

The Philosophical Quarterly

Volume 60 • Number 241 • October 2010

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Hume's Morality: Feeling and Fabrication. BY RACHEL COHON. (Oxford UP, 2008. Pp. viii + 285. Price £39.00.)

Was Hume a Humean about motivation? Was he a non-cognitivist? Did he espouse 'Hume's law'? Rachel Cohon's answer to each of these questions in her new book on Hume's meta-ethics and virtue theory is 'No'.

The discussion is officially divided into two, but happens in three stages. The first explains and undermines the 'common reading' of Hume's meta-ethics. The second stage provides Cohon's interpretation. The third discusses Hume's virtue theory, and argues that the artificial virtues are socially concocted devices for overcoming our natural deficiencies. This last stage contains much of interest for those who want to understand Hume's tricky arguments and more obscure claims concerning the artificial virtues, but because of constraints of space I focus on the first two.

Cohon claims that on the common reading, Hume holds (i) beliefs cannot move us to action – we also need a desire or other conative or affective state [*inertia of belief*]; (ii) moral judgements are not beliefs [non-cognitivism]; (iii) evaluative judgements cannot be inferred or deduced from purely factual premises [Hume's law]. She traces the origin of the common reading to an interpretation of Hume's argument from *Treatise* III i 1: (1) 'morals ... have an influence on the actions and

affections'; (2) 'reason alone ... can never have any such influence' [*inertia of reason*]; (3) 'it follows that [morals] cannot be deriv'd from reason'. The common reading stems from treating this argument as equivalent to (a) moral judgements move us to act; (b) beliefs alone cannot move us to act [*inertia of belief*]; (c) therefore moral judgements are not (mere) beliefs.

Ch. 1 spells out problems which arise from interpreting Hume's argument in this way. One problem is in understanding his representation argument. Hume claims that the representation argument supports (2), but, Cohon argues, it is hard to see how it could support (b), for there is no clear connection between a state's being representational and its lacking causal powers (nor its being non-representational and having causal powers). For this reason, and others which Cohon documents, the common reading does a bad job of making Hume consistent. We should try to do better for Hume before settling for such a reading.

Ch. 2 marks the beginning of Cohon's offensive. She argues that we should resist ascribing the *inertia of belief* thesis to Hume, for he repeatedly allows hedonic beliefs to generate new passions and so 'a hedonic belief is (in the ordinary case) sufficient to initiate a causal chain that terminates in action' (p. 52).

One difficulty for following the dialectic here is that Cohon initially underspecifies her target, the *inertia of belief* thesis (which she claims is *Humeanism about motivation*). Its official presentation is 'Beliefs cannot move us to action; we also need a desire or other conative or affective state' (p. 11). Later, it is presented as the conjunctive claim that 'beliefs ... alone can neither cause any actions directly *nor cause any motivating passions (such as desire or aversion) that might in turn cause action*' (p. 17; my italics). Allowing hedonic beliefs to generate desires or aversions is inconsistent with this second version of the thesis. Nevertheless, someone might interpret the *inertia of belief* thesis, as first stated, as claiming only that every action requires a passion (or that no combination of beliefs alone could suffice to generate an action). Hume's holding *this* would not be undermined by his allowing beliefs to generate *passions* (even passions that subsequently generate actions). So whilst Cohon ably shows that Hume is often read as holding an alternative view of how *passions* are generated, *viz* that hedonic beliefs cannot generate new passions but only redirect pre-existing passions, and she gives a convincing case against that interpretation, this need not undermine the claim that Hume holds the *inertia of belief* thesis as first presented. For Cohon's argument to undermine ascribing the *inertia of belief* thesis to Hume (and thus show that Hume was not a Humean about motivation) we must interpret it in the stronger, later, form, and read Cohon's argument as demonstrating that Hume does not hold the second part of the thesis.

Things are tighter in ch. 3, and this is where the action is in Cohon's quest to overhaul our reading of Hume. She argues that attention to Hume's empiricism shows that Hume's *inertia of reason* (2) is not the same claim as the *inertia of belief* (b). The keystone of her interpretation is taking Hume's talk of 'Reason' to refer to *reasoning*, the process of comparing perceptions to find relations among them. So when Hume claims that reason *alone* has no influence on actions and affections he is not delimiting the causal powers of *beliefs*, as the common reading supposes, but drawing the consequences of his conception of reasoning. The process of reasoning

is just the comparing of perceptions and its only possible output is the enlivening of an idea, so it cannot produce passions or actions. Thus anything that generates actions or passions is distinct from *reasoning*.

Continuing this process-interpretation, Cohon claims that we should take Hume's talk of moral *distinctions* to refer to processes of *discriminating*, e.g., virtue and vice. So when Hume claims that 'moral distinctions are not deriv'd from reason', he means that the process of distinguishing virtue and vice is distinct from reasoning. They are distinct because one process, moral distinguishing, produces passions and actions, something that reasoning (alone) cannot do.

Ch. 4 supplies (Cohon's) Hume's positive account of moral distinctions, or *discriminations* between virtue and vice, and an account of the nature of these properties. Compared with the space devoted to undermining the common reading, this is slightly compressed (though some of the issues have arisen earlier). Cohon's 'moral sensing' interpretation depicts Hume as a cognitivist anti-realist who holds that moral properties are 'reaction-dependent properties: they depend for their existence on the emotional responses of sensitive beings' (p. 100). Thus Hume's claims that virtue and vice, like sounds, colours, heat and cold, 'are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind', and that this discovery is an advancement, are not a profession of non-cognitivism (nor an error theory). For Hume thinks that virtue and vice are real, but that philosophy reveals to us that like other secondary qualities, they are response-dependent. Cohon's most interesting claim here is that Hume held the view that we do not detect virtue and vice through reason (of course): we sense them, and thus *feel* the difference between them.

Ch. 5 is focused on Hume's remarks about the 'steady and general' point of view. What exercises Cohon is to ensure first that Hume's claims about the general point of view do not enable *reason(ing)* to detect virtue and vice (which it could if moral evaluations were judgements of what we would be caused to feel in certain circumstances), and secondly that his claims that we adopt this point of view to 'correct' our sentiments are consistent with his view of sentiments as non-representational. She provides an understanding of Hume's remarks which meshes with her interpretation generally, although because there is comparatively little text to draw upon here, it is harder to judge whether she is giving us what Hume claimed or what he could consistently have claimed.

I have mentioned a fraction of the issues Cohon covers. She provides a plausible account of Hume's views which makes him a more consistent and idiosyncratic meta-ethicist than previously supposed. The book's greatest virtue is its scrupulous fairness. Cohon provides a convincing case for her interpretation, but helpfully explains which passages support the common reading and make most trouble for hers. The position she defends and the arguments she deploys should be of interest to anyone interested in Hume's ethics and sentimentalist views generally. It is an excellent addition to the recent flurry of first-rate Hume scholarship, and even those unconvinced by Cohon's interpretation will agree that it will yield progress in understanding Hume.

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