Cit.*, 28-36.

¹⁴ Kydd, *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁵ Kydd, *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁶ Francis Hutcheson, *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, Ed. Bernard Peach (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1971), 122.

theoretical reason fails to move us to action is *not only* because it is neither a desire nor an emotion. It fails because it provides us with no *end* about which we might be able to feel a desire or aversion or emotion. So even if theoretical reason could fashion some object proved by analysis to be ultimately worthwhile, this would be irrelevant to the moral enterprise if it were not the object of a desire. Hence desires and affections are not significant merely because they move us to act; impulses, whims, and uncontrollable urges do so as well. They are significant because they posit *ends* which we desire to achieve, and these desires move us to act.

Two implications of Hutcheson's argument follow directly. First, a necessary condition of an object's having moral value is that it be able to motivate us to action, i.e., that it be an object of desire. Second, reason provides no such motivating ends. The conclusion is clear: Reason provides no moral motivation to action. But if reason provides no motivating ends, and if we can be motivated only by ends we desire to achieve, then reason does not determine the ends we desire to achieve; these can be determined only by instincts, affection, and desire.¹⁷ This conclusion is recognizable as Hume's negative utility-maximization thesis.

As with Hume, this negative thesis is buttressed by Hutcheson's answer to the question,

[A]re there no exciting reasons, even previous to any ends, moving us to propose one end rather than another? To this Aristotle long ago answered that 'there are ultimate ends desired without a view to anything else'. To subordinate ends these reasons or truths excite, which show them to be conducive to the ultimate end, and show one object to be more effectual than another; thus subordinate ends may be called reasonable. But as to these ultimate ends, to suppose exciting reasons for them, would infer that there is no ultimate end, but that we desire one thing for another in an infinite series.¹⁸

Here Hutcheson does not mean to deny that we are motivated to achieve final ends. Rather, he is denying that we are motivated by *rational considerations* to achieve those ends. His point is that reason plays no role in the choice of final ends. Furthermore, reason does play a role in investigating

¹⁷ This point is supported, and not undermined, as Kydd seems to think (*Op. Cit.*, 39-40), by his later assertion that

He acts reasonably, who considers the various actions in his power, and forms true opinions of their tendencies; and then chooses to do that which will obtain the highest degree of that to which the instincts of his nature incline him. (*Ibid.* 126)

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 123.

and determining the most effectual subordinate ends, i.e., means to those final ends.¹⁹ Again, this view is recognizable as Hume's positive utility-maximization thesis.

Thus Hume's task was twofold. First, it was necessary to clearly delineate the actual scope and limits of reason, in order to demonstrate conclusively the conviction he shared with Hutcheson and John Clarke that no truth of reason could of itself incite an agent to action, much less moral action. Second, Hume had to provide a positive and detailed account of the passions in order to show just what the true origins and motives of moral action actually were. These enterprises form most of the subject matter of Books II and III of the *Treatise of Human Nature*, and account for his adherence to both the positive and the negative utility-maximization thesis.

For it is of course significant that both Hume and his ally Hutcheson assumed almost without a second thought the truth of the negative utility-maximization thesis as an argument supporting their convictions about reason's irrelevance to moral, and in general behavioral, motivation. Both suppose that reason's inability to determine rational ends, and its limited function as a mere means of achieving those ends are in some sense indicative of its inability to motivate an agent to action. The implicit reasoning seem to be that a necessary condition of motivation is an object of desire, or end, and that if reason cannot determine such an end, it cannot move one to action. Hutcheson follows this line of reasoning straightforwardly: He argues that a rational end is a necessary condition of rational motivation, and that since our ends are ultimately determined by our nonrational desires, this condition cannot be satisfied.

Hume's strategy is more subtle, and more problematic. His objective is to demonstrate the mutual independence of reason and motivation. But as we will see in Section III, his arguments depend on confusing a motive and an end of action. This confusion then leads him to conclude, from the imperviousness to rational standards of certain ends, the imperviousness to reason of our motives for acting - just as Hutcheson does. However, this thesis will need to be evaluated independently of Hume's arguments, for they do not prove what he thought they did.

Hume begins by considering the role of passion, and then later makes the role of reason his starting point. The rest of this section will be devoted to the first, and Section III to the second. His first argument, then, is that reason cannot incite us to action. Only the prospect of pleasure or the avoidance of

¹⁹ Cf. Note 17 and also *Ibid.*, 115-16, where he describes reason as the "sagacity in prosecuting any end", and as the finding of means to promote both the public and private good.

pain from an object can do that. (T 414) He states quite clearly that reason has *no* motivational efficacy (T 415), and later characterizes it as "of itself... utterly impotent [to excite passions, and produce or prevent actions]". (T 457) Moreover, in his own summation of his argument of Book II, Part III, Section 3, Hume takes himself to have "prov'd, that reason is perfectly inert, and can never either prevent or produce any action or affection". (T 458) Nor can reason oppose our desires, for only another desire or passion can oppose a desire or passion, and if this could originate in reason, then reason would, on the contrary, be capable of inciting us to action. And Hume has just argued that it is not. Thus Hume's first claim is that only passions can oppose each other, and only passions can motivate actions. Reason, it seems, is excluded from the scene.

However, there are passages in the *Treatise* which have seemed to many to commit Hume to at least some minimal motivational role for reason, and these must be examined. First, there are passages in Part III., Section 10 of Book I, "Of the Influence of Belief". There Hume tells us, for example, that "the effect... 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 119; emphasis added). He also states that "belief is almost absolutely requisite to the exciting our passions". (T 120) The implication would seem to be that belief constitutes an identifiable link in the causal chain between the presence of the object and the agent's exertion in its service. If belief is motivationally influential in exciting the passions, which in turn cause action, and true belief is a species of rationality, then reason must be motivationally influential as well.

However, one of the premises contained in this line of reasoning is subject to doubt: belief may be motivationally influential, but it is not a species of rationality. To see this, consider first Hume's detailed account of how facts become "the object of faith or opinion":

When an affecting object is presented, it gives the alarm, and excites immediately a degree of its proper passion;... This emotion passes by an easy transition to the imagination; and diffusing itself over our idea of the affecting object, makes us form that idea with greater force and vivacity, and consequently assent to it, according to the precedent system. (T 120)

The steps in the process are (1) the affecting object causes a passion; (2) this passion is transferred to the imagination; (3) in the imagination, the passion infuses our idea of the object; (4) this infusion imparts greater force and vivacity to the idea, "imitating", as Hume has said shortly before, "the effects of the impressions"; (T 119); (5) the greater intensity of this idea, and its approximation to an impression causes us to assent to it. "Belief", Hume tells us, "is nothing but a *more vivid and intense conception of any idea*". (T 119-20). The implications are four. First, belief is composed of an idea and a passion

"diffused over" it. Second, the causal factor in belief is the passion that precedes the idea it infuses, not the idea itself. Third, since reason, as we already know, concerns only relations of ideas and matters of fact, reason is no more causally efficacious than are ideas as such. And finally, therefore, belief, qua passion-infused idea, is not a species of reason.

This account of the influence of belief is borne out by Hume's earlier analysis of the nature of propositional belief in Sections 6 and 7. There Hume distinguishes between belief in those propositions proved by intuition or demonstration, and those concerning causation and matters of fact. (T 95) We are determined to believe the former either immediately or by the interposition of other ideas. This chain of ideas, i.e., inference, depends solely on the union and association of ideas in imagination, not on reason. (T 92) By contrast, whether we believe a proposition about matters of fact or its negation is determined by which of the two ideas is related to or associated with a present impression, thus increasing its force and vivacity. (T 96; also T 86, 93). As Hume frequently reminds us, belief is a particular *manner* of forming an idea. (T 95, 96, 97) A belief that has motivational influence, then, is an idea whose accompanying impression has sparked the passion that infuses it and has thereby rendered it particularly forceful and vivacious. Again it is the impression and the passion that precede the idea that are motivationally efficacious, not reason.

This conclusion is further supported by Hume's claims that belief is *merely* a certain feeling or sentiment (T 153, 624); that it is not itself an idea (T 184, 623-26) or a simple act of thought (T 184); and that it is more properly an act of the sensitive than the cognitive faculties (T 103, 183-5). Hume in the *Enquiry* makes the point even more strongly: He characterizes belief as "the true and proper name of [an indefinable sentiment or] feeling"; (E 48-9); he contends that

[B]elief consists not in the peculiar nature or order of ideas, but in the *manner* of their conception, and in their *feeling* to the mind. I confess, that it is impossible perfectly to explain this feeling... But... we can go no farther than assert, that *belief* is something felt by the mind, which distinguishes the ideas of the judgement from the fictions of the imagination. It gives them more weight and influence; makes them appear of greater importance; enforces them in the mind; and renders them the governing principle of our actions. (E 49-50)

These passages lend support to the thesis that what identifies something as a belief is the passion that imbues it, not the idea that gives it content. Having come to believe something, it may well be that *our believing it* causally influences the passions that cause us to act. It is nevertheless false, according to Hume's account, to infer that reason has any such influence.

However, there are two other sets of passages that may seem to engender similar inferences. Hume often claims that reason *alone* cannot influence the will (T 413, 414, 457); that reason can "excite" a passion only "by informing us of the existence of something which is a proper object of it"; (T 459); that an action "may be *obliquely* caus'd by [a judgment], when the judgment concurs with a passion"; (T 459); that reason "may, indeed, be the mediate cause of an action, by prompting, or by directing a passion". (T 462); and that "the blind motions of the [affections], without the direction of the [understanding], incapacitate men for society". (T 493) These passages have suggested to some that reason may be at least a necessary (if not sufficient) motivational influence on a passion.²⁰ Here the problem lies in the scope of the word "cause" as we, and Hume, choose to use it. I submit that Hume and some of his commentators have failed to make the distinction between a necessary condition and a contributing cause. Something is a *necessary condition* for an action if the action would not have been performed without it. Something is a *contributing cause* of an action if, independently of other causal factors with which it is conjoined, it exerts some causal influence on the agent to perform the action. Suppose, for example, that I discovered a wished-for cherry pie on the table. I am moved to approach the table. Does my *discovery* of the pie move me toward the table? Surely not. If I discovered the pie without wanting it, it would have no such influence. Rather, it is *my desire for the pie* that has this effect on me. Of course my discovery of the pie on the table is a necessary condition of my approaching *the table* (rather than, say, the window). In that sense, my discovery "directs" or "prompts" me toward the table. But not everything that is required in order for an event to occur can be sensibly described as a contributing cause of its occurrence. In particular, my discovery of the pie is a necessary condition of my action, but not a contributing cause of it; for, as Hume often notes, reason *by itself* has no causal influence whatsoever. The suggestion, then, is that when Hume uses words such as "prompts" or "directs", he is referring to a particularly salient necessary condition of action, i.e., reason - not a contributing cause of it. This interpretation enables us to resolve the passages just cited with Hume's immediately preceding claim to have "prov'd, that reason is *perfectly inert*, and can never either prevent or produce any action or affection". (T 458, emphasis

²⁰ See Henry David Aiken, "An Interpretation of Hume's Theory of the Place of Reason in Ethics and Politics", *Op. Cit.*, Note 7; and David Fate Norton, *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician*, *Op. Cit.*, Note 7. As far as I can tell, W.D. Falk (in "Hume on Practical Reason", *Philosophical Studies* 27 (1975), 1-18) does *not* make this mistake.

added) That Hume regards these two points as mutually consistent is made clear in the *Enquiry*, when he states that

[r]eason being cool and disengaged, is no motive to action, and directs only the impulse received from appetite or inclination, by showing us the means of attaining happiness or avoiding misery. (E 294)

Finally, there are the passages surrounding Hume's account of the origin of the artificial virtue of justice. Hume tells us that society is advantageous for the purpose of compensating individual defects, achieving equality or superiority relative to others, augmenting individual abilities, and providing personal security (T 485) and protection of personal goods (T 488); but that "in order to form society, 'tis requisite not only that it be advantageous, but also that men be sensible of these advantages", (T 486) and that they gain this sensitivity from experiencing a family. On the other hand, our innate selfishness and partiality works against the cooperation with others that enables society to perform this role. "From all which it follows", Hume concludes, "that our natural uncultivated ideas of morality, instead of providing a remedy for the partiality of our affections, do rather conform themselves to that partiality, and give it an additional force and influence". (T 489) Where might we find a remedy for the partiality of our affections? Hume's answer follows:

The remedy, then, is not deriv'd from nature, but from *artifice*; or more properly speaking, nature provides a remedy in the judgement and understanding, for what is irregular and incommodious in the affections. (T 489)

Some commentators²¹ have taken Hume to mean here that reason compensates for the partiality of the affections, hence provides a more stable source of motivation than they alone could supply. But first, this is not what Hume means; and second, even if it were, it would not imply that reason had motivational influence. That Hume does not mean to identify reason as the remedy for our partiality is suggested by his characterization of the remedy as "deriv'd from *artifice*;" reason, surely is not derived from artifice. But Hume's real meaning can be seen more clearly by his subsequent remarks in the same paragraph: He explains that the remedy for social disturbance must consist in "putting [external goods], as far as possible, on the same footing with the fix'd and constant advantages of the mind and body', so as to limit "their looseness and easy transition from one person to another". "This can be done", he avers,

after no other manner, than by a convention enter'd into by all the members of the society to bestow stability on the possession of those

²¹ For example, David Fate Norton (page 134, *Op. Cit.*, Note 7).

external goods, and leave every one in the peaceable enjoyment of what he may acquire by his fortune and industry. (T 489)

The remedy for our partiality, then, is not reason, but rather the rules of justice, which ensure social equilibrium by enforcing the rules of private property. At most, reason is the *source* of the rules we devise for this purpose. Thus to say that nature provides a remedy *in* the judgment and understanding is not to say that nature provides the judgment and understanding *as* a remedy. Hume asserts the former, but not the latter.

But suppose reason were Hume's remedy for the partiality of our affections? Would this show that it had motivational influence? I think not, for Hume makes it quite clear in this paragraph and in the subsequent discussion that we devise and implement the rules of justice for purely instrumental reasons, i.e., so that we may each enjoy our possessions in peace and security:

By this means, everyone knows what he may safely possess; and the passions are restrain'd in their partial and contradictory motions. *Nor is such a restraint contrary to these passions; for if so, it cou'd never be enter'd into, nor maintain'd: but it is only contrary to their heedless and impetuous movement.* (T 489; emphasis added)

Clearly Hume means to deny any suspected departure from his earlier doctrine regarding the slavish and purely instrumental role of reason relative to the passions. Reason, under the guidance of self-interest, (T 492) generates the rules of justice as means for restraining the passions, which in turn is the means to the safe enjoyment of property. Reason does not causally oppose the passions, but rather directs them in the sense noted above. (T 493) Hence the role of reason in engendering the rules of justice is not only fully consistent with Hume's doctrine of Book II regarding reason's motivational inefficacy, it is an *instance* of that doctrine. We have yet to find the clear evidence of conflicting doctrine upon which some of Hume's commentators have insisted.

III

Recall that Hume's doctrine of the motivational inefficacy of reason was the first of two lines of thought, the first taking the viewpoint of the passions, the second taking the viewpoint of reason. Now let us consider this second line of attack more closely. Reason, as Hume has already established, consists in the conformity to truth, either of abstract relations between ideas or of experienced matters of fact, of our previous ideas and impressions. The passions, on the other hand, are neither. They are "original modifications of existence" that do not represent anything, and therefore do not represent it either truly or falsely

'Tis impossible, therefore, that this passion can be oppos'd by, or be contradictory to truth and reason; since this contradiction consists in the disagreement of ideas, considered as copies, with those objects which they represent. (T 415)

Only when a passion is accompanied by a false judgment, either about the existence of an object of the passion, or about the best means for attaining that object, can it be said to be contrary to reason; "and even then 'tis not the passion, properly speaking, which is unreasonable, but the judgment". (T 416) Thus just as reason can no more oppose the passions than a logical argument could a stone falling through the air, similarly the passions can no more be contrary to reason than a falling stone can be contrary to a logical argument.

This is the context in which one of Hume's most explicit avowals of the negative utility-maximization thesis must be understood. Directly following the argument that a passion can be opposed to reason only in that the judgment which accompanies it might be, Hume says

'Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger. 'Tis not contrary to reason for me to chuse my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an *Indian* or person wholly unknown to me. 'Tis as little contrary to reason to prefer even my own acknowledg'd lesser good to my greater, and have a more ardent affection for the former than the latter. A trivial good may, from certain circumstances, produce a desire superior to what arises from the greatest and most valuable enjoyment; nor is there anything more extraordinary in this, than in mechanics to see one pound weight raise up a hundred by the advantage of its situation. (T 416)

Call this passage (A). Here Hume apparently means to exemplify his previous argument by citing a few illustrations of passions one might think, at first glance, were contrary to reason. But Hume means to provoke us, through these illustrations, into further reflection on his argument, and ultimately into arriving at the opposite conclusion.

This plan is glaringly unsuccessful. Hume has just argued that a passion, "such as hope or fear, grief or joy, despair or security", (T 416) cannot be contrary to reason because it "contains not any representative quality, which renders it a copy of any other existence or modification". (T 415) But passions must take intentional objects. We hope *for* something, are afraid of something, despair of, over, or about something. Hence the sense in which they contain no "representative quality" is obscure at best.

To be sure, Hume carefully distinguishes between a passion, the cause of the passion, and the object of the passion. A passion, as defined by Hume, 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". (T 437) Thus the passion, strictly speaking, is merely the set of physiological and psychological sensations caused by some object or circumstance. In itself, this set does not represent anything; it is an "original modification of existence".

In discussing the indirect passions of pride and humility, Hume also distinguishes between the cause of the passions and their objects.

betwixt that idea, which excites them, and that to which they direct their view, when excited... The first idea, that is presented to the mind, is that of the cause, or productive principle. This excites the passion, connected with it; and that passion, when excited turns our view to another idea. (T 278)

In the context of this discussion, Hume means to distinguish as the cause of the passion that intentional object we feel pride or humility *about*:

Every valuable quality of mind... wit, good sense, learning, courage, justice, integrity; all these are the causes of pride... A man may [also] be proud of his beauty, strength, agility... But this is not all... Our country, family, children, relations, riches, houses, gardens,... any of these may become a cause of either pride or humility. (T 279)

The object of the passion, on the other hand, is in each case the self, i.e., that object in relation to which the ideas of "valuable qualit[ies] of the mind,... the body likewise,... [and] whatever objects are in the least ally'd or related to us" (T 279) can excite such sentiments in us.²² Thus the cause of a passion for Hume is that which *we* might be inclined to describe as its intentional object, while the object of the passion is equivalent to what we might describe as its cause, i.e., self-aggrandizement.

However, in discussing the direct passions (desire and aversion, grief and joy, hope and fear, and volition), (T 438) Hume often equates the object of a desire, i.e., that to which the passion is directed, with what he calls its cause, for example, when he claims that contrary passions *arise* from *different objects of desire or aversion* respectively. (T 441, 443) Here he allows the possibility that that which causes a passion, e.g., a freshly-baked apple pie, can be the object of the passion as well.

Nevertheless, in spite of Hume's care in distinguishing the cause and intentional object of a passion from the passion itself, it is not plausible to argue that passions cannot be irrational on the ground that in themselves they do not represent or judge anything. For this distinction between the passion and its intentional object is suspect. It is not easy to imagine how we might identify a particular passion independently of its intentional object. Surely we

²² Also see Annette Baier, "Hume's Analysis of Pride", *The Journal of Philosophy* LXXV, 1 (January 1978), 27-40.

need the death of the close friend, the threat of violence, or the sight of the disgorge calf hanging in the butcher's window in order to distinguish respectively grief, fear, or aversion. The knotting of the stomach, increased heart rate, and tightness in the temples alone do not suffice to distinguish between them - nor, indeed, from particularly intense pleasurable experience of certain sorts. The intentional object of the passion is part of what identifies it *as* a particular passion.

Furthermore, it is difficult to imagine a case in which the intentional object of the passion is not a necessary part of the cause of the passion, as Hume rightly suggests. Even neural stimulation would not disconfirm this hypothesis. But these two considerations taken together suggest that a passion *always* includes, or at least is accompanied by, some "representative quality", i.e., that object which is intentionally represented. So either passions are intrinsically representational, or else they *are*, on the contrary, always "accompany'd with some judgement or opinion" concerning "the existence of objects". (T 416)

This conclusion is borne out by the examples Hume cites in passage (A), all of which make reference to intentional objects. Surely it is at least the ideas of the destruction of the whole world and of the scratching of my finger that causes me to prefer the one to the other; surely it is at least the idea of the unknown Indian that causes me to desire to prevent his uneasiness more than my total ruin. Indeed, it is hard to imagine giving a complete description of any particular passion without referring to its intentionally represented object. But this means that passions *can*, then, be unreasonable, or contrary to reason after all, for they always involve at least a "supposition of the existence of the object", (T 416) about which one may be mistaken.

Of course a subject need not suppose the object of a passion to have *material, empirical* existence. Hume would scarcely maintain that any such object must be supposed already to exist in this strong sense. For this would imply that we could only aspire to bring into material existence that which already had it; hence that the desire to achieve or realize our ends played no part in motivating us to action. There is no reason to think Hume held this view. Nor is this supposition required by Hume's notion of intentional existence:

To reflect on anything simply, and to reflect on it as existent, are nothing different from each other. That idea, when conjoined with the idea of my object, makes no addition to it. Whatever we conceive, we conceive to be existent. (T 66-67)

When we conceive of some object or state of affairs we deplore, or wish to attain through action, we suppose it to exist as intentional object of our

grief or desire respectively. We add nothing to this conception by ascertaining whether it exists in a stronger, material sense as well.

But this supposition is a judgment made by our reason, and can be true or false, for it is possible to deplore or desire something that cannot exist even in the weak sense, i.e., a self-contradictory object. This is the only kind of object which can exist neither as a conceived possible empirical reality to be attained through some course of action, nor as that actual state of affairs which caused the subject to conceive it in the first place. But we might nevertheless mistakenly suppose it could. We might fail to recognize the self-contradictory nature of the object (for example, as when the desired end is to be fashionably thin, *and* consume Black Forest Tortes on demand). Thus the suggestion is that we understand Hume's criterion of irrationality as involving a mistaken supposition about the *intentional* existence of the object and not its *material* existence: We are irrational, in this sense, if we conceive a state of affairs which, because it is internally inconsistent, cannot even be a genuine object of a passion.

This implies that Hume's claims in passage (A) are correct, but not for the reasons he gives. Hume's overall strategy has been to advance a variant on Hutcheson's claim: From the purported non-irrationality of the preferred ends cited in passage (A), we are to conclude the similar imperviousness to rational criteria of our motives. And he has partially succeeded in this enterprise. The choices and preferences he cites are not indeed irrational, but not because they "contain no representative quality" and hence cannot be contrary to reason. They are not irrational because they do not violate the only requirement on ends which Hume by implication proffers: internal logical consistency. But this is in truth no constraint on the *range* of possible objects of desire at all. It requires that any such intentional object *be* a possible object of desire, i.e., that it not be self-contradictory; and not that it conform to any requirements such objects themselves must satisfy.

Thus passage (A) provides strong evidence for the negative utility-maximization thesis. For here Hume maintains explicitly the immunity to rational criticism of ends one might intuitively regard as irrational. And he implicitly maintains the conformity of any such end to the requirement that they be possible ends at all. But clearly, this is to require merely that an end be an end. It is not to require that it be rational. Hence, it seems, the corresponding passion is immune to rational criticism as well.

But now we must ask whether Hume's, as well as Hutcheson's, overall argument proves what these writers suppose it proves. Does it in fact follow from the fact that reason imposes no constraints on possible ends that it imposes no constraints on their corresponding passions? The connection between rational ends and rational motivation is surely not as intimate as Hume and Hutcheson appear to think. For even if we accept the necessary

conjunction of a passion with its intentional object, this commits us to the necessary conjunction neither of the passion with its sufficient cause, nor of the passion with any particular end that passion may cause us to desire.

Many things can cause us to feel, say, joy. Remembering something achieved or overcome may cause us to feel joyful. The thing achieved or overcome is then the intentional object of the passion, and also originally causes it. But it can also be the intentional object of the passion without being a sufficient cause of it, as would be the case if it were not the memory of our previous achievements, but rather someone's present praise of them, which causes us to feel joy in those past achievements. Similarly, the feeling of joy in our past achievements may extend into joyful anticipation of future ones. Here the object of the feeling of joy would be a desired end, i.e., anticipated future achievements, while its cause would be the remembered past ones. Thus an identifiable passion - joy in something - is logically independent of both its cause and the end it causes us to desire. Either can function as the intentional object of the passion. Although we require some such intentional object in order to be able to identify the passion, this object need be strictly identifiable with neither its cause nor its desired end. However, either its cause or its desired end may motivate an agent to action. Joy or pride in our past achievements may move us to take on some new challenge, independently of our enthusiasm for that new project in itself. Or, it may be just and only our enthusiasm for that new project which moves us to action, independently of the feelings of anxiety, fear, uncertainty, or self-doubt it may simultaneously cause us to have. Since a passion can take either its cause or its ends as its intentional object, the immunity to reason of its end does not necessarily imply the immunity to reason of that passion itself.

Now suppose it true, as has already been argued, that a passion cannot be unreasonable or irrational, even if it must contain an intentional object. Does this imply that its ends also cannot be unreasonable or irrational? At first glance it would appear that this does *not* follow. For if the passion can be distinguished from its desired end (as, for example, in the case where the passion's intentional object is its cause but its cause is not its end: My joyful memory of past achievements causes me to take on a new challenge, even though I do not desire that challenge in its own right), then to show that a passion cannot be irrational proves nothing about its end. Apparently, the passion could be immune to rational criticism although its end were not.

But within Hume's framework, this appearance is misleading. For although an end can be detached from *some* passions, such as joy, enthusiasm, grief, or reluctance, it cannot, for flume, be detached from desire or aversion *for that end*. This is the only basis on which Hume permits the object in

question to count as an end for us at all (T 414); and desire and aversion themselves are direct passions.

Many states of affairs may cause us to desire something. Among those *not* identical with the object of the desire are envy, malice, generosity, etc. But in addition to these causes, we must also count as necessary, if not sufficient, the thought of the object itself, considered as a source of pleasure or pain. We cannot exercise that passion Hume calls "desire" without simultaneously experiencing the thought of that object our desire is a desire for. So the object of desire, or end, is a necessary concomitant of at least two of the passions: desire and aversion.

Moreover, desire or aversion must be necessary concomitants of all the other passions, for Hume, in so far as these motivate the agent to seek an object of pleasure or avoid an object of pain (T 414, 417). We could not blindly take on the new project, *merely* out of joy in our past achievements. For this alone would not be sufficient to determine our choice of that one end over many others. Out of joy in our past achievements alone we might as easily choose to rest on our laurels as to press on to something new. Although this joy might well override any fondness or enthusiasm we might feel for the end in its own right, there must be at least enough interest to determine our choice of *that* end rather than some other; and Hume supplies no alternative to desire, e.g., an account of intention as causally efficacious, that would satisfy this desideratum.²³

Hence for Hume the very fact that we adopt some particular end indicates the presence of a desire for that end. Conversely, the presence of desire is sufficient to indicate an end or purpose since desire is one of those passions which must take an intentional object. Hence the presence of desire can be construed tautologically as a necessary ingredient in any combination of passions which can motivate us to action.²⁴ So if the passions are the sole sources of behavioral motivation, and if the passions cannot be contrary to reason, then the ends they lead us to adopt cannot be irrational either. The absence of rational constraints on desire is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for the absence of rational constraints on ends. Thus we must

²³ As, for example, Kant arguably does.

²⁴ Thus we can regard Hume's pronouncements on the respective roles of reason and desire in motivation as the first explicit statement of what we now refer to as the "belief-desire" theory of motivation. For contemporary formulations, see Richard Brandt and Jaegwon Kim, "Wants as Explanations of Action", in N.S. Care and Charles Landesman, *Readings in the Theory of Action* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), 199-213; also Donald Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes", in Care and Landesman.

conclude that Hume not only accepts the traditional view of reason, but actively embraces both the positive and the negative utility-maximization theses - for more reasons even than he himself explicitly gives.

IV

I now want to consider an argument that may incline scholars to an opposite conclusion, i.e., that in spite of the evidence to the contrary already assembled, Hume does in fact provide a positive account of what amounts to rational constraints on ends.²⁵ In Book I, Part IV, Section 4 of the *Treatise*, Hume distinguishes between those principles,

which are permanent, irresistible, and universal; such as the customary transition from causes to effects, and from effects to causes: And the principles, which are changeable, weak, and irregular... (T 225)

such as the superstitious inclination to impute a faculty or occult quality to phenomena we cannot otherwise explain. (T 224) He argues that the former are received by philosophy for the simple reason that human life would be impossible without them: "[They] are the foundation of all our thoughts and actions, so that upon their removal human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin". (T 225) Of course Hume does not claim that such principles - let us call them *PIU principles* - are rational, nor that they are logically or conceptually necessary. They are necessary merely for the survival of human nature, of our capacities for thought and action. But philosophy is the discipline of rational thought *par excellence*. So it might be argued, at least, that the reception of the PIU principles by philosophy is strong *evidence* of their rationality.

Later, in discussing the problem of freedom of the will in Book II, Hume identifies those natural principles which govern human behavior as being of a piece with PIU principles. He argues, for example, that

Whether we consider mankind according to the differences of sexes, ages, governments, conditions, or methods of education; the same uniformity and regular operation of natural principles are discernible.

²⁵ The argument as I present it is a variant on that offered by David Miller, 37-39 (*Op. Cit.*, Note 7), although Miller does not claim rational, but rather merely reflective and analytical status for the PIU principles. I am grateful to Louis Loeb for originally calling my attention to the passages on the PIU principles, and for discussion of them, although the use I make of them here is my own. Loeb develops this notion in a different direction in "Cartesian Epistemology Without Divine Validation of the Cognitive Faculties" (unpublished paper, 1985).

Like causes produce like effects; in the same manner as in the mutual action of the elements as powers of nature. (T 401)

Hume then goes on to assert that just as the cohesiveness of matter arises from necessary principles, similarly, human society is founded on principles which are just as necessary. Indeed, we can be even more certain of such necessary natural principles governing human social phenomena than we can in the case of natural phenomena, for we are more successful in explaining the former than the latter:

[T]he different stations of life influence the whole fabric, external and internal; and these different stations arise necessarily, because uniformly, for the necessary and uniform principles of human nature... There is a general course of nature in human actions, as well as in the operations of the sun and the climate. There are also character peculiar to different nations and particular persons, as well as common to mankind. The knowledge of these characters is founded on the observation of an uniformity in the actions, that flow from them; and this uniformity forms the very essence of necessity. (T 402-3)

What are the certain principles of human behavior that Hume has in mind? These can be divided into two categories: (1) those principles describing the influence of sensory limitations and the violent passions on human behavior, which I shall refer to as *principles of variability*; and (2) those describing the modifying influence of the calm passions, which I shall call *principles of stability*.²⁶ A violent passion is, as we saw, a "violent and sensible emotion of mind, when any good or evil is presented", (T 437) whereas calm passions are "affections of the very same kind... but such as operate more calmly... (T 437)

tho' they be real passions, produce little emotion in the mind, are more known by their effects than by the immediate feeling or sensation. These desires are of two kinds; either certain instincts originally implanted in our natures, such as benevolence and resentment, the love of life, and kindness to children, or the general appetite to good and aversion to evil, consider'd merely as such. (T 417)

Whether a passion is calm or violent depends on the individual's temper, the circumstances and situation of the object, the intensity of other

²⁶ By contrast, Miller (*Ibid.*) takes Hume's PIU principles to refer solely to general, higher-order rules by which our first-order beliefs and inferences can be corrected (see T 146-50, and Book I, Part III, Section 15, "Rules by which to judge of causes and effects"). This is where my understanding of the PIU principles diverges from Miller's: Miller thinks Hume means to refer only to principles governing our judgments, whereas I contend that he means to refer to principles governing our behavior more generally.

simultaneous passions, its degree of habituation, and the extent to which it excites the imagination. (T 438)

Hume's account of the relationship between (1) and (2) is basically as follows. Possible objects of desire undergo modification and distortion in perceived degrees of desirability, according as the passions which adopt them vary in violence or intensity (or "vivacity"), and as other contingent conditions vary. The variability in the violence of the passions depends upon just the contingent circumstances that generate them. However, the distortive effect of these circumstances is partially corrected by the operations of the calm passions, which are often mistaken for reason. Let us now examine this account more closely. I shall treat Hume's principles of variability in this section, leaving his principles of stability for Section V. Finally, in Section VI, I shall again recur to and dispose of the general argument that claims that Hume does, in effect, impose rational constraints on ends.

In the *Treatise*, Hume enumerates the principles falling into the first category in greater detail: (a) We are more inclined to pursue a good when it is near to us than when it is remote, because the nearer it is the more violent the passion it causes, and we are more easily impelled to action by violent than by calm passions. (T 319; also 427-34) (b) Similarly, we are more strongly impelled to pursue or avoid an object about which we experience conflicting passions than we would be otherwise, for these increase the intensity of the predominating passion we feel toward it. (T 421) (c) Uncertainty in the apprehension or prospects of realizing the object, on the other hand, tend to increase our enthusiasm, for it much as security tends to replace enthusiasm with boredom. (T 421-22) (d) Custom and repetition in the performance of certain actions can transform the accompanying violent passion into a calm one. For they give rise to a facility in performing the action. On the one hand, this facility is an additional source of pleasure (up to a certain point) that motivates us to repeat the action. On the other hand, repetition transforms the action into a settled habit of conduct we perform without feeling intensely motivated to do so (T 422-4; cf. 426) (e) Finally, our imagination increases our pleasurable anticipation of achieving some object, insofar as our prior experience of it enhances our conception of it, as does our memory of it. (T 424-6) These are the most prominent among Hume's principles of variability.

In a significant passage in the *Enquiry*, to which we will recur, Hume summarizes these circumstances when he maintains that

when some of these objects approach nearer to us, or acquire the advantages of favorable lights and positions, which catch the heart or imagination; our general resolutions are frequently confounded, a small enjoyment preferred, and lasting shame and sorrow entailed upon us. (E 239; cf. T 536)

Is it only objects of desire that we must appraise cautiously in order to correct our distorted or prejudiced perceptions of them? Are objects of desire the only subjects of principles of variability? Hume has already answered this question in the negative. It is not merely the violence of our passions that color our perceptions, but our sensory limitations as well:

[T]he senses alone are not implicitly to be depended on;... we must correct their evidence by reason, and by considerations, derived from the nature of the medium, the distance of the object, and the disposition of the organ, in order to render them within their sphere, the proper criteria of truth and falsehood. (E 151)

Thus *all* objects of perception, including objects of desire, are subject to the distortions arising from the limitations of individual circumstances: our spatiotemporal relation to the object, our personal constitution, the psychological background against which we apprehend the object, and the intensity of the sentiments aroused by it.

Hume makes equally clear that it is not only perceived objects which are susceptible to this distortion, but perceived subjects as well. In the *Enquiry*, Hume argues eloquently that all human beings have instincts of sympathy and benevolence, even if these vary enormously among individuals and circumstances. Two factors determining the intensity or violence of our sentiment of sympathy or approval for someone's moral behavior are (1) the extent to which the person's actions affect us personally; (2) the person's spatiotemporal proximity to us. Hence our sentiments are more deeply aroused by a statesman serving our own country, now, than by one serving another country or one whose actions occurred in the distant past. (E 227) Hume explicitly maintains that we must correct the inequality of our responses to the two cases in the same way, and for just the same reasons, as we must when making perceptual judgments or choosing among desired objects:

[W]here the good,... [is] less connected with us, [it] seems more obscure, and affects us with a less lively sympathy. We may own the merit to be equally great, through our sentiments are not raised to an equal height, in both cases. The judgment here corrects the inequalities of our internal emotions and perceptions; in like manner, as it preserves us from error, in the several variations of images, presented to our external senses... And, indeed, without such a correction of appearances, both in internal and external sentiment, men could never think or talk steadily on any subject; while their fluctuating situations produce a continual variation on objects, and throw them into such different and contrary lights and positions. (E 227-8)

This argument is derived, in essence, from a similar one Hume makes in the *Treatise*. There Hume is concerned to refute the objection that since our moral sentiments vary while our moral appraisals do not, these appraisals are not based on our moral feelings but rather on reason. Hume's response is that our moral judgments themselves are based on "a moral taste, and from certain sentiments of pleasure or disgust, which arise upon the contemplation and view of particular qualities or characters". (T 581) Hume's point here is an important one: It is that judgments, thought to issue from reason conceived as distinct from the passions, are not in fact independent of those passions or sentiments, but rather are generated by them. Thus the same feelings - pleasure or aversion - arise in response to perceiving moral qualities as they do in response to other sorts of possible objects of desire. Hume concedes, as before, that these sentiments

must vary according to the distance or contiguity of the objects... our situation, with regard both to persons and things, is in continual fluctuation... Besides, every particular man has a peculiar position with regard to others; and 'tis impossible we cou'd ever converse together on any reasonable terms, were each of us to consider characters and persons, only as they appear from his particular point of view. (T 581)

So moral judgments about persons as well as nonmoral ones about objects of desire and perception are susceptible to distortion, so far as they are colored by our own variable circumstances. Each of these types of objects contribute to the subject matter of Hume's principles of variability, for each is a type of object with respect to which our judgment must be distorted by the very subjectivity of our situation itself. We will call the perception conditioned by this situation the *subjective perspective*.

I suggested that the calm passions are claimed by Hume to provide a partial corrective to the subjective perspective, and that their workings constitute the subject matter of what I termed *principles of stability*. In the following section, I shall elaborate this suggestion in detail.

V

Hume immediately continues the above discussion by arguing that we correct these variations in our sentiments and perceptions by fixing on what he describes as some *steady* and *general* point of view; and always, in our thoughts, place ourselves in them, whatever may be our present situation". (T 581-2) He contrasts this steady and general point of view with the actual variations in viewpoint that occur because of the changes in our particular circumstances, arguing that our use of language disregards such fluctuations, and expresses "our liking or dislike, in the same manner, as if we remained in

one point of view". (T 582) However, he contends, we do not thereby fully succeed in correcting the waywardness and partiality of our feelings through behavior that is consistent with this stable and general view:

[R]eason requires such an impartial conduct, but... 'tis seldom we can bring ourselves to it, and... our passions do not readily follow the determination of our judgement. This language will be easily understood, if we consider what we formerly said concerning that *reason*, which is able to oppose our passion; and which we have found to be nothing but a general calm determination of the passions, founded on some distant view or reflexion. (T 583)

The last sentence summarizes Hume's earlier argument of Book II, Part III, that reason, far from opposing and controlling the passions in the service of morally obligatory behavior, is in fact of a piece with them, and that we mistake certain passions for the motivating influence of reason only because they operate tranquilly rather than violently on us. (T 417, 437)

But for our present purposes, the passage is significant for the additional light it sheds on the "steady and general view" that corrects the contingencies of our individual perspectives. For here Hume further characterizes this view as impartial, reflective, distant, often mistaken for the operations of reason, and the basis for a "general calm determination of passions". Thus the basic picture is that of a perspective that corrects for individual contingencies, changes, and partiality of vision by being stable where individual perception is fluctuating; general where individual perception is confined to the particular perspective dictated by its own relation to the object; impartial or judicious where individual perception is biased in its view by its location relative to the object; and reflective where individual perception is impulsive and unselfconscious in its appraisal of the object. Finally, this perspective provides the foundation for the tranquil and undisturbed workings of the passions, which are consequently mistaken for the operations of reason. Let us call this the *objective perspective*.

The basic argument in support of the objective perspective would appear to be as follows:

(P.1) Nearness and remoteness to the object of appraisal is a function of psychological as well as spatial or temporal proximity to the individual;

(P.2) The violence and intensity of our passions decrease with the object's psychological distance from the self, much as they do with its spatial or temporal distance from the physical location of the individual;

(C) The greater the spatiotemporal or psychological distance of the object from the individual, the more nearly we approach the objective perspective.

That Hume maintains (P.1) follows from the variety of objects he subjects to his principles of variability, of which we already spoken. (P.2) follows from

his many and detailed discussions of the disturbing and distinctive effects of the object's spatiotemporal and psychological proximity to the individual, which we have already reviewed (e.g., T 489, E 234). (C) follows from the premises plus the implicit assumption that the objective perspective is to distance as the subjective perspective is to proximity. We find support for this assumption in Hume's own repeated use of the phrase "distant view" to characterize this perspective (e.g., T 583, E 239). We can then further describe the objective perspective as one that involves psychological and emotional distance from just those objects that are psychologically and spatiotemporally - therefore emotionally - closest to us: considerations of self-interest, immediate sources of pleasure, proximate objects of gratification, etc. To distance ourselves from these objects is precisely to view them as though from that psychological or spatiotemporal distance at which they would not affect the passions as violently and distort our judgment as completely as they otherwise do.

This interpretation is further confirmed by the following important passage from the *Enquiry*, which I quote in full:

All men, it is allowed, are equally desirous of happiness; but few are successful in the pursuit; one considerable cause is the want of strength of mind, which might enable them to resist the temptation of present ease or pleasure, and carry them forward in the search of more distant profit and enjoyment. Our affections, on a general prospect of their objects, form certain rules of conduct, and certain measures of preference of one above another: and these decisions, though really the result of our calm passions and propensities (for what else can pronounce any object eligible or the contrary?) are yet said, by a natural abuse of terms, to be the determinations of pure reason and reflection. But when some of these objects approach nearer to us, or acquire the advantage of favorable lights and positions, which catch the heart and imagination; our general resolutions are frequently confounded, a small enjoyment preferred, and lasting shame and sorrow entailed upon us. And however poets may employ their wit and eloquence, in celebrating present pleasure, and rejecting all distant views to fame, health, or fortune; it is obvious that this practice is the source of all dissoluteness and disorder, repentance and misery. (E 239)

Call this passage (B). Here Hume makes a number of important points. First, he amplifies further his conception of the objective perspective. For here we see that this perspective requires us not merely to distance ourselves emotionally from our most proximate interests, objects of desires, and appraisals, but explicitly to assume the vantage point of a psychologically or

spatiotemporally remote interest, object of desire, or appraisal in order to achieve this.

These two are patently distinct. I can detach myself from my closest concerns by emotionally withdrawing from them. By repressing, diminishing, or subduing the intensity of my desire for a Black Forest Torte, I achieve a certain detachment from this desire. It ceases to upset my composure, hence permits me to reflect on it more tranquilly, or consider with greater liberality features of it which my emotional investment in it might otherwise obscure or bypass altogether. A person who is not temperamentally susceptible to tempestuous feelings is able to view most of her interests and desires with greater intellectual clarity and equanimity, for it allows her to analyze and explain such things without the unbalancing impediment of emotional involvement.

But emotional detachment is not sufficient for achieving the objective perspective. For it does not follow from my lack of emotional upheaval over my most proximate objects of desire or appraisal that I therefore do not, because of their proximity, mistakenly ascribe to them primary value. That is, it does not immediately follow from the assumption that the calm passions are governing one's behavior that one thereby appraises objects of desire objectively, or judiciously. It is hardly unusual to encounter a person who is both calm and biased; whose emotional tranquility is matched only by a staunch conviction in the primacy of her personal interests above general ones. Hence it is not enough to distance oneself merely from the distorting effects of the violent passions, for this degree of detachment is nevertheless consistent with maintaining the subjective perspective. Unbiased and judicious judgment requires, in addition, that *one view one's individual perspective itself* from a distance. And this requires not just emotional detachment, but intellectual and psychological distance from one's concerns as well. Hume's specifications that one assume the vantage point of *distant* concerns makes this requirement explicit.

However, concerns can be distant in two ways. They can be distant from the constellation of interests, desires, beliefs, and judgments that constitute my present self, but nevertheless proximate to the constellation that I now know will comprise my future self, or my overall self considered through each moment of time. This would be the stance of *enlightened self-interest*. Alternatively, concerns can be distant from my self *simpliciter*, i.e., such as will never constitute part of myself from any temporal perspective, hence can never be subsumed under the rubric of self-interest. This would be the stance of *strict impartiality*.

Some have interpreted Hume's sketchy remarks about the objective perspective, both in the *Treatise* and in the *Enquiry*, as referring to the stance of strict impartiality.²⁷ And indeed Hume's claim in the *Treatise* that

'Tis seldom men heartily love *what lies at a distance from them, and what no way redounds to their particular benefit*; as 'tis no less rare to meet with persons, who can pardon another any opposition he makes to their interest, however justifiable that interest may be by the general rules of morality. Here we are contented with saying, that reason requires such an *impartial conduct* but that 'tis seldom we can bring ourselves to it: and that our passions do not readily follow the determinations of our judgment. (T 583; emphasis added)

supports this interpretation. On this reading, the objective perspective is mistakenly thought to be equivalent to the perspective of reason, which dictates objectively and impartially without regard for the claims of self-interest. The difficulty is that it is not immediately clear how this perspective is to be achieved by any limited sentient individual, nor how it is even connected with the subjective perspective with which every individual is familiar.

Passage (B) from the *Enquiry* indicates that it is rather the stance of enlightened self-interest that Hume has in mind. There Hume is fulminating against the evils and misery of pure time preference, i.e., of preferring some satisfaction over another purely because of its greater temporal proximity to the agent. He is recommending that we detach ourselves from the satisfactions of the immediate present, and choose objects or courses of action with a view to our future happiness, or our happiness considered as a whole, over the entire course of our lives. We are to think of our overall, genuine rather than our immediate self-interest. But it is a far cry from this distance from some one time-slice of my life to the greater, quite dizzying distance from all time-slices of all lives that is necessary for judging any one such time-slice from the stance of strict impartiality.²⁸ For in the *Treatise*, Hume takes

²⁷ For example, Stephen Darwall (*Impartial Reason* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), 60) takes Hume to be committed to this brand of distance when he maintains in the *Treatise* that "'Tis only when a character is considered in *general without reference to our particular interest*, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil". (T 472; emphasis added) Also see Marcia Baron, "Hume's Calm Passions" (MA. Thesis, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1978).

²⁸ For an attempt to characterize the latter, see Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970). A more refined account that raises correspondingly more issues is to be found in his "Subjective and Objective", in *Mortal*

impartial judgement to be the opposite of self-interested judgment of any kind. Strictly impartial judgement then requires a distant view that is nevertheless not the view of any one *self* at all, neither immediate nor future, nor unified as a whole over time. It is difficult to say in what such a view might consist.

There is thus good reason why Hume may have opted, upon mature reflection, for the stance of enlightened self-interest described in the *Enquiry*. To be sure, it rules out strict impartiality by presupposing that our distant view is nevertheless always the view of one's self, hence that its appraisals of objects are conditioned accordingly. But it simultaneously makes room for a more limited, intermediate distance that at the same time satisfies the requirement of the objective perspective, i.e., that we transcend the distortions contingent on considerations of immediate self-interest to achieve judiciousness in our judgments. We find an account of this intermediate distance, and how it is achieved, in Hume's claim that

Every man's interest is peculiar to himself, and the aversions and desires, which result from it, cannot be supposed to affect others in a like degree. General language, therefore, being formed for general use, must be moulded on some more general views, and must affix the epithets of praise or blame, in conformity to sentiments, which arise from the general interest of the community... Sympathy, we shall allow, is much fainter than our concern for ourselves, and sympathy with persons remote from us much fainter than that with persons near and contiguous; but for this very reason it is necessary for us, in our calm judgments and discourse concerning the characters of men, to neglect these differences, and render our sentiments more public and social. Besides, that we ourselves often change our situation in this particular, we every day meet with persons who are in a situation different from us, and who could never converse with us were we to remain constantly in that position and point of view, which is peculiar to ourselves. The intercourse of sentiments, therefore, in society and conversation, makes us form some general unalterable standard, by which we may approve or disapprove of character and manners. (E 228-9)

This passage enumerates three steps which permit us to move from the subjective to the objective perspective: (1) We discount the characteristics that distinguish between ourselves and others, and between persons near to us and those remote from us; (2) We note consciously the "intercourse of sentiments" consequent on our regularly and often changing our own

Questions (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 196-213. Many of these are resolved in his recent *The View From Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

positions and exchanging it for those of others in society with whom we must communicate; (3) We form a more generalized conception of the features common to both of our situations.

(1) enables us to overcome the limitations of our individual vantage points. (1) by itself, however, would not suffice for the objective perspective, for it would, as already pointed out, leave us with no point of view at all from which to regard them. (2) then stipulates that alternate point of view: that of the other individuals collectively, with whom we interact. By putting ourselves in these other situations, we gradually develop from a subjective, enclosed view of our concerns to a more general one that encompasses the common features of all the perspectives of those with whom we have exchanged positions and sentiments. This is step (3), the "general, unalterable standard" by which we then make normative judgments and which arise from the general interests of the community. Thus the "general interests" are those which remain invariant across exchange of positions and sentiments among individuals. Clearly these must include *certain* of the self-interests of any one of these individuals chosen at random.

Further evidence for this reading of the objective perspective as the stance of enlightened self-interest can be culled from Hume's discussion of the "common interest" in his treatment of justice and property in the *Treatise*. In discussing the origin of the convention to respect private property, he says of it:

It is only a general sense of common interest; which sense all the members of the society express to one another... I observe, that it will be for my interest to leave another in the possession of his goods, *provided* he will act in the same manner with regard to me. He is sensible of a like interest in the regulation of his conduct. When this common sense of interest is mutually express'd, and is known to both, it produces a suitable resolution and behavior... the sense of interest has become common to all our fellows, and gives us a confidence of the future regularity of their conduct... In like manner do gold and silver become the common measures of exchange, etc. (T 490)

This description of how the conventions of private property, language, and money are established satisfies the three-step sequence for moving from the subjective to the objective perspective of the common or general interest, and thereby supports Hume's remarks in the *Enquiry* about the relation of language to the general interests of the community: I begin by observing the differences between my own position (as possessor of some good) and that of the other (as potential threat to my possession). I then discount those differences (step (1)). Next, I exchange our respective positions: She, as possessor of goods, is as much threatened by my potential aggression as I was

by hers (step (2)). In step (3), we recognize our common features as possessors of goods with an interest in protecting them, and it is the recognition of this common interest that then establishes the convention of conduct, i.e., respect for private property, which allows each of us to satisfy it. The same reasoning can be applied to the conventions of language or money. The general point is clear: Establishing the social conventions that make human society of any kind whatsoever possible requires moving from a narrow, subjective view of our own interests that distorts our appraisal of different states of affairs to a more objective perspective that regards those interests from the viewpoint of the interests shared by the community as a whole. (E 119, fn.) This objective perspective enables one to appraise some state of affairs, but not with strict impartiality; for I have suggested that this is in any case metaphysically impossible. Rather, it enables us to appraise it judiciously, in the sense that we can view the matter from the vantage point of the community's interests. And it is only this perspective which allows us to establish the conventions of behavior on which human society can be erected.

These remarks illuminate the second important point Hume makes in passage (B), i.e., that the subjective perspective is the "source of all dissoluteness and disorder, repentance and misery". The greater the uncorrected proximity of the objects of desire, the more we are victimized by the violent passions they produce, and the more unconsidered and disorderly are our actions in their pursuit. The subjective perspective is, then, the source of moral and personal chaos that undermines social order and the conventions that maintain it. It is a threat to the general interest that the objective perspective so clearly recognizes:

'Tis certain, that self-love, when it acts at its liberty... is the source of all injustice and violence; nor can a man ever correct those vices, without correcting and restraining the natural movements of that appetite. (T 480)

Now we are in a better position to see how the calm passions provide a partial corrective to the subjective perspective. The social conventions that arise out of that recognition of the common or general interest which characterizes the objective perspective are precisely those actions motivated by calm passions; Hume is quite explicit about this, not only in passage (B), but also in the *Treatise*, where he describes a calm passion as one which "has become a settled principle of action" to which "repeated custom and its own force have made everything yield". (T 419)²⁹ The calm passions are those that motivate us to perform those habitual and customary actions, or conventions, in which most of social life consists. These are the "certain rules of conduct"

²⁹ This is consistent with interpreting the *prevalence* of the calm over the violent passions as a natural virtue (T 418).

formed by our affections on "a general prospect of their objects", and often mistakenly identified as the workings of reason. Passions originally became calm through repetition of the actions they motivate. Thus they are mistaken for the operations of reason, not only because they fail to disturb us emotionally, but because they result in *general rules* of conduct under which repeated instances are subsumed. But it is in fact not reason which enjoins us to this customary conduct. Rather, it is the recognition of genuine self-interest, i.e., of the ends we most desire to achieve. We repeatedly perform those actions because we recognize them as solutions to a coordination problem arrived at by conventions, i.e., how to behave so that common interests are maximized and individual interests are promoted. This is a problem because acting solely in the pursuit of immediate individual interest is to act from the subjective perspective, hence to be victimized by distorted and biased appraisals of where our genuine best interests actually lie. This bias is corrected by that recognition of the common interest that occurs as we move through the three-step sequence into the objective perspective. This recognition in turn enables us to formulate and act upon those rules of conduct that, "when [thus] coordinated by reflection and seconded by resolution, are able to control [the violent passions] in their most furious movements", (T 437-8) hence preserve the social order.

Now those who contend that Hume's introduction of what I have called the objective perspective commits him to ascribing a larger role to reason in motivating action than his explicit arguments suggest, may contend that this "steady, distant, reflective view" on which the workings of the calm passions are founded is not itself a passion but rather a function of the understanding, or reason. I see no reason to accept this contention. The analysis given in these pages suggests that the objective perspective is nothing more than a perception of others' interests, coupled with an absence of those emotional obstacles that usually prevent our recognizing the extent to which those interests coincide with our own. This absence of emotional obstacles does not imply the presence of intellectual cognition, but rather the presence of tranquil passions lulled into quiescence by repetition and habit. And we win recognition of our common interests not through rational reflection, but rather through having had many and varied social interactions with others with whom we do, in fact, have much in common.

Thus the subject matter of what I have termed Hume's principles of stability are those actual rules of conduct in which the calm passions find expression, and which act as an antidote to the disruptive and distorting effects of the violent passions that normally characterize the subjective perspective. These principles are directly antithetical to the principles of variability in that the latter enumerate the psychological laws by which social

order is disrupted through the stimulation of the violent passions, while the former, if spelled out, enumerate the social rules by which it can be maintained.

This completes our discussion of Hume's principles of stability. In closing, it remains only to be reemphasized that for Hume, both principles of variability and principles of stability are uniform and necessary laws of human nature, for they are subject in exactly the same way to the causal determinants that condition any natural event. They are explicitly stated by Hume to be of a piece with - indeed, instances of - the operations of causal law. Now we shall fit this account into the argument that claims Hume to have in effect imposed rational constraints on ends.

VI

According to the argument introduced in Section IV, that these principles are of a piece with causal law implies that they, too, are PIU principles that must be received by philosophy. Now Hume may not explicitly identify these principles as rational. In fact, we have seen that he repeatedly and explicitly *denies* rational status to the principles of stability. But perhaps these passages are to be collectively discounted, if it can be shown that Hume's principles governing the passions in fact satisfy all the conditions that rational principles must satisfy. For recall Hume's characterization of reason. He distinguished it into demonstrative and probabilistic. And his arguments regarding the status of causal connection, together with his taxonomical division of the faculties of reason, implied that the concern of probabilistic reasoning is causal connection. We now discover that the two kinds of principles describing the operations of the passions are a species of causal law. The inference is evident: The principles governing the passions conform to probabilistic rationality. And to the extent that "our actions have a constant union with our motives, tempers, and circumstances", (T 401) the ends they determine will be equally settled, uniform, and regular. Indeed, this inference finds confirmation on page 281 of the *Treatise*, where Hume argues, first that the same objects - power, riches, beauty, personal merit - give rise to the same passions in all nations; and second, that new objects adapt themselves to an already existing passion by partaking of some general quality shared by its other objects, to which the mind is already disposed. Hence the rational principles describing the ways in which the passions typically operate provide an equally rational set of constraints on the ends or intentional objects those passions typically take. It seems that the PIU principles of the passions do provide a positive set of constraints on the range of ends it is rational for a human agent to adopt.

But this conclusion is mistaken. What is rational about the PIU principles of the passions, if anything, is the fact that they are, like other causal laws, necessary, uniform, and general *in their application*. Moreover, like other causal laws, they describe law-like and seemingly regular and predictable relations among given phenomena. It is the fact that they qualify as *genuine principles* which entitles us to think of them as rational. Similarly, for Hume, it is a certain *kind* of relation between abstract ideas that is rational, i.e., the inferentially correct and real one. In both cases, we are exercising our reason in so far as we investigate and determine the true - which is to say the uniform, universally valid, and "necessary" connections among given states of affairs.

One may want to argue that Hume's principles of stability are rational in a further sense as well: As effective social rules and conventions, they are rational means to the achievement of individual ends, in that they are the most efficient ways of achieving various states of affairs desired by individual, consistently with satisfying the common interest in social order. This argument can be illustrated by Hume's treatments of the origin of justice and private property discussed above (respectively, Sections II and V).

But in neither case can this be thought to imply that *these states of affairs* themselves are rational. That there is a logical and rational relation between the idea of being a bachelor and the idea of being an unmarried man does not suggest that either idea as such is rational. That there is a causal and probabilistically rational relation between the color of litmus paper and the acid solution in which it is dipped suggests the rationality neither of the color of the litmus paper nor of the relevant solution. And that there is a similar type of relation between the intensity of one's craving for a Black Forest Torte and its actual proximity, or between one's desire to retain one's own possessions and one's respect for those of others, suggests the rationality neither of the craving nor of the Torte nor of private property. The general point is clear: That there is a rationally discernible relation between the passions and the ends they try to achieve does not imply the rationality of those ends any more than it does the rationality of the passions themselves. Hence Hume's principles of variability and stability do not delimit a range of identifiably rational ends. For here the demand is not for principles governing ends that are rational in virtue of the rational status of the *principles*. The demand is for principles governing ends that confer rational status on the *ends*. And the PIU principles of the violent and calm passions do not meet this demand.

This conclusion follows, indeed, from Hume's very characterization of the passions:

[W]hat 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. (T 437)

Hume's first point here is that *when* any object that is good, evil, or capable of causing in us a desire or aversion for it is presented to us, we *then* experience a "violent and sensible emotion of mind", or at least a more tranquil one that "cause[s] no disorder in the temper". His second point is that the range of objects capable of affecting us in this way is constrained only by our own capacity to so respond to it, i.e., by "the original formation of our faculties".

Two implications of Hume's claims follow immediately: First, the passions, both violent and calm, depend on the *prior* presentation of some object in order to be aroused. It is only if we are already conscious of the object as desirable or repellent that we are then incited to pursue or avoid it. Hence the passion follows rather than precedes adoption of the object as a positive or negative end. This summarizes and is underscored by Hume's earlier assertion that

'Tis from the prospects of pain or pleasure that the aversion or propensity arises toward any object: And... these emotions extend themselves to the causes and effects of that object, as they are pointed out to us by reason and experience. (T 414)

This passage occurs as part of Hume's argument that reason can provide no motivation to action. But the temporal priority of perceiving the object as a source of pleasure or pain over the excitation of a motivating passion for or against it, stands nevertheless. If we must perceive the object as desirable or undesirable before we are motivated to achieve or avoid it, then it must be a recognizable end for us, whether positive or negative, *before* we are moved to action on its behalf. But if the recognition of the object as a desirable end is presupposed by its exciting a violent or calm passion, it is not easy to see how the passions might originally determine any particular range of ends. Clearly, it would seem to be the other way around.

The second consequence of Hume's claim, and the conclusion of this discussion, is that the only constraint on the range of objects that can be possible ends or objects of desire for us is our own motivational capacity. We can adopt anything as an end that we can be moved to attain. This diminishes even further the plausibility of supposing that either the passions or the PIU principles that govern them might impose rational constraints on ends. For Hume, such constraints can consist only in our natural capacity for desiring. And the counterintuitive examples enumerated in the introduction to this discussion strongly suggest that to argue for the rationality of this capacity as a rational constraint on what we can desire is implausible at best. Hence when

Hume flamboyantly but categorically denies that reason can influence our final ends, we must take him at his word, with all the counterintuitive and methodologically exasperating implications that accompany it.