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*Passionate Objectivity*¹

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One of the attractive features of Hume's moral theory is that it recognizes the important role that human emotions play in morality. Hume's statement that "morality is...more properly felt than judg'd of" (Hume, 1978, 470) strikes a responsive chord. Yet it is this very feature of the theory that leads some philosophers to think that Hume's theory could not be right: for if morality were based on feeling, it could not be objective; and a morality that is not objective is no morality at all. The idea of an objective morality that is based on sentiments or feeling does seem almost paradoxical, and yet, I will argue, this is what we find, without paradox, in Hume's moral theory.

I am not the first to suggest that Hume's moral theory is one according to which morals are objective. In his book, *David Hume: Common-sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician*, David Fate Norton presents an interpretation of Hume's moral theory according to which "[m]oral qualities are not merely sentiments but, rather, the objective correlates of sentiments" (Norton, 1982, 111; see also Norton, 1975 and 1985). According to Norton, the moral sentiments are *signs* of virtues and vices; they are not themselves the virtues and vices. Virtues and vices are qualities to be found in virtuous and vicious people; they do not merely exist in the eyes of their beholders (Norton, 1982, 131; see also Norton, 1975, 528).

Norton's interpretation rests primarily on two claims. The first is the claim that, according to Hume, the relation between the moral qualities of the persons we judge (their virtues and vices) and the moral sentiments by means of which we judge them is a *causal* relation. Because of this, the moral sentiments can serve as signs of these qualities in the same way that impressions of sensation can serve as signs of qualities in the objects whose features we sense. The second claim is that, according to Hume, perceptions of the actions and characters of persons are not based on idiosyncratic features of the perceiver. In our moral judgments it is necessary that we appeal to common or shared sentiments, and the existence of such sentiments shows that there is something in the objects we

perceive that is responsible for our having these sentiments. The evidence we have that virtue and vice are real qualities of their possessors rather than merely subjective modifications of a particular perceiver's mind is that when we abstract from the peculiarities of the perceptual situation, everyone is affected in the same way by the same things. Norton does not make the point in exactly this way, but I think this is what is behind his claim that "[w]e can rely on common opinion in morality...because it is in fact common sentiment, and these common sentiments are reliable because each moral *sentiment* is a reliable, infallible sign of a fixed principle of mind (for only these give rise to moral sentiments), and our common sentiments are, simply, those infallible moral sentiments that we have in common" (Norton, 1982, 146).

This paper develops an account of the moral sentiments and their relation to judgments of virtue and vice which, if correct, provides additional support for Norton's interpretation of Hume's moral theory as one according to which virtues and vices are qualities of persons which are made known to us by means of the moral sentiments, but which are nonetheless different from these sentiments. My account differs from Norton's in that whereas he links the moral sentiments to the moral qualities of persons via the indirect passions (Norton, 1982, 115), I take the moral sentiments to be particular kinds of indirect passions. In this respect I agree with Pall Ardal. In *Passion and Value in Hume's Treatise* (Ardal, 1989),² Ardal argues that Hume's discussion of the indirect passions in Book II of the *Treatise* provides the key to understanding the nature of the moral sentiments, which are forms of the indirect passions. (See especially Chapter Six, "Moral Sentiments," 109-147. Ardal defends this interpretation against criticism in Ardal, 1977 and to some extent in the Introduction to Ardal, 1989.) The case that Ardal makes for his claim that the moral sentiments are species of indirect passions is strong. I attempt to add another layer of justification to his interpretation by providing an analysis of the moral sentiments that shows that they are produced in the same way that the indirect passions are produced—namely, by means of a double association of ideas and impressions. I argue that Hume's moral sentiments are indirect passions: that is, they are secondary impressions (impressions that are ultimately derived from impressions of sensation) which are produced by means of a double relation of ideas and impressions and, for this reason, they can properly be denominated forms of love and hatred (when someone other than the person who has them is their object) or pride and humility (when the person who experiences them is their object). Detailed analysis of the moral sentiments along these lines shows that the moral sentiments are causally related to qualities and characters of the persons of whom one approves or disapproves and that the very mechanisms by means of which the moral sentiments are caused shows that they are responses to objective qualities to be found in virtuous and vicious persons rather than subjective qualities existing only in the eyes or minds of their beholders.

On my interpretation, because the moral sentiments have the special features they do, they can serve as the original standard for judgments of morality in the same way that sense impressions serve as original standards for judgments of sizes, shapes, colors, etc., but both sets of impressions (the moral sentiments and the impressions of the senses) can vary not only with variations in the objects that cause them but also with accidental variations in the circumstances in which they arise. The objectivity of moral judgments as well as that of judgments of sizes, shapes, and colors depends on our correcting for these variations so that only variations that are due to variations in the objects judged are taken into account. Hume's appeal to reason and general rules for the correction of impressions plays this important role in explaining the objectivity of moral judgments.

I. The Nature and Causes of the Moral Sentiments

Hume does not give an explicit causal analysis of the moral sentiments in Book III of the *Treatise*. The closest he comes to such an analysis is in a controversial passage where he says, "Pride and humility, love and hatred are excited, when there is any thing presented to us, that both bears a relation to the object of the passion, and produces a separate sensation related to the sensation of the passion. Now virtue and vice are attended with these circumstances" (Hume, 1978, 473). That is, virtue and vice—the qualities themselves, not the moral sentiments they give rise to—have the features that Hume had earlier shown to be causally responsible for the indirect passions of pride and humility, love and hatred. First, they bear a relation to the object of the passion. If the passion is directed towards oneself, as are pride and humility, then the virtue or vice that is presented must be related to oneself; if the passion is directed towards someone else, as are love and hatred, the virtue or vice must be related to that person. Secondly, the qualities produce a sensation separate from but related to the sensation of the passion. The virtue or vice, when presented to us, must produce a sensation of either pleasure (in the case of virtue) or pain (in the case of vice) that is distinct from the pleasing sensations of pride and love or the disagreeable sensations of humility and hatred.

This passage is sometimes taken as evidence that the moral sentiments are different than the indirect passions. Norton, for example, reads it that way (Norton, 1982, 115, n. 19). He takes Hume to be saying that the thing presented to us produces a separate sensation—namely, a moral sentiment—and that this sensation is related to, but distinct from, the sensation of one of the indirect passions. On my reading, the separate sensation that virtue and vice produce is not itself a moral sentiment, but part of the cause of the sentiment; the moral sentiments are themselves indirect passions. (Ardal also reads Hume this way. See Ardal, 1977, 409.) Because the interpretation of this passage is so controversial, I do not rely on it alone.

There are other passages that suggest that moral sentiments are indirect passions. For example, Hume says,

since every quality in ourselves or others, which gives pleasure, always causes pride or love; as every one, that produces uneasiness, excites humility or hatred: It follows, that these two particulars are to be consider'd as equivalent, with regard to our mental qualities, *virtue* and the power of producing love or pride, *vice* and the power of producing humility or hatred. In every case, therefore, we must judge of the one by the other; and may pronounce any *quality* of the mind virtuous, which causes love or pride; and any one vicious, which causes hatred or humility (Hume, 1978, 575).

Moreover, Hume says explicitly that the moral sentiments are “nothing but a fainter and more imperceptible love or hatred” (Hume, 1978, 614), (or of pride or humility in one’s own case). He also says that the sentiment of esteem and the sentiment of love “are at bottom the same passions” (Hume, 1978, 608, n.). Since Hume sometimes describes the moral sentiment aroused by virtue as a sentiment of esteem (Hume, 1978, 610), he must believe that moral sentiments are indirect passions. It is surprising that some people who have argued that the moral sentiments are not indirect passions have included esteem on their list of indirect passions, but did not see that Hume actually describes the moral sentiment of approbation as a sentiment of esteem (Hume, 1978, 610). In both the *Treatise* and the second *Enquiry* Hume explains the relation between love and esteem in a footnote. In the *Treatise* he says that love and esteem “are at the bottom the same passions, and arise from like causes” (Hume, 1978, 608); in the *Enquiry* he says that they “are nearly the same passion, and arise from similar causes” (Hume, 1975, 317, n.1). In both places Hume distinguishes esteem and love in terms of (a) the quality of the pleasurable feeling—the pleasure of esteem “is more severe and serious” (Hume, 1978, 608); (b) the object of the passion (“where [the passion’s] object is great or makes a strong impression” (Hume, 1978, 608) the feeling aroused is esteem not love); and (c) the effects of the passion (when it produces any degree of humility or awe, the passion is esteem; both give rise to benevolence, but benevolence is connected with love “in a more eminent degree” (Hume, 1978, 608 and Hume, 1975, 317).

If moral sentiments are indirect passions, as Hume says they are, then Hume’s account of the indirect passions in Book II and the sketch of it in this passage will explain how the moral sentiments are produced. To see how this account applies to the moral sentiments we need to look first at what Hume actually says about the nature of these sentiments. The causal account must at least be consistent with Hume’s descriptions.

When Hume first introduces the moral sentiments as the source of the distinction we make between virtue and vice, he says that “[t]o have the sense of virtue, is nothing but to *feel* a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character. The very *feeling* constitutes our praise and admiration” (Hume, 1978, 471) and, similarly, the very feeling we have when we con-

template a vicious character constitutes our blame or disapprobation. These feelings—the moral sentiments—are described by Hume, first of all, in terms of the general category of feelings to which they belong: they are kinds of pleasures (or agreeable feelings) and pains (or disagreeable feelings). More specifically, the impression of virtue is described variously as a feeling of satisfaction, delight, approbation, and esteem; the impression of vice is described as a feeling of uneasiness, disgust, blame, or disapprobation.³ Hume says that the sense of virtue is that agreeable feeling you have when you see a noble and generous action, and the sense of vice is that disagreeable feeling you have when you consider one that is cruel or treacherous (Hume, 1978, 470).

To answer objections to his system as well as to clarify his meaning, Hume compares the moral sentiments to sentiments that resemble them in some respects—namely, aesthetic sentiments and the sentiments of interest. To answer those who might object that were Hume right about the origin of virtue and vice, then even inanimate objects would be virtuous or vicious because they also can produce pleasure and pain, Hume responds that even though the pleasure and pain caused by the sight of beautiful and ugly objects, respectively, are close in feeling to the pleasure and pain caused by the sight of moral beauty and deformity, nevertheless, the two sets of sentiments (the aesthetic and the moral) are directed towards different objects and have different effects. The kind of pleasure we feel when we consider beautiful objects (other than persons) by themselves, without reference to their owners or creators, is not directed towards a person and so has no connection to love or pride; the kind of pain we feel when we see ugly objects, because it is not directed towards a person, has no connection to hatred or humility (Hume, 1978, 473). Hume does say that we can love a person for his beauty (Hume, 1978, 330), he would also say that we could love him for his ability to make beautiful things (Hume, 1975, 259), but in either case this love would have a person, not a thing, for its object. We may value a beautiful painting for its beauty without thinking of any person, but Hume would not characterize our feeling for the painting as a kind of love. (See also Hume, 1978, 473.) Later Hume remarks that, because the two sets of sentiments have different objects, they are different in feeling. “All the sentiments of approbation, which attend any particular species of objects [for example, mental qualities of human beings], have a great resemblance to each other, tho’ deriv’d from different sources [for example, from a view of its utility and from a view of its immediate agreeableness]; and, on the other hand, those sentiments, when directed to different objects [for example, to a mental quality and to a house], are different to the feeling, tho’ deriv’d from the same source [for example, from a view of their utility]” (Hume, 1978, 617). For this reason, “a convenient house, and a virtuous character, cause not the same feeling of approbation” even though both “flow from sympathy and an idea of their utility” (Hume, 1978, 617).⁴ Hume makes this same observation again in the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* to answer a similar objection. There Hume says that the fact that an inanimate object can be useful does not mean that, according to his

system, it ought “to merit the appellation of *virtuous*. The sentiments, excited by utility, are, in the two cases, very different, and the one is mixed with affection, esteem, approbation, &c. and not the other” (Hume, 1975, 213, n. 1).

The conclusion Hume draws from this discussion is that only qualities of mind and the actions that are signs of them give rise to moral sentiments (Hume, 1978, 472). But even with respect to our reactions to such qualities and actions there is a distinction to be made. Not “every sentiment of pleasure and pain, which arises from characters and actions, [is] of that *peculiar* kind, which makes us praise or condemn” (Hume, 1978, 472). The moral sentiments resemble the sentiments of interest—that is, feelings of love and hatred of others because of what they do to us, but the two sets of sentiments are different. A courageous and honest rival may arouse two sets of feelings: the moral sentiments and sentiments of interest. We can respect and admire the courage and honesty of a rival, while at the same time these very qualities can make us hate or resent her. Sentiments of interest are generally more intense than the sentiments of morals; moreover, they change with changes in our circumstances and interests, whereas the sentiments of morals do not (Hume, 1978, 472). Only those sentiments that are aroused “when a character is considered in general, without reference to our particular interest” are *moral* sentiments (Hume, 1978, 472). Because human beings seldom “heartily love what lies at a distance from them, and what no way redounds to their particular benefit” (Hume, 1978, 583), even though the sentiments of morals are indirect passions, these passions are calmer or less intense than the sentiments of interest. They are also calmer in that they are more steady, less subject to fluctuation, than the passions that are connected with particular interests. This is because particular interests change and circumstances bring us into different relations to other people. A rival may become a partner, a stranger may become a friend. The interested feelings I may have for these people will change with these changes. The sentiments of morals, however, because they are based on a general view without reference to particular interests, do not undergo these same variations (Hume, 1978, 583).

Thus, there are two distinguishing features of those indirect passions that comprise the moral sentiments. First, they are caused by the contemplation of the mental qualities of thinking, sensible beings. Because their causes have this connection to human beings, they are suited to arouse sentiments of love and hatred, pride and humility. This connection to the indirect passions distinguishes moral sentiments from other sentiments of beauty. Because the sentiments are caused by the contemplation of *mental qualities* they are also different from the passions that are connected with external advantages, such as our esteem for the rich and powerful. Secondly, the moral sentiments are distinguished by the fact that they are aroused when a mental quality is considered without reference to our particular interests. Because of this, they are calmer, more reflective passions than the sentiments of interest.

What Hume says about the moral sentiments suggests that they are instances of pride and humility and of love and hatred. Furthermore, an examination of the moral sentiments reveals that they have the same structure as the indirect passions of love and hatred, pride and humility.

The general structure of the indirect passions is as follows:⁵ They have a cause, which is the thing that arouses the passion, and an object, or that towards which the passion is directed. The causes themselves are complex. Within them we can distinguish “a *quality* that operates, and the *subject* in which it is placed” (Hume, 1978, 330). The causes of pride, for example, are pleasant qualities placed in a subject that is related to the self. For example, if I am proud of the beauty of my garden, the cause of my pride is a quality—namely, beauty—placed in a subject—my garden. This is what I am proud of. The object of an indirect passion is that towards which the passion is directed, and this is always some person, either oneself or someone else. The passions themselves are impressions or feelings that have an object as well as a cause. The passion of pride is, according to Hume, a good or pleasant feeling directed towards oneself—that is, pride is a pleasant feeling that has one’s self as its object. Love has the same structure: love has both a cause and an object. The causes of love are pleasant qualities placed in a subject that is related to some person. Perception of these qualities gives rise to impressions of pleasure distinct from the pleasant feeling of love; the subject in which these qualities are found is related to the person loved. Love also has an object; it is a pleasant feeling directed towards a sensible being. Humility and hatred are similar to pride and love except that their causes give rise to impressions of pain. Humility is an unpleasant feeling which is directed towards oneself and which is caused by something unpleasant that is related to oneself. Hatred is an unpleasant feeling aroused by something unpleasant related to the person hated, and this feeling is directed towards that person. Each of these passions has two components: an emotional component—a feeling or impression—and something that links the emotion to an object—namely, an idea of the object. So pride, for instance, is a mixture of a certain pleasant feeling and an idea of oneself, where both the feeling and the idea are related in a special way to the cause of pride. Humility is a mixture of a certain unpleasant feeling and an idea of oneself, where both the feeling and the idea are related in a special way to the cause of humility. By the same token, love is a mixture of a certain pleasant feeling and an idea of the beloved, where both the feeling and the idea are related to the cause of love. Hatred is a mixture of a certain unpleasant feeling and an idea of the person whom one hates, and both the feeling and the idea are related to the cause of hatred. This characterization of the indirect passions suggests that they are not simple in the sense of simplicity specified by Ardal (namely, unanalyzable or non-composite). (See Ardal, 1962, 11f.) On my interpretation, these sentiments comprise a pair of impressions (or feelings of a certain sort) and a pair of ideas. Hume does call these passions “simple and

uniform impressions” (Hume, 1978, 277), so it may appear that they could not be units comprising a set of impressions and ideas. Yet it is clear that one of the defining features of pride is that it is directed to self and certainly the relation of the subject of the cause to the object of the passion is one of the relations necessary for accounting for the indirect passions.

Hume gives some indication of what he means when he says that the passions are uniform by contrasting reflective impressions with ideas. Ideas, he says, are capable of forming a *compound* by their conjunction. A complex idea is just a compound of distinct ideas. Impressions, on the other hand, form *mixtures*, “and like colours, may be blended so perfectly together, that each of them may lose itself, and contribute only to vary that uniform impression, which arises from the whole” (Hume, 1978, 366). The indirect passions can have a cause and an object, and these elements can all mix together to form a single, uniform passion. Hume entertains the hypothesis that something further is involved with love, that mixing together a cause, an object, and an aim makes only one passion—namely the desire to benefit one’s beloved. He rejects this hypothesis because the aim is not essential to love (Hume, 1978, 367). The connection between loving someone and wanting them to be happy is merely a contingent connection. The connection between the causes and object of love is not contingent. An emotion would not be love were it not caused by a quality placed in a subject which subject is related to the object of the passion. According to Hume, love is always love of some person for some quality that is related to that person.

The moral sentiments have the same structure as the indirect passions. They are caused by the right kinds of thing—namely, qualities placed in subjects. Hume allows that actions also are approved and disapproved, but he insists that this is only because and insofar as they are indications of characters and mental qualities (Hume, 1978, 575).⁶ According to Hume, when we perceive qualities of persons that are harmful or disagreeable to people, we have sentiments of disapprobation. When we perceive qualities of persons that are useful or agreeable to people, we have sentiments of approbation. (Hume summarizes his findings in Hume, 1978, 587-591 and 618-620. See also the Conclusion (Section IX) of Hume, 1975, 268.) The fact that the qualities that give rise to the moral sentiments are of a unique, determinate kind does much to prove that virtue and vice are real, determinate properties of persons.

In addition to having the same kinds of causes as the indirect passions, the moral sentiments also share the other structural feature of the indirect passions. The indirect passions have an emotional component (they are feelings of pleasure or pain) and an object (that towards which the passion is directed). The moral sentiments also have an emotional component (they are kinds of pleasures and pains) and they have objects. In fact, Hume says that one of the distinguishing features of the moral sentiments is that they are directed towards only one kind of object—namely, persons (Hume, 1978, 473).

The fact that the moral sentiments have the same structure as the indirect passions is significant because Hume arrives at the conclusion that the indirect

passions are produced by means of a double association of ideas and impressions by noting the regularity of the relation between the causes of these passions and the passions themselves. The qualities that cause these passions are qualities that are themselves pleasant and painful, and the passions they give rise to are always of the same sort: If the quality is a pleasant one, it invariably gives rise to passions that are themselves pleasant, as are pride and love. If the quality is a painful or unpleasant one, it invariably gives rise to the painful or unpleasant passions of humility and hatred. In addition, the subject in which the quality is placed always bears some relation to the object of the passion. If the passion is self-directed, the subject always bears some relation to the self; if it is other-directed, the subject is always found to be related to the very same person to whom the passion is directed. Having noted this double association, an association of the emotional tone of the quality of the cause and the emotional tone of the passion and an association of the idea of the subject with the idea of the object of the passion, Hume concludes that the mechanism by means of which the mind passes from the cause of the passion to its effect (the passion itself) is the familiar one of association, only in the case of the indirect passions the association must be double: an impression must be associated with a resembling impression and an idea must be associated with a related idea. If either relation is missing, the result may be another feeling or idea, but it is not one of the four indirect passions.

In Book II Hume performs a number of “experiments” to show that this is the case. (See Hume, 1978, 332-347.) In Experiments One to Four, Hume varies a feature of the passion—either the quality of the cause or the subject in which this quality is placed or the object of the passion—and notes that the resulting passion belongs to a different class. In this way he proves that each of these ingredients is essential to the passion. He also confirms his hypothesis that the indirect passions are the effects of our perceptions of painful or pleasant qualities placed in subjects related to persons and that the causal mechanism is a double association of ideas and impressions.

Hume summarizes his findings concerning the nature and causes of the indirect passions as follows: “When an idea produces an impression, related to an impression which is connected with an idea, these two impressions must be in a manner inseparable, nor will the one in any case be unattended with the other” (Hume, 1978, 289; see also 284 and 305f.).

Given that the structure of the moral sentiments is the same as that of the four indirect passions, it is not unreasonable to suppose that they too arise from a double association of ideas and impressions. It is clear that there is the right kind of relation between the subject of the cause and the object of the sentiment. When we disapprove of Hitler’s cruelty our disapproval is directed towards Hitler. When we approve of Mother Teresa’s charity, our approval is directed towards her. So the basis of an association of ideas is present. It is less clear that the quality that causes our moral sentiments has an emotional tone that resembles the tone of the moral sentiment. It is the quality of the cause of our sentiments

that must give rise to a pleasure distinct from the pleasant feeling of the sentiment. If the moral sentiments arise in the same way as the indirect passions, then Hitler's cruelty must be unpleasant to every person who has the sentiment of disapproval for Hitler. There is no question but that Hitler's cruelty was painful for his victims. The question is whether his cruelty is painful or at least unpleasant to those who were not his victims but who nonetheless disapprove of Hitler. If it is not, then it could not be the case that the moral sentiments are produced in the same way as the indirect passions are produced and have the same structure as these passions because there would be no association of resembling impressions. This point has been made by a number of critics of Ardal. They claim that there is no separate pleasure or pain which can give rise to the moral sentiments by means of an association of impressions. (See, for example, Hearn, 1973, 290; Cheshire C.H. Calhoun makes a similar point in Calhoun, 1980, 71.) Unless there is some reason to think that vicious qualities are unpleasant to those who have never been personally affected by them, an account of the moral sentiments in terms of the double relation would be hopeless. The relation between the causes of the moral sentiments and the sentiments themselves would have to be explained in some other way. This is where sympathy comes into play.

Hume argues in both the *Treatise* and the second *Enquiry* that if human beings did not sympathize with the pleasures and pains of others, there would be no such thing as morality. If the suffering of others did not affect us, if we were not made uncomfortable by the sight or thought of it, we should never have cause to resent those who inflict suffering on others. If we did not take pleasure in other's happiness, we should never have a reason to approve of those who bring about such happiness in others. Sympathy plays an essential role in Hume's moral theory because it accounts for the fact that virtuous or vicious qualities of persons are pleasant or unpleasant even to those who have never themselves been the beneficiary or victim of the person who has these qualities. Hume insists that this is its role both in the *Treatise* (see Hume, 1978, 577f., 580, and 618f.) where he says that an idea of a quality that has a tendency to the good of mankind "affects us by sympathy, and is itself a kind of pleasure" (Hume, 1978, 580), and in the second *Enquiry* (Hume, 1975, 218-232, 234, 260). In other words, sympathy is needed to explain the separate pleasantness or painfulness of the qualities that cause the moral sentiments. If these qualities were not capable of causing us pleasure or pain when we perceived them, they would not give rise to the moral sentiments by means of a double relation.

Hume analyzes sympathy, or the communication of sentiments, as follows: ideas we form of passions and sentiments, on being related to our impressions of ourselves, are so enlivened as to become impressions of these passions or sentiments. According to Hume, the force of our impressions of ourselves is communicated to the idea of the sentiment we are considering, and enlivens it so that we actually feel that sentiment (Hume, 1978, 317-319). This analysis accounts for the fact that we sympathize more with beings who are related to ourselves,

since when we are related to some being, we are more likely to connect our impressions of ourselves to our ideas of that being's sentiments (317f.).

Sympathy helps to account for the moral sentiments not because these sentiments are cases of sympathy, but rather because these sentiments depend for their existence on the operation of sympathy. Ardal notes that people are sometimes "tempted to call these feelings [the pleasures or pains aroused by sympathy], rather than the indirect passions themselves, moral sentiments" (Ardal, 1977, 409). One will succumb to this temptation only if one ignores the fact that the moral sentiments have objects. A pleasant feeling generated by sympathy with a person's pleasure is not itself approval. The feeling must be directed towards someone (towards the cause of that person's pleasure). Approval of any kind must be approval of something, and moral approval is always approval of some person. So the sympathetic pleasure or pain cannot be the moral sentiment.

I have explained how the moral sentiments arise from other impressions and other ideas. This is only a partial account of these sentiments. A full causal account of the moral sentiments has to begin with an impression of sensation. We perceive something, usually an action, which gives rise to the idea of a quality in a subject. This idea then gives rise to a moral sentiment by means of a double relation of ideas and impressions.

This account of the causes of the moral sentiments can be illustrated and, to some extent, tested by means of an example. Imagine yourself standing in a hot, crowded commuter train during rush hour. At the other end of the car there is a young woman who has been sitting comfortably reading her newspaper. You see her look up, and you notice that she sees a frail-looking, old man, obviously uncomfortable, jostled about by the movements of the train as well as by the other commuters. He seems to be suffering patiently, but he looks tired and uneasy. Then you observe the woman folding up her newspaper and putting it away. She taps the man's arm and offers him her seat. After a short exchange, the old man takes the seat and relaxes into it gratefully, while the young woman takes his place in the press of the crowd. She remains standing on the train almost to the end of the line because she does not get a seat until then. Seeing what the young woman has done, you are likely to have a warm feeling towards her, even though both she and the old man are complete strangers to you. This warm feeling towards the woman is an example of a moral sentiment.

What we have perceived in this case is the woman's act of kindness; our perception of this act is the ultimate cause of our feeling of approval of her. When we perceive this, we form an idea of the woman's kindness. In other words, we form an idea of a quality in a subject. This idea is the mediate cause of the moral sentiment. In perceiving her act of kindness, we also perceive its effect—the relieving of the old man's distress. Our idea of the woman's kindness includes an idea of its effect on the old man. The next step in the causal chain involves a transition from our idea of the man's relief to our own feeling of pleasure. This step requires the communication of sentiment made possible by

sympathy. When we see the woman's act of kindness, there is a transition in our own sentiments which mirrors the transition in the man's sentiments from uneasiness (the sight of the old man's uneasiness makes us uneasy) to relief (when the old man is comfortably seated we feel less uneasy ourselves). Our pleasant feeling of relief, along with our idea of the woman's kindness, gives rise to a pleasant feeling directed towards the woman by means of a double association of ideas and impressions.

Figure 1 gives a schematic representation of the moral sentiments. The first idea (D-1 for iDea) is supposed to be an idea of a pleasing or harmful quality in a person. This idea produces an impression (M-1 for iMpression) because it (D-1) includes the idea (D-1') of someone's pleasure or pain, and when we sympathize with this pleasure or pain, we feel our own pleasure or pain—that is, we have an impression (M-1) of pleasure or pain. This impression of pleasure or pain (M-1) is related to another impression (M-2) that is connected with an idea (D-2)—that is, a feeling directed towards a person. For example, on seeing the woman on the train acting kindly towards the old man (the impression (M-0) that constitutes our seeing the woman on the train acting kindly towards the old man is the ultimate cause of the sentiment of approval), we form an idea of kindness in the woman (D-1) which idea includes the idea (D-1') of the effect of this act of kindness—namely, the old man's pleasure. The idea of this effect (D-1') gives rise to an impression (M-1) of pleasure or pain *in us* via our sympathy with the old man. This impression (M-1) is related, via resemblance, to another impression (M-2)—namely, the warm feeling—which is connected with an idea (D-2)—namely, the idea of the kind woman—which is itself related to the first idea—that is, the idea of the kind woman (D-1). The first mental state (D-1 along with M-1) is doubly related to the second mental state (D-2 along with M-2): D-1 and D-2 are related via some principle of the association of ideas,⁷ and M-1 and M-2 are related via resemblance. (Hume claims that the only principle of association between impressions is that of resemblance (Hume, 1978, 283)). Because the two states are doubly related, when we have the first impression (the impression of pleasure that arises when we sympathize with the old man) along with the first idea (the idea of the woman's kindness), we will also have the second impression (the feeling of approval for the woman). This is the causal story.

On this analysis, the causal connection between qualities of persons and the moral sentiments is indirect, but there is nonetheless a connection. Were such a connection completely lacking, the moral sentiments could not serve as signs of features of things outside the mind of the person who feels them. However, the fact that there is such a connection does not, in itself, mean that virtue and vice are objective qualities of virtuous and vicious people. There is a causal connection between frightening things and fear, but this does not mean that being frightening is an objective feature of, for example, spiders, nor does it mean that fear is a sign of some objective quality of frightening things. If there is anything objective about being frightening, this is due to the connection between being

Ultimate Cause	The Cause of the Moral Sentiment		Resulting Passion
Impression of Sensation (M-0)	CAUSES	Idea of a Quality in a Person (D-1) <hr/> First Relation <hr/> CAUSES via Double Relation <hr/> Impression of Pleasure or Pain (M-1) CAUSES via sympathy Idea of Someone's Pleasure or Pain (D-1') Second Relation Impression of Pleasure or Pain (M-2)	Idea of a Person (D-1) Related to Impression of Pleasure or Pain (M-2)
You see the woman acting kindly towards the old man (M-0)	CAUSES	Idea of the Kindness of the Woman (D-1) <hr/> First Relation <hr/> CAUSES via sympathy Idea of the Old Man's Pleasure (D-1') Second Relation Impression of Pleasure (M-1)	Idea of the Woman (D-2) Related to Pleasant Feeling (of Love) (M-2)

Figure 1. The Structure of the Moral Sentiments

frightening and being harmful or being dangerous, and it is this connection with harm or danger that provides the basis for ought statements about fear. When we point out to someone that he ought not be afraid of certain spiders, we argue that these spiders are harmless. Nonetheless, we do mark the difference between harmful or dangerous things and frightening things. A rabbit can be frightening to a person if that person is afraid of rabbits.

Hume's causal analysis of the moral sentiments indicates that they are not like fears. What distinguishes them from fears is not the fact that they are caused by events occurring outside the perceiver's mind, but the fact that they are caused in the special way they are caused.

The moral sentiments depend for their very existence on the operations of sympathy, and this ensures that they will be the same in every person who perceives the facts of the situation in the same way, so it ensures intersubjective agreement. The moral sentiments are different from the sentiments of interest in that the latter vary from person to person, and even within a person from one time to another (Hume, 1978, 581). The moral sentiments do not vary in this way because they do not depend for their existence on the peculiar features and circumstances of the person who has them. We do not find a quality to be virtuous on the basis of the benefits we personally get from it; we find it virtuous on the basis of the benefits it confers on those who are affected by the expression of this quality in action.

The moral sentiments arise when we consider the situation from a certain point of view—the point of view of those who are affected by the person being judged. This is a point of view that anyone who knows the facts of the situation can take—it is general in that sense. When we all view the same situation from the same point of view, we form the same ideas of pleasure or pain. These ideas are transformed, by means of the mechanism of sympathy, into the feelings of pleasure and pain that are part of the cause of a moral sentiment. Since the mechanisms that are responsible for our moral sentiments operate in the same way in every human being, and since these mechanisms are operating on the same—or very similar—things, their effects will be the same, or very similar, for every human being. (Sympathetic responses can vary *in intensity* depending on the distance of the relation between the person who sympathizes and the person with whom she sympathizes, so the intensity of the moral sentiments can vary from person to person. The implications of this variation are discussed in Section II of this paper.) Thus, once we understand the way in which the moral sentiments are caused, we can see that they will be the same, or very similar, in everyone who has them. In other words, there will be substantial intersubjective agreement in moral sentiments.

Of course, what one feels does depend on what one sees and how one interprets what is seen. Someone who saw the woman getting up and the old man sitting down, but did not see that the woman got up in order that the old man could sit down, would not be affected in the same way as someone who saw that the woman gave up her seat so the old man could sit. The operations of the

understanding come into play in determining the facts of the case to which one's moral sentiments are responses. We form an idea of a quality in a person using the same conceptual and perceptual resources that we use to form an idea of any quality in an object. Only after we have formed such an idea do the mechanisms responsible for the moral sentiments come into play. (See Hume, 1975, 285-286.) One source of error in moral judgments concerns the facts of the case. If one misinterprets the situation, the sentiments one feels towards the situation may well be inappropriate to the real situation. Two people could have two different moral sentiments in response to a single situation. Sympathy only guarantees intersubjective agreement when people perceive the facts of the situation in the same way.

Because the moral sentiments arise only when we take the point of view of those who are affected by the persons we judge, certain variable and accidental features of the perceiver (her particular interests, ambitions, and position with respect to the agent) play little or no role in the generation of these sentiments. This ensures that variations in the moral sentiments are primarily due to variations in the external circumstances rather than to these idiosyncratic subjective variations.

In these two respects the moral sentiments are quite different from such subjective feelings as fears. There is no intersubjective agreement concerning fears; and the fact that not everyone fears the same things is due, in part, to the fact that whether a particular kind of thing causes fear often depends on variable and accidental features of the persons involved. (For example, your past experiences with horses may have caused you to be afraid of horses. Someone else whose experiences with horses were different would not be afraid of them.)

These are important differences, but they do not mark the most important difference between objective qualities and qualities that are merely subjective. For suppose that human nature had been such that we all naturally responded with fear to exactly the same things—namely, rabbits and earthquakes. Even under this condition, being frightening does not seem to be an objective quality of rabbits and earthquakes; for there is nothing that rabbits and earthquakes have in common that is causally responsible for our fear. The *only* basis we should have for grouping rabbits and earthquakes together in one class is that they and only they cause fear. In other words, even under conditions of perfect inter- and intrasubjective agreement in feelings, being frightening would be a merely subjective quality if we attribute this common quality to frightening things *solely* on the basis of the similarity of their subjective effects. If there were some quality that rabbits and earthquakes had in common other than their effect on our minds, and if this quality was causally responsible for our feelings, then being frightening would be an objective feature of rabbits and earthquakes.

In his analysis of the causes of the moral sentiments, Hume discovers that virtues do have something in common in addition to their causing the sentiments of approval and that this feature is causally responsible for those sentiments. He found the same thing with respect to vices and sentiments of disapproval. It is

this discovery that gives us reason to believe that virtue is an objective feature of virtuous people and that vice is an objective feature of vicious people. What accounts for our sentiment of approval is our perception of the good effects of an action on people when we conceive of that action as springing from a durable quality of the agent's mind. What accounts for our sentiment of disapproval is our perception of an action's bad effects on people when we conceive of that action as springing from a durable quality of the agent's mind. What virtues have in common, then, is that they are durable qualities of mind which are generally beneficial or immediately agreeable to people, while vices are all durable qualities of mind that are generally harmful or immediately disagreeable.

Hume explains, by means of the moral sentiments, how human beings can track these objective qualities in their moral judgments without knowing that this is what they are doing. Philosophic reflection reveals that the general human practice of making moral judgments on the basis of feelings is neither arbitrary nor capricious. (Particular moral judgments might be, but the practice in general is not.) The moral sentiments turn out, upon reflection, to be regular responses to a class of objects—namely, mental qualities—which form two distinct classes on the basis of something other than their subjective effects on the moral judge. Hume discovers that there really is a difference between those qualities we judge to be virtues and those we judge to be vices, a difference distinct from the fact that we judge them differently. Those qualities we judge to be virtues have a feature which other qualities do not have—namely, their usefulness or agreeableness. Because of the connection between this feature and the moral sentiments, we can class a quality a virtue either in terms of its subjective effect (namely, it produces the moral sentiments) or in terms of its objective features (namely, its usefulness or the fact that it is immediately agreeable).⁸

II. Moral Sentiments and the System of Morals

According to Hume, the moral sentiments serve as the original standard by which we judge virtue and vice (Hume, 1978, 603) in the same way that our impressions of color serve as the original standard by which we judge color. To test his theory Hume attempts to explain how, on the basis of these sentiments, we come to have a general system of approval and disapproval and a general language of morals—that is, how we come to have “a general inalterable standard, by which we may approve or disapprove of characters” (Hume, 1978, 603). Hume tests the first part of his account of morality, the part that says that judgments of morality are based on the moral sentiments, by seeing whether, on their basis, he can account for the existence of a general system of approval and disapproval, since that is what he takes morality to be. He argues that his account passes this test, while accounts that try to base morals on other sentiments (namely, the sentiments of interest) do not, because sentiments of approval or disapproval that are based on sympathy are more nearly constant and universal than those other sentiments of approval and disapproval which depend on our

own particular circumstances and interests (Hume, 1975, 272-276). Hume argues that only when we judge characters and actions on the basis of the moral sentiments do we find within ourselves and others patterns of responses to qualities and actions which can form the basis of a language of evaluative terms and of a general system of praise and blame—on the assumption that there is a uniformity in the effects of these mental qualities on people.

Such uniformity in the effects is also necessary. If generous people, for example, did not typically bring pleasure to those whom they treated generously, or if cruel people did not typically inflict pain on those whom they treated cruelly, there would arise no general language or system of morals at all. Such a system of praise and blame could not arise unless there were a connection between the qualities in question and their effects on people as well as a connection between these qualities and our responses to them. Our responses could not be uniform if the qualities did not tend to have uniform effects on those towards whom they were directed. (Certain qualities are morally neutral because there seems to be no regular connection between them and anyone's happiness. A tendency to tie the laces on one's left shoe before tying those on one's right, although it may have advantageous consequences on a particular occasion, is neither esteemed nor blamed because it seems to have no *regular* connection with anyone's pleasure or pain.)

Hume concludes that the moral sentiments are the only ones consistent with the existence of a general system of approval and disapproval, but he does not conclude that these sentiments themselves provide the general, inalterable standard. They merely serve as the original standard. Something more is required to account for the general standard. To explain how we come to form this general, inalterable standard for judging virtue and vice, Hume appeals not only to the moral sentiments but also to principles of human nature other than those which account for the moral sentiments.

While the sentiments of blame and approbation that are based on sympathy may be the only ones sufficiently constant and universal to serve as the basis of a general system of morals, even they are not so constant and universal as the actual system. There are variations in our moral sentiments that we can not take into account in our general judgments of morals. For if we did take them into account, our judgments would fail to be general. For instance, the strength of our resentment or love for a person with a vice or a virtue varies with the psychological nearness or remoteness of the person who is affected by the person we are judging. We resent qualities that result in injuries to our friends and ourselves more strongly than we resent the same qualities when they result in injuries to people who have no connection with us; we delight in qualities that benefit our friends and us more than we delight in the same qualities when they benefit someone whom we do not know (Hume, 1978, 582). In both cases, our feelings are stronger when our own or our friend's interest is at stake than they are when it is a stranger's interest that is either furthered or compromised because we

typically sympathize more strongly with those who are closely related to us than with those whose relation to us is merely resemblance with respect to kind of being.⁹ Since different people, and even the same person at different times, stand in different relations to others, if we were to take these variations in the strength of our approval and disapproval into account, we should never arrive at a general system of morals (Hume, 1978, 603).

There is another difference between the moral sentiments and the general system of approbation and blame: moral sentiments are *particular* responses to *particular* persons occasioned by *particular* views of their qualities as they are exhibited in *particular* actions, while the general system of morals that is based on them is supposed to be about *kinds* of qualities and *kinds* of actions (for example, we judge that justice is a virtue). Annette Baier finds this a reason for thinking that the moral sentiments are not indirect passions. According to Baier, since indirect passions are always directed towards persons, and moral approval is approval of qualities, it follows that the moral sentiments must be different from the indirect passions. To answer this objection, it is necessary to distinguish the moral sentiments from the system of evaluation that is based on them. Moral sentiments are feelings of approval for persons because of their qualities. These sentiments form a pattern that is responsive to qualities rather than to persons. We feel moral approval whenever we perceive kindness and generosity. On the basis of the similarity of the feeling, we group instances of each of these qualities together and mold our language upon the perceived similarities (Hume, 1975, 274. See also Hume, 1975, 229 and Hume, 1978, 582.). No such pattern emerges with respect to persons, in part because there is a mixture of virtue and vice in almost everyone. A generous person can also be lazy. When we contemplate her generosity, we feel approval, but when we contemplate her laziness, we disapprove of her for that. In addition, moral qualities can be found wherever we find people, and there are a sufficient number of instances of each quality to form a pattern of affective responses which can have an effect on language and practices. The fact that the pattern that emerges from moral sentiments is a pattern that tracks the qualities of the causes of these sentiments rather than the objects of the sentiments is no objection to the claim that moral sentiments of love and hatred and of pride and humility form the basis of this system of evaluation.

To develop a general system of morals on the basis of the moral sentiments, we need to find patterns within our experience, and the patterns are there to be found, but they are not as regular as the system we develop would suggest. We see this difference between the pattern of moral approval and our general system of morals when we consider the difference between our moral sentiments and our moral judgments in cases where circumstances prevent a virtue or vice from exerting itself in action or having any effects on others. In such cases, because we have no actual person to sympathize with, we do not feel anything as strong as the usual moral sentiments, nonetheless, in our general system of approbation and blame, we still judge the person who has good qualities that happen to be

inactive to be as virtuous as someone with the same qualities who has the opportunity to express them in actions, and we consider the person who has bad qualities without the opportunity to harm anyone just as bad as someone with the same qualities who has this opportunity. According to Hume, we do feel *something* when we consider inactive virtues because our minds easily pass from the idea of the cause (the virtue) to its usual effect (someone's pleasure), but the abstract idea we form of pleasure in our imaginations does not have as great an effect on our emotions as the idea of pleasure we form when we actually perceive someone's happiness (Hume, 1978, 584). We disregard this difference in the intensity of our feelings when we judge degrees of virtue or vice. We consider generosity, for example, a virtue of the same stature in whatever circumstances we may find the generous person.

Hume acknowledges the discrepancies between our general judgments of qualities and persons and our particular moral sentiments, and he accounts for them by saying that we correct our sentiments by reflecting on the ways in which they can be influenced by idiosyncratic internal and external circumstances (Hume, 1978, 581f.). According to Hume, when we make moral judgments, our moral sentiments serve as the original standard by which we judge qualities and persons (Hume, 1978, 603), but our moral judgments are not simply reports of our current feelings about some person or his qualities. When we make moral judgments, we correct for those variations in our moral sentiments that we know are due to our own particular circumstances and the particular circumstances of the person whose qualities we survey. We know from experience that when our own interests are at stake, our sentiments of approval and disapproval are more intense than they would be if we had no involvement with the person we judge or with the people affected by her actions. In our judgments we try to correct for this influence in order to arrive at stable and intersubjectively shared opinions of the qualities and persons we judge. Here is another role that reason or the understanding plays in our moral judgments in addition to that of interpreting the situation as one indicative of a mental quality that has certain effects on others.¹⁰ Reason or experience is necessary to enable us to correct for variations in the *intensity* of feelings produced by sympathy. Reason makes the general point of view—which is achieved by sympathy with those affected by the person we are judging—even more general, and it does so by showing us which variations in the intensity of our feelings are due to our particular relations to the persons with whom we sympathize and which are due to objective features of the situation. (Hearn provides an excellent account of the correction of moral sentiments by appeal to general rules. See Hearn, 1970, 419-422.)

Reason and experience also come into play when we consider virtue in rags. Experience teaches us that certain qualities have typical effects and also that their having these effects depends on the contribution of additional causes. We learn from experience that although circumstances may affect the expression of certain qualities, the circumstances may change; and when they do, the qualities again

become effective and arouse our strong sentiments of approval and disapproval. Although our survey of a kind and generous person who has been deprived of liberty of action arouses fainter sentiments of approval because there is no actual beneficiary of this person's kindness and generosity with whom we can sympathize, we do not take the intensity of the sentiments into account when we judge the person and his qualities. Here again, we correct for the variations in the sentiments—especially in their intensity—by reflecting on the effects of circumstances on these sentiments in order to arrive at a more steady and shared opinion of the quality and the person who has it.

Reason or the understanding does play a role in the formation of our general system of morals, but its role is subsidiary. In forming a general system of morals we reflect on practices that already exist and on sentiments that already fall into patterns in order to make these practices and patterns even more regular than they already are. Even here, the moral sentiments serve as the standard of moral judgments, since our reflections generally concern what our feelings would be were circumstances different. In addition, the corrections we are led to make on the basis of such reflections usually have to do with the *degrees* of virtue and vice (Hume, 1978, 585), rather than with their presence or absence. Hume mentions only one kind of case where reason or reflection leads us to correct our sentiments in a more radical way, and that is the case where there is an opposition between our own particular interests and the particular interests of the person we judge. In this kind of case, “[w]e make allowance for a certain degree of selfishness in men; because we know it to be inseparable from human nature... . By this reflection we correct those sentiments of blame, which so naturally arise upon any opposition” (Hume, 1978, 583). Although these sentiments of blame arise from the same principles and in the same way as other moral sentiments—that is, from a perception of the pain that our adversary causes when she opposes our interests, we try to disregard these sentiments in our moral judgments. Here the corrections do not proceed from reflections about the effect of circumstances on our feelings. We consider such things as “that any man, in the same situation, would do the same; that we ourselves, in like circumstances, observe a like conduct; that, in general, human society is best supported on such maxims;” (Hume, 1975, 274, n.), and by such reflections “correct, in some measure, our ruder and narrower passions” (Hume, 1975, 275, n.). We try to develop standards of behavior that are the same for everyone, and to do this, we must disregard certain natural sentiments of blame.

III. The Objectivity of Morals

On Hume's view, just as we must correct the moral sentiments in order to arrive at a stable judgment of those qualities we call virtues and vices, so also we must correct the impressions of all the senses and for the same reason (Hume, 1978, 582). Because the impressions of the senses depend not only on the way the objects that affect the organs of sense actually are, but also on the circumstances

in which the objects act on us, including the disposition of our own minds and bodies, variations in impressions do not always indicate variations in the objects that give rise to them. According to Hume, by reflecting on our own experiences we learn to distinguish those variations which are due to the particular circumstances and particular dispositions of our minds from those which are due to changes in the object. When we judge an object's size, color, etc., we do so on the basis of sense impressions—these impressions serve as the original standards for judgments of size, color, etc. just as the moral sentiments serve as the original standards for judgments of virtue and vice—but we correct for those predictable variations in impressions that are due to accidental features of the external circumstances (for example, lighting or our distance from the object) or to peculiar internal circumstances (for example, illness), and we consider only how the objects would appear from “*steady and general points of view*” (Hume, 1978, 582). When we make these corrections we can separate the subjective effect from the quality in the object that is its cause.

When we correct for variations in impressions by reflecting on the influence that particular circumstances can have on these impressions, we are left with a set of judgments which we have every reason to believe are objective. First, the impressions on which we base our judgments are those which are the same in everyone, so that these judgments are intersubjectively valid. Secondly, the judgments that are based on impressions which have been corrected by reflection depend only on two things: on the qualities of the object we are judging, and on universal features of human beings. When this is the case, there is no reason to think that when we purport to judge the qualities of the object on the basis of these corrected impressions, we are not really judging the qualities of the object but are merely reporting facts about ourselves. When, having corrected for all the variations in impressions that are due to particular circumstances, we judge, on the basis of these impressions, that an object is red, we are, in fact, making a judgment about a quality of that object; we are not just reporting something about ourselves. Similarly, when, having corrected for all the variations in impressions that are due to particular circumstances, we judge that a quality is a virtue or that a person is virtuous, we are, in fact, making a judgment about the quality and the person; we are not just reporting something about ourselves (for example, that we approve of such people and qualities). The two kinds of cases are essentially the same.

In order to prevent misunderstandings concerning the nature of the relation between the moral sentiments and virtues and vices, we need only mark the difference between the means by which we judge these qualities and the qualities we judge. The qualities we judge can be characterized without reference to their psychological effects, even though an empirical investigation of the nature of these qualities must proceed from an investigation of the known effects—namely, the moral sentiments—to the unknown cause, namely those features of virtuous things that are the relevant causes of our sentiments of approval. The qualities we

judge on the basis of our impressions are the qualities *of the object* that cause the impressions on which our judgments are based. The case is the same with sensory qualities. If red objects never produced impressions of redness (or even redly-appearings) in us, then, everything else being equal, we should never attribute redness to these objects. This does not mean, however, that red objects are not really red. If we find some set of features that red objects have in common which is the cause of our impressions of redness—whether or not this feature resembles our impressions of redness—we have the only basis we need for attributing redness to the objects or for saying that the objects themselves are red.

Hume examines the bases of our judgments of morality in order to discover the nature of the things we are judging and the connection between things of this sort and our judgments. He discovers a set of things that arouse moral approval which can be characterized without reference to the feeling of moral approval—namely, mental qualities that are useful or agreeable to the person who possesses them or to others. These qualities are objective qualities of the virtuous person; they do not exist merely in the eye of the beholder. We know of them through the moral sentiment of approval because our perception of these qualities causes us to have that sentiment. Vices are mental qualities of persons that are harmful or disagreeable to others or to the person possessed of them. Hume proves that this is the nature of vice by showing that and how such qualities give rise to the moral sentiment of disapproval. Both virtues and vices are judged by means of the moral sentiments, just as qualities such as redness, bitterness, and size are judged by means of sense impressions, but what is judged is an objective quality in all these cases.

It might be objected that if virtue and vice are objective features of persons, then we must be able to make mistakes about them. However, Hume says explicitly that our opinions about morality are “in a great measure infallible” (Hume, 1978, 546).

The distinction of moral good and evil is founded on the pleasure or pain, which results from the view of any sentiment, or character; and as that pleasure or pain cannot be unknown to the person who feels it, it follows, that there is just as much vice or virtue in any character, as every one places in it, and that ‘tis impossible in this particular we can ever be mistaken (Hume, 1978, 546f.)

(Hume adds in a footnote that he will discuss the issue of whether there can be a right and a wrong taste in morals later.)

The fact that we cannot be wrong about whether the view of a particular character or quality gives rise to pain or pleasure does not mean that we cannot go wrong in our particular moral judgments in the same way that we cannot go wrong in our judgments of subjective qualities. It should now be clear that particular judgments of morality can go wrong in a number of ways. (1) We can misinterpret the situation by failing to see that it is one that is indicative of a certain quality in a person. If we do not understand the motive for an action, we will not see the action as indicative of a certain kind of quality. If we mistake the

motive, the action may seem indicative of a different quality than the one the person actually has. Because the moral sentiments arise as a result of our perceptions of qualities in persons, if our perceptions are faulty, the sentiments they give rise to will reveal nothing about the virtue or vice of the person perceived. (2) We can fail to be properly affected by a quality in a person because we fail to sympathize with the person affected by the expression of that quality in a particular case. Such failures could be due to mistaken beliefs (the belief that the person is not a human being like oneself),¹¹ to willfulness, or even to a psychological defect. (There may be people who are not capable of sympathizing with others.) In this kind of case, one's assessment of the person's virtues or vices is faulty because it is not based on a moral sentiment. Strictly speaking, one has not made a *moral* judgment at all. (3) We can fail to assess a person's moral qualities properly by failing to correct for variations in the intensity of feelings due to variations in sympathy. We may overrate a friend's virtue or an enemy's vice. (4) We can fail to appreciate the tendencies of a quality. A person who understands the tendencies of courage—the fact that courageous acts are often quite costly to human beings—will be less impressed by this quality than someone who does not see this. Someone who believes that unquestioning charity has pernicious effects even on the recipients of that charity will not find such charity virtuous. Progress in morals is often a matter of discovering the tendencies of qualities and of learning to distinguish those qualities that really do tend towards the happiness of human beings from those which superficially resemble them but do not have the same tendencies (for example, distinguishing liberal guilt from true kindness).

Most of these mistakes in moral judgments are due exclusively to mistakes concerning matters of fact. (The exception would be the case where someone was incapable of feeling the moral sentiments, but it is not clear that this person would be making moral judgments at all. A person who was not capable of sympathizing with others could repeat the words that report such judgments, but could not make the judgments herself.) When we perceive the situation—including our own places in it—correctly, and judge it on the basis of our moral sentiments, having corrected for variations due to our particular situations, it seems that our judgments cannot be mistaken. In this respect, our moral judgments are like judgments based on sense impressions. Both are different from judgments of subjective qualities because we do not correct for variations in our feelings when we judge subjective qualities. Indeed, in the case of subjective qualities there is no basis for correction. What you feel is all that matters. If a toothache gives you more pain than a slipped disc, then for you the toothache is more painful. In the case of moral judgments, the conditions for correct perception are not as easily satisfied as they are in the case of sense impressions. Much reasoning may be required before we are in a position to judge, and we often go wrong here. We can make mistakes in our moral judgments, and we do both as individuals and as a group. It is even possible that every human being who has ever lived has found a particular quality virtuous when, in fact, that quality was not virtuous. We could

all have been wrong about its tendencies towards the happiness of others. (Whether this is likely is another matter.)

Although I have established that on Hume's theory moral qualities are at least as objective as qualities such as color, heat, and sound, and that we have as much justification to question the correctness of particular moral judgments as we do to question the accuracy of particular judgements of color or temperature or pitch, as well as to attribute these qualities to something other than the person who makes judgments concerning them, I have not addressed the thornier issue of the metaphysical status of these qualities. Hume himself tends to shy away from this issue. He notes the similarity between secondary qualities and moral qualities, and he reports—without committing himself to the view—that modern philosophy denies the reality of secondary qualities, but his response suggests that the metaphysical question is unimportant. In his essay, "The Sceptic," Hume expresses this sentiment as follows.

Were I not afraid of appearing too philosophical, I should remind my reader of that famous doctrine, supposed to be fully proved in modern times, 'That tastes and colours, and all other sensible qualities, lie not in the bodies, but merely in the senses.' The case is the same with beauty and deformity, virtue and vice. This doctrine, however, takes off no more from the reality of the latter qualities, than from that of the former... . Tho' colours were allowed to lie only in the eye, would dyers or painters ever be less regarded or esteemed? There is a sufficient uniformity in the senses and feelings of mankind, to make all these qualities the objects of art and reasoning, and to have the greatest influence on life and manners (Hume, 1898, 210, n. 1, see also Hume, 1978, 469.).

In this paper I will not take up the question whether Hume was a moral realist in any of the senses that are given to this term in contemporary discussions, but I do want to suggest that an adequate answer to this question cannot be given except by a general consideration of Hume's metaphysical views.¹²

We can conclude that, according to Hume, virtues and vices are not merely in the eyes of their beholders, and that moral judgments are not merely subjective and relative. In discovering the objective basis for the distinction we make between virtue and vice, and by explaining how these objective qualities have regular effects on our emotions, Hume has shown that despite the fact that we distinguish virtue and vice by means of moral sentiments, the distinction we make has a basis in reality. Thus, Hume's moral theory shows how we can have it both ways: objectivity with passion.

Notes

¹A version of this paper was presented at the Seventeenth Hume Conference in Canberra, June 1990. I should like to thank those who participated in this conference for their helpful criticisms of that version. I should also like to thank the members of the 1990 NEH Institute, "Hume and the Enlightenment," who also read that version and commented on it extensively.

²Since this paper was written a second edition of Ardal's book has been published. In the Introduction to this edition Ardal repeats and reinforces his point that an understanding of Book II is essential to understanding Hume's moral theory (Ardal, 1989, ix).

³Hume usually uses the terms 'satisfaction' and 'uneasiness' to characterize the moral sentiments (Hume, 1978, 296, 471, 475, 499, and 575). He also calls the moral sentiments "sentiments of approbation and blame" (577, 579, 584; see also 447, 617, 618, 619 and 469). The term 'sentiments of esteem' appears on 610. The sentiment caused by the sight of a virtuous person is called 'delight' on 296, that caused by the sight of a vicious person is called 'disgust' on 581.

⁴Ardal notes this difference between moral sentiments and other indirect passions in Ardal, 1977, 409.

⁵For Hume's analysis of the general structure of pride and humility see Hume, 1978, 277-290; for his analysis of the general structure of love and hatred see 329-332.

⁶See also 348-351 in Book II, where Hume discusses the importance of motives. Norton notes this fact, and refers to a letter where Hume says that he did not make this point clearly enough in the *Treatise*. (See Norton, 1982, 113; the reference is to a letter to Hutcheson, September 17, 1739.) As Norton points out, Hume does make this point more than once. If Hume thinks he did not say it often or clearly enough, we can take that fact as evidence that this claim plays a central role in his account of the moral sentiments.

⁷According to Hume, ideas can be related by resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect. If my analysis of the double relation is correct, then the idea of the woman's kindness must be related to the idea of the woman in one of these ways, presumably through the relation of resemblance. There is, however, another possibility, which I cannot reject out of hand—namely, that the causally relevant idea is D-1' (the idea of the effects of the virtue or vice on some person). This idea would be related to the idea of the virtue or vice in a person via cause and effect. The mind would pass from the idea of the effect (the old man's pleasure) to the idea of its cause (the kindness of the woman). In either case the ideas and impressions necessary to give rise to a moral sentiment by means of a double relation are present.

⁸Hume gives two definitions of virtue which parallel his two definitions of cause in Book I. The relation between these definitions justifies Hume's using either one as suits his purposes. For a discussion of the connection between the subjective and objective definitions of causes see Garrett, 1991. His analysis can be generalized to explain the two definitions of virtue and vice as well.

⁹All human beings resemble each other in that they are human. That is the basis for the extensive sympathy that makes possible general systems of morals (Hume, 1978, 586), but some human beings resemble each other in many other respects. The more closely two people are related by resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect, the easier it is for them to sympathize with each other (Hume, 1978, 317f.).

¹⁰This point was made by Taylor, 1971, and by Stewart, 1976. However, the analyses both Taylor and Stewart give of the role of reason in correcting the sentiments concerns the importance of adopting a general point of view. I think we should distinguish the role of sympathy from the role of reason with respect to the general point of view. Sympathy, not reason, is the most important determinant of the general point of view. One can either view actions and qualities of persons from the point of view of one's own interests or from a general point of view—a point of view which anyone can take and from which the actions and qualities appear the same to everyone. This is the point of view we achieve when we consider the action from the point of view of "those who have any commerce with the person we consider" (Hume, 1978, 583), a point of view that has affective consequences because we are able to sympathize with those persons. Experience or reason may teach us to distinguish the sentiments we have when we adopt this point of view and those we have when we consider only our own and our friends' interests. It may also teach us the advantages of adopting this point of view. Nonetheless, the generality of the point of view is primarily due to the fact that we all can view the action from the same perspective—namely, from the perspective of those who are affected by the person we judge—and feel something in response to this view.

¹¹Hume's analysis of the moral sentiments helps to explain why, when people fail to see other human beings as beings like themselves, they can permit or even perform the most atrocious acts without aversion or remorse. On Hume's analysis of the moral sentiments, a committed Nazi's failure to see that his Jewish victims are human beings like himself would be responsible for his failure to see that his treatment of these victims is morally reprehensible. The fact that he fails to see this does not entail that he is not morally reprehensible. There is a difference between a person's thinking or feeling that he is virtuous and that person's being virtuous.

¹²I discuss these views and some of their implications for Hume's moral theory in Swain, 1991. That paper is primarily concerned with Hume's rejection of the distinction made by the moderns between primary and secondary qualities. Swain 1991a also discusses Hume's scruples about metaphysics, but in connection with his theory of self-identity.

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