Hume, teleology and the 'science of man'

Lorenzo Greco and Dan O'Brien

Published in:

Teleology and modernity [ISBN: 9780815351030] edited by William Gibson, Dan O'Brien, Marius Turda (Routledge, 2019).

There are various forms of teleological thinking central to debates in the early modern and modern periods, debates in which David Hume (1711–1776) is a key figure. In the first section, we shall introduce three levels at which teleological considerations have been incorporated into philosophical accounts of man and nature, and sketch Hume's criticisms of these approaches. In the second section, we turn to Hume's non-teleological 'science of man'. In the third section, we show how Hume has an account of human flourishing thatis not dependent on teleology. In the fourth section, we shall speculate as to the relation between Hume's account of human nature and contemporary evolutionary accounts of morality and reasoning.

Teleology: metaphysical, Christian, political

There are distinct domains or ways of thinking of reality within which teleology can be seen as relevant, that is, with respect to the causal interaction between ordinary objects in the world, with respect to individuals and with respect to society and political progress. In this section, we shall sketch teleological accounts of these kinds in order to clarify what is meant by teleology and the kinds of ways it has been seen as playing a role in nature. We shall also note Hume's rejection of all such accounts.

First, there is the Aristotelian notion of final causes. A final cause is the end-point towards which things are directed. These are mind-independent features of the natural order. The final cause is the 'cause of causes'. As Boulter describes it, a final cause is 'that which causes the efficient cause of X to bring about *this* arrangement in the stuff of X rather than some other arrangement'.[1] Hume rejects this Aristotelian framework: '[A]ll causes are of the same kind, and . . . there is no foundation for that distinction, which we sometimes make betwixt efficient causes, and formal, and material . . . and final causes.'[2] Further, the one kind of cause that remains is not easily identifiable with any of those posited by Aristotle. Both our everyday beliefs about the

causal structure of the world and our causal science are derived from the way we project experienced regularities onto the world and not from knowledge of mind-independent features of the natural order.

Second, there is the notion of the teleology of individuals and, for Christians, the teleology of a person – the end-point at which they are directed – is, all being well, eternal life and salvation. Hume has no truck with such thinking, and this is agreed upon even by those who do not interpret Hume as a hardline atheist. Harris, in his recent intellectual biography, takes Hume as having 'a maximally detached and disengaged point of view' with respect to religion, considering it with 'ruthless impartiality, as if describing nothing more emotionally engaging than some bizarre belief systems so long extinct as to be bound to be all but unintelligible to the reader'.[3] A persuasive case is made that there was 'little genuine intellectual affinity between Hume and the *philosophes*',[4] bristly atheists such as Diderot and d'Alembert whom Hume met in Paris. Hume was sceptical that writers could change and improve the world, history giving us 'no reason to believe that philosophy might be able to do anything at all to weaken the hold of religion on the vast majority of people'.[5] He preferred the company of moderate Scottish Presbyterians such as Robert Wallace, Thomas Reid and George Campbell. Harris sees his interpretation as a corrective to the irreligious picture of Hume in which he is portrayed as *The Great Infidel* (the title of Graham's 2006 biography).[6] The latter is the standard line and it has been developed by, amongst others, Herdt, Bailey and O'Brien, and Rus- sell.[7] However, whichever interpretation one favours, all agree that Hume had no personal faith; he saw no positive connection between religious belief and morality, and, in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*,[8] the case for theism 'crumbles almost into nothing under rational examination'.[9]

Hume does, though, make the surprising claim in his essay, 'Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth', that 'it is vain to think that any free government will ever have security or stability' without an established Church and clergy.[10] However, even if this is a sincere claim, it is not one derived from ideological commitment or teleological claims concerning an inevitable future political state. That religion may have played a role in stabilising society at points in history is a highly contingent historical claim and does not in any way legitimise the tenets of particular historically-situated religions. This is confirmed by Hume's tongue-in-cheek suggestion that clerics should be paid by the state – not to cement their legitimacy – but in order to 'bribe them to indolence'.[11] Given that religion exists, it would be dangerous to suppress it. We should instead buffer religious fanaticism with state-funded moderates. As Baier says, 'A less religious justification for establishing religion could scarcely be imagined.'[12]

Harris is right that Hume often meets religion with humour rather than anger or frustration, but the humour is often cutting, mocking and acerbic, particularly so in the *History of England*. Harris even agrees with Carlyle, a friend of Hume's, that Hume is 'by no means an atheist'.[13] It is not completely

clear, though, why this is denied. Part of the reason is that Hume should not be seen as an atheist in the eighteenth-century context given that this would suggest a dogmatic commitment to some kind of naturalistic metaphysical view of reality, which, arguably, is inconsistent with Hume's scepticism. Harris seems to suggest, though, that Hume is also not an atheist in today's sense. If so, then his characterisation of contemporary atheism is unduly narrow. It may be true that the revolutionary zeal and dogmatism of the *philosophes* was not to Hume's taste, nor would be the temperamentally-akin New Atheism of today. It may also be true that he preferred to talk about politics and economics rather than religion, but none of this undermines his credentials as a certain kind of atheist: one who is non-dogmatic, tactful with friends whose deeply held commitments are different to his own, perhaps at times weary of the fight and sceptical of any lasting disintegration of religion, but one who, nevertheless, wielded an armoury of argument and biting humour against organised religion in all its forms and thus against teleology in Christian form.

Third, teleology can be applied at the level of the nation. Contemporaries of Hume typically answered questions concerning the relationship between liberty and authority by appealing to inalienable rights – Tories favouring those of the monarch, while Whigs sought a return to ancient freedoms possessed before the Norman conquest. Hume thought such a 'prelapsarian' state mythical: 'There had been no freedom worth the name in the Saxon period' and the 'Magna Carta was by no means a codification of ancient English liberties'.[14] The latter had merely codified a deal between the barons and the king, and, as a side-effect, the populace had benefitted. 'English history was a story of continual change, not of a return to first principles'[15]: a result of complex vying for power between the monarchy, nobility and people. Further, any attempt to radically change the political order is more than likely to fail and cause harm. Cromwell's republic was 'a wild aberration fuelled largely by religious fanaticism',[16] and it ended up achieving nothing. Hume took the side of the King in the civil war, but this was only on pragmatic grounds; it did not reflect his commitment to Tory ideology. 'What mattered in government was stability, order, and the protection of rights of property' and the status quo generally maintains these better than violent upheaval.[17] Hume, Harris argues, 'broke altogether with the tradition of English historiography. He was asserting, in effect, that the past had no political significance Politically speaking, it was
the present, and the future, that mattered'[18] – a future, though, that was open; one that was not always in the process of being borne back into a past of 'first principles', be they Tory or Whig.

In this chapter, though, we shall not focus on these particular metaphysical, theological and political issues, but rather on human nature and morality, realms that resisted the early modern move away from teleology towards naturalistic explanation. Locke and Hutcheson, for example, both take important steps towards a fully naturalistic account of human nature and morality, but they do not jettison all teleological elements. For Hutcheson,

the moral distinctions we draw are based on feelings or 'natural affections' of approval and disapproval, and not on eternal moral truths that can be discerned by reason alone.[19] Hutcheson thus grounds morality in human nature, a nature that should be investigated empirically. Such investigation, though, reveals the divine origin of our natural sentiments and thus its teleological dimension. We agree with each other on what is virtuous, and these hard-wired affective responses lead to us acting in ways that are beneficial to ourselves and to others. Such harmony cannot be down to chance, but rather to the design of a benevolent creator: 'This account of Affections will . . . prepare the way for discerning considerable Evidences for the *Goodness of the Deity*, from the Constitution of our Nature.'[20] Hume concurs with the empirical approach that Hutcheson takes to morality and with his emphasis on the importance of the natural affections or 'moral sentiments', but he takes the extra step and, as noted by Taylor, he 'effectively displaces the teleological explanations so prevalent even in the works of those he lauded, such as Locke, Butler, and Hutcheson'.[21] Hume's firm rejection of teleology is confirmed in a 1739 letter to Hutcheson, in which, it is thought, Hume is responding to Hutcheson's criticisms of the account of morality presented in a draft manuscript of the *Treatise*.[22] In this letter Hume says

> I cannot agree to your Sense of Natural. 'Tis founded on final Causes; which is a Consideration, that appears to me pretty uncertain & unphilosophical. For pray, what is the End of Man? Is he created for Happiness or for Virtue? For this Life or for the next? For himself or for his Maker? Your Definition of Natural depends upon solving these Questions, which are endless, & quite wide of my Purpose.[23]

It is upon Hume's non-teleological account of human nature that the next section begins to focus.

The science of man

In the Introduction to the *Treatise*, Hume tells us that he wants to develop a 'science of man'.[24] Such a science is also presented in the *Abstract* of the *Treatise* and in Section 1 of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.[25] We shall spell out its methodological aspects, and then the conception of human nature to which it leads.

Hume argues that the science of man encompasses all the other sciences. It is *foundational* in character: ''Tis evident, that all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature; and that however wide any of them may seem to run from it, they still return back by one passage or another.'[26] When he says 'all the sciences', he means *all* of them, not just those enterprises that might appear to be closer to the operations of human nature, such as morality, literary and artistic criticism and politics. Thus:

> Even *Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Natural Religion*, are in some measure dependent on the science of Man; since they lie under cognizance

> of men, and are judged of by their power and faculties.[27]

The method used by Hume to develop his science of man is strictly empirical, the subtitle of the *Treatise* being 'An Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects'. At the core of this method there is 'experience and observation',[28] and by relying on these, Hume follows in the footsteps of Francis Bacon, John Locke, Lord Shaftesbury, Bernard Mandeville, Francis Hutcheson, Joseph Butler and Isaac Newton. He talks with 'contempt of hypotheses', that is, of any explanation that is advanced before and independently of experiential confirmation.[29]

By following this method, it becomes possible to reduce the science of man to a small number of principles, in the same way as the Newtonian method arrives at a set of principles in natural philosophy:

> But 'tis at least worth while to try if the science of *man* will not admit of the same accuracy which several parts of natural philosophy are found susceptible of. There seems to be all the reason in the world to imagine that it may be carried to the greatest degree of exactness. If, in examining several phaenomena, we find that they resolve themselves into one common principle, and can trace this principle into another, we shall at last arrive at those few simple principles, on which all the rest depend.[30]

Hume 'proposes to anatomize human nature in a regular manner, and promises to draw no conclusions but where he is authorized by experience'.[31] The result is an 'anatomy' of human nature that results in a kind of 'mental geography'.[32] Such a study is not an easy task. This is because, to begin with, 'we ourselves are not only the beings, that reason, but also one of the objects, concerning which we reason'.[33] Thus, performing experiments in this case is very different from the way we do this with all the other sciences, where '[w]hen I am at a loss to know the effects of one body upon another in any situation, I need only put them in that situation, and observe the results from it'. We cannot readily do this with 'moral subjects'. The experiments that the scientist of human nature can hope to examine are of a very different sort:

> We must . . . glean up our experiments in this science from a cautious observation of human life, and take them as they appear in the common course of the world, by men's behaviour in company, in affairs, and in their pleasures.[34]

What results from this is a notion of human nature that incorporates our social relations with each other. If one looks to the *Treatise*, only Book 1, 'Of the Understanding', is devoted to the operations of the individual mind, and this only in part. Book 2 is on the passions, while Book 3 focuses on ethical matters. Human beings are not isolated minds, that can be seen as independent from the actions that these embodied minds perform and the social relations in which they take part. The science of man thus goes beyond the mere analysis of mind.

This becomes even clearer in Section 1 of the first *Enquiry*. There, Hume observes that philosophers can be anatomists or painters. While the painter 'employs all the richest colours of his art, and gives his figures the most graceful and engaging airs', hence promoting virtue and discouraging vice, the anatomist provides the painter with a detailed examination of

> the inward structure of the human body, the position of the muscles, the fabric of the bones, and the use and figure of every part and organ. Accuracy is, in every case, advantageous to beauty, and just reasoning to delicate sentiment. In vain would we exalt the one by depreciating the other.[35]

The job of the anatomist is to inquire into 'the abstruse philosophy',[36] so as to find the first principles of human nature, and thus come

> to know the different operations of the mind, to separate them from each other, to class them under their proper heads, and to correct all that seeming disorder, in which they lie involved, when made the object of reflexion and enquiry.[37]

But again, as was the case in the *Treatise*, in the first *Enquiry* the objects of this examination are presented as always dependent on the reality in which they act and live: 'Man is a sociable, no less than a reasonable being. Man is also an
active being.'[38] The 'spirit of accuracy' that distinguishes the anatomist's conduct is always 'subservient to the interests of society',[39] and the science of man would be hamstrung without the perspectives of both the anatomist and the painter. Therefore, the scientist of human nature, to properly realise her goal – that is, to offer a complete description of human nature – should listen to both the anatomist and the painter, and see the object of her study as a creature that thinks but also feels and acts together with other people:

> Indulge your passion for science, says she [nature], but let your science be human, and such as may have a direct reference to action and society. . . Be a philosopher; but, amidst all your philosophy, be still a man.[40]

Let us now, as it were, put some flesh on Hume's account of human nature: let us consider the content that emerges from the survey of human beings seen 'in company, in affairs, and in their pleasures'. This consists of certain consistent features of human behaviour, those directly observable, and those that have revealed themselves in the course of human affairs as they unfold throughout history. Direct observation and the study of history disclose a basic uniformity in human motives, which allows us to predict human conduct to a high degree of accuracy:

> Ambition, avarice, self-love, vanity, friendship, generosity, public spirit; these passions, mixed in various degrees, and distributed through society, have

> been, from the beginning of the world, and still are, the source of all the actions and the enterprizes, which have ever been observed among mankind.

Moreover, observation and history permit us to compare different social situations distant in space and time, and note similarities between them:

> Would you know the sentiments, inclinations, and course of life of the greeks and romans? Study well the temper and actions of the french and english: You cannot be much mistaken in transferring to the former *most* of the observations, which you have made with regard to the latter. Mankind are so much the same, in all times and places, that history informs us of nothing new or strange in this particular.[41]

Hume resumes this comparison between Roman and Greek societies, on the one hand, and French and English ones, on the other, in *A Dialogue*, and this seems to illustrate the constancy of human nature notwithstanding the multiplicity of its manifestations:

> The Rhine flows north, the Rhone south; yet both spring from the *same* mountain, and are also actuated, in their opposite directions, by the *same* principle of gravity. The different inclinations of the ground, on which they run, cause all the difference of their courses.[42]

There are, though, variations that can be observed in the behaviour of individuals from one society to another, and there is some debate as to whether Hume offers an account of human nature that is independent of the context in which it plays out. Different weight has been attributed by Hume scholars to social context in determining the regularities in human nature. Cohen, Walsh and Berry, for example, favour an account in which Hume elaborates a theory of human nature that, despite being given in history and in specific contexts, is, nonetheless, not reducible to these.[43] Walsh, for example, remarks that 'Hume proposes to treat these differences as supervenient upon, or per- haps as specifications of, a common human nature which we all share'.[44] In contrast, according to Forbes, Hume upholds a form of 'sociological relativism' whereby

> [t]he universal principles are to be regarded as abstractions from the concrete variety of human (= social) experience; Hume's 'general psychology' is concerned with the function and mechanism, not the content of the mind, which is various and supplied by social and historical circumstances.[45]

However, for our purposes, we need not make a stand on this issue. The key claim is that human nature – be it context-dependent or context-independent – is a contingent fact about human beings that is revealed through history and through observation of our social relations with others. It is not, as it was

for other naturalistically minded thinkers of the early modern period, the product of a divine creator and his purposes, whatever they may be.

Human flourishing, teleology and Humean ends

We have seen how Hume arrives at his account of human nature by empirical and historical means. In this section, we shall distinguish his approach from a priori conceptions of human nature, those grounded in teleologically-based accounts of what it is for individuals and for societies to flourish.

For Hume, we must remain satisfied with what experience teaches us, without concerning ourselves with what is beyond the limits of experience – that is, we must accept the 'impossibility of explaining ultimate principles'.[46] It is, though, 'a satisfaction to go as far as our faculties will allow us'.[47] As he claims in the Introduction to the *Treatise*:

> [I]t [is] . . . impossible to form any notion of its [the mind's] powers and qualities otherwise than from careful and exact experiments, and the observation of those particular effects, which result from its different circumstances and situations. And tho' we must endeavour to render all our principles as universal as possible, by tracing up our experiments to the utmost, and explaining all effects from the simplest and fewest causes, 'tis still certain we cannot go beyond experience; and any hypothesis, that pretends to discover the ultimate original qualities of human nature, ought at first to be rejected as presumptuous and chimerical.[48]

Not only the science of man, but all the other sciences, and all the arts, cannot 'go beyond experience, or establish any principles which are not founded on that authority'.[49] Experience is the starting point for our inquiries into human nature. At the same time, experience appears to be the extreme limit within which the notion of human nature can have meaning:

> When we see, that we have arrived at the utmost extent of human reason, we sit down contented; tho' we be perfectly satisfied in the main of our ignorance, and perceive that we can give no reason for our most general and most refined principles, beside our experience of their reality.[50]

Therefore, the principles of the science of human nature are established on the basis of an examination of human affairs, and these same principles are then applied to understand the concrete phenomena of human life, in which they are adapted to the variety of circumstances in which human life expresses itself. Within this picture, Hume's conception of human nature is strictly devoid of any teleology: all our conclusions regarding human nature are derived from observation, and do not depend on ideas about how human nature *should* be framed. Considerations derived from experience do not allow us to take for

granted any final end, nor do they say anything of any alleged essence of human nature.

Hume's approach can thus be contrasted with a neo-Aristotelian strategy, such as that of Philippa Foot, one in which it is possible to isolate 'Aristotelian categoricals', that is, teleological judgments that identify what is naturally good or bad for a certain species. Aristotelian categoricals reveal themselves in experience; even so, they represent the a priori conditions that make species flourish: 'Part of what distinguishes an Aristotelian categorical from a mere statistical proposition about some or most or all the members of a kind of living thing is the fact that it relates to the teleology of the species.'[51]

Conversely, for Hume, any such views concerning human flourishing are generalisations only, drawn from observation of constancy in people's conduct as they behave in different situations, in different contexts and at different times. When it comes to determine Aristotelian categoricals for humans, Foot lists the virtues as an integral part of the definition of human nature and of what makes it thrive; a good human being is someone who acts according to the virtues, since it is these that specify the *telos* of human beings. On the contrary, for Hume, what we observe regarding human conduct does not tell us anything regarding the *telos* of human nature; we cannot say what our virtuous actions *are for*, or what our lives as a whole *are for*, either in terms of the design plan of a benevolent creator or in terms of Aristotelian categoricals.

That is not to say, though, that Hume does not provide an account of what it is for humans to flourish, for them to be, in a non-teleological sense, doing well. Empirically speaking, it is possible to register what is pleasant and what is painful to humans, and thus to derive principles to determine what is good or bad for them – such principles being 'inseparable from our make and constitution'.[52] Specifically, Hume argues that human beings appreciate, and hence find virtuous, what is immediately agreeable or what is useful to themselves or to others. Conversely, they are averse to, and hence find vicious, what is immedi- ately disagreeable or disadvantageous to themselves or to others.[53] These criteria are derived from experience and, in turn, when applied to human conduct, universally determine what is virtuous or vicious to human beings. Hume can thus criticise certain ways of living that have characterised particular periods in history. This is what he says, for example, regarding the Christian or 'monkish virtues' of '[c]elibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, [and] solitude':

> [f]or what reason are they every where rejected by men of sense, but because they serve to no manner of purpose; neither advance a man's for- tune in the world, nor render him a more valuable member of society; neither qualify him for the entertainment of company, nor encrease his power of self-enjoyment? We observe, on the contrary, that they cross all these desirable ends; stupify the understanding and harden the heart, obscure the fancy and sour the temper.

As such forms of behaviour are not conducive to human flourishing, we 'justly . . . transfer them to the opposite column, and place them in the catalogue of vices'. Hume ends this polemic with a cutting attack on sainthood:

> A gloomy, hair-brained enthusiast, after his death, may have a place in the calendar; but will scarcely ever be admitted, when alive, into intimacy and society, except by those who are as delirious and dismal as himself.[54]

Hume, therefore, offers an account of what is natural for human beings that bears both a descriptive and a prescriptive valence. By looking at how human beings have behaved in the course of their history, they can be described as approving of what is agreeable or useful to themselves or to other people. This also represents a normative measure to judge what is good or bad for them,[55] allowing Hume to conceive a 'dynamic or progressive' engine operating within human relations, thus admitting the possibility of the correction of human behaviour due to experience and reasoning.[56] This is in contrast to 'artificial systems' such as those which incorporate the monkish virtues, in that these are characterised by a static and definitive conception of human life that rejects at the outset any possibility of correction via experience and reasoning.[57]

What is crucial, however, is that this normative measure does not reflect any final end for human beings that can be stated prior to experience and that unfurls, pre-ordained, through history. If human beings can be described as appreciating what is agreeable or useful – and such appreciation of virtue can be seen to progress and develop – this is the result of empirical observation that does not presuppose any teleology in Hume's approach.

A final speculation: Hume and Darwinian teleology

Hume thus rejects Aristotelian, scholastic and Christian notions of teleology, in favour of the science of man or what is today called naturalism. Such an approach is now mainstream, although, as we have seen, there are exceptions such as Foot.[58] There remains, though, a respectable form of teleology in con- temporary philosophy, one most prominent in teleological accounts of cognition and morality. This is where teleology is cashed out in evolutionary terms. In this final section we shall, anachronistically of course, speculate concerning what Hume's attitude to such teleology would be. Such speculation will clarify both what is distinctive about Hume's account of human nature, and also certain claims concerning the historical importance and relevance of Hume to contemporary naturalism. This, for example, is what I said in the *Reader's Guide to Hume's Enquiry*:

> Cognitive science is now an interdisciplinary research programme that brings together workers in psychology, computer science, neurophysiology, linguistics, evolutionary biology and philosophy. . . .

> [Hume] is an important precursor to this whole movement. It is not too fanciful to claim that Hume would have looked very favourably on this modern approach to the mind, and, if he were around today, one can easily see him as a director of a cognitive science programme rather than as a professor of metaphysics or traditional epistemology [i]t is not hard to imagine Hume embracing a Darwinian evolutionary account of life and of the mind.[59]

In one sense, this is uncontroversial. Given his account of animal cognition, Hume would surely have accepted an evolutionary account of the origin of man. Traditionally, humans were seen to hold a special place in the natural order of things, a place higher than that of animals. Some philosophers have claimed that this is because we have a kind of insight into the nature of the world that animals lack. Through a priori reasoning alone we can come to know truths about the nature of the world: we can know, for example, that every event has a cause, and that God exists. Such insight is a product of our 'Understanding' or 'Reason', and, as Locke puts it, 'it is the *Understanding* that sets Man above the rest of sensible Beings, and gives him all the Advantage and Dominion which he has over them.'[60] Such powers of reasoning place us above animals and nearer to God in the natural order.[61]

Such an elevated conception of human nature is the target of Hume's science of man. We do not have rational insight into the essential nature of the world. Such God-like insight is replaced by the kind of processes that also govern animal thinking. Hume argues by analogy. Animal behaviour is similar to our own in various ways, and such similarities suggest that animals have certain experiences and ways of thinking in common with man.

> No truth appears to me more evident, than that the beasts are endowed with thought and reason as well as men. The arguments are in this case so obvious, that they never escape the most stupid and ignorant.[62]

Hume does, however, acknowledge that there are certain differences between human and animal thought. Human thought is unique in that it turns to questions of morality, law and religion. Later philosophers have come to focus on man's linguistic abilities, and it is these that enable our thought to be more sophisticated. Hume does not consider this route, although he does note that testimony from books and conversation enlarges our experience and thus enables us to have thoughts that would be beyond an isolated individual (or a non-linguistic animal). He also suggests other naturalistic explanations for differences between animal and human thinking. First, cognitive abilities vary between people – and between people and animals – because there are differences in powers of attention and memory, and these differences, in turn, lead to differences in reasoning capacity. Second, 'larger' minds can more easily think about complex systems of objects and pursue longer chains of causal reasoning. For Hume, similar quantitative differences between the cognitive powers of men and animals explain why

our thinking is capable of more complex operations.[63] Nevertheless, the suggestion here is that Hume would likely be conducive to Darwinian developments – a century later – given his views on the continuity between animal and human thought.[64]

However, contemporary teleological theories of mental content do not simply claim that human cognitive processes are the product of natural selection. They go further, with the nature of mental content and its normative dimension defined in evolutionary terms: (very roughly) my belief has the content *that the sky is blue* because believing the sky is blue when the sky is indeed blue has given our ancestors a survival advantage and thus the cognitive structures that enable us to have such thoughts have been selected for.[65] Here, though, speculations concerning whether Hume would accept such an account are stretched to the limit, given his fundamentally distinct account of mental content and his allegiance to the idea theory. It may, though, be instructive to consider teleological accounts of reasoning rather than of propositional content. Certain forms of reasoning are seen as good and others as bad and this distinction can be grounded in evolutionary terms. Good reasoning is that which has contributed to our biological fitness, the mechanisms for which thus selected for and inherited. Normativity, as it were, comes for free with a naturalistic, evolutionary account of the function of mental states.[66]

Speculation concerning whether Hume would embrace such an account of how good reasoning (such as inductive inference) can be distinguished from bad (such as indoctrination) is not so stretched given such a distinction is right at the heart of the tension between Hume's scepticism and naturalism. His sceptical arguments appear to undermine *all* forms of reasoning, yet, in the context of the discussion of miracles and elsewhere, inductive reasoning is recommended and taken to be 'wise'.[67] The coherence of his position is not obvious since his scepticism would appear to undermine the distinction between good and bad forms of reasoning (to which he does seem to be committed). However, here is one way to navigate this most central and contentious issue of Hume interpretation. Scepticism, for Hume, has an epistemic role. As Falkenstein puts it: 'For Hume, an encounter with skeptical arguments diminishes the vivacity of all of our ideas, but certain beliefs (those originating from causes that we consider to be legitimate) are better able to recover from the blow.'[68] As scepticism dims or extinguishes the products of the various mechanisms of belief acquisition – those involving, for example, indoctrination and faith – the force or vivacity derived from causal reasoning can shine through. Such reasoning applied to the beaks of finches, the fossil record and the genomes of populations of fruit flies inexorably leads to the belief in evolution by natural selection. Such belief can then be applied to what is today called the problem of normativity, and inductive reasoning can then be seen as justified since it is the product of natural selection. (Our fictional Hume, as head of his cognitive science programme, relieved that his youthful philosophical doubts are unfounded.)

However, something here doesn't sit well. First, we should remember the depth of Hume's scepticism: it concerns the justifiedness of belief in the

external world, one's enduring personhood and the soundness of both inductive and deductive reasoning.[69] Hume's solution to scepticism, whatever that may be, must come before – must justify – belief in evolution, rather than the belief in evolution grounding his solution to scepticism. His account of normativity has to justify beliefs in the external world and inductive reasoning, whereas the justification of such beliefs and forms of reasoning is presupposed by science. Recall the earlier metaphor: scepticism dims the lights on poor forms of reasoning. Imagine them going down . . . not smoothly, as one might turn a dimmer switch, but patchily, as lights might go out in a theatre after a show, first the stalls, then the orchestra pit, then the gods. These areas of the theatre correspond to different forms of reasoning, with the individual seats in these areas corresponding to specific beliefs arrived at via these forms of reasoning: the stalls perhaps comprising beliefs that are the result of indoctrination, the gods, those arrived at by faith alone. When all the lights go out, though, it's not completely dark . . . the red exit lights remain: causal reasoning the exit from scepticism. It is from this red light that good scientific reasoning develops, but the first flicker must itself be justified by something more fundamental, and not the blaze of scientific reasoning that will ultimately result.

Evolutionary considerations have also been brought to bear on morality and moral theory. Joyce and Greene, for example, argue that moral thinking aids cooperation and therefore survival.[70] This is, therefore, the function of morality – this is what it is *for*. Again, in one sense it's plausible that our fictional Hume would agree that the psychological mechanisms involved in moral thinking are the product of natural selection.[71] However, for Hume, the normativity constitutive of morality is grounded in feelings of approval felt from the com- mon point of view, those we appreciate via sympathy.[72] That we have such sympathetic mechanisms is the key thing, whether or not such mechanisms are the result of evolution. The normative element is supplied by the point of view afforded by the mechanism of sympathy, not by the origin of this mechanism. The practice of morality may help explain our survival, but we suspect that Hume would baulk at the suggestion that this is what morality is *for*. Such a way of putting it smacks too much of the kinds of teleological thinking at which his science of man is aimed.

In this chapter, we have examined the notion of teleology in relation to Hume. After distinguishing certain metaphysical, Christian and political senses of tele- ology, we turned to Hume's empirical science of man and clarified how it is opposed to teleological explanations of the workings of human nature. Not- withstanding Hume's rejection of teleology, we have argued that he upholds a form of human flourishing which is in line with his empirical approach. We concluded by considering whether Hume would embrace contemporary teleological accounts of cognition and morality. We expect Hume would have probably been sympathetic towards Darwinism, but that he would have rejected the kind of normativity and teleological claims that some derive from it.

Notes

1 Boulter, 'Can the Sciences Do Without Final Causes?' (Chapter 7 in this volume), p. 135.
2 D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. D. F. Norton and M. J. Norton, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 [first published 1739–1740], 1.3.14.32.
3 J. Harris, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 22 and 343. The discussion in this section is a development of thoughts first presented in D. O'Brien, 'Review of J. Harris, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography*,' *History of Political Thought*, 38(2), 2017, pp. 371–81.
4 Harris, *Hume*, p. 414.
5 Harris, *Hume*, p. 22.
6 R. Graham, *The Great Infidel: A Life of David Hume*, East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2004.
7 J. Herdt, *Religion and Faction in Hume's Moral Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; A. Bailey and D. O'Brien, *Hume's Critique of Religion: Sick Men's Dreams*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2013; P. Russell, *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise: Skepticism, Naturalism, and Irreligion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
8 D. Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. N. Kemp Smith, Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1947 [first published 1779].
9 Harris, *Hume*, p. 447.
10 D. Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. E. F. Miller, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund Press, 1987 [first published 1741].
11 D. Hume, *History of England: From the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, 6 vols, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund Press, 1983 [first published 1778], vol. 3, p. 136.
12 A. Baier, *Death and Character: Further Reflections on Hume*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008, p. 92.
13 Harris, *Hume*, p. 569, n. 193.
14 Harris, *Hume*, pp. 388 and 397.
15 Harris, *Hume*, p. 389.
16 Harris, *Hume*, p. 335.
17 Harris, *Hume*, p. 320.
18 Harris, *Hume*, p. 406.
19 For the move from moral rationalism to moral sentimentalism, pursued in their different ways by Hutcheson and Hume, see M. B. Gill, *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
20 F. Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Conduct of the Passions and Affections with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, London: J. Darby, 1728, p. 86. God plays an analogous role in the moral theories of Adam Smith and Shaftesbury. See A. Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976 [first published 1759]; A.A.C. Shaftesbury, *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue, or Merit*, ed. D. Walford, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977 [first published 1699].
21 J. Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects: Passions, Sympathy, and Society in Hume's Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 2.
22 'Natural', for Hutcheson, means created by God – virtue thus God-given and natu- ral. Hume questions this, claiming ''Tis impossible . . . that the character of natural and unnatural can ever, in any sense, mark the boundaries of vice and virtue' (*Treatise*, 3.1.2.10). Hume observes that both virtue and vice are natural, as opposed to supernatu- ral or miraculous, and that perhaps vice has more claim to be called natural in the sense of usual or common.
23 D. Hume, *Letters of David Hume*, ed. J.Y.T. Greig, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932, vol. 1, p. 33.
24 Hume, *Treatise*, Intro., p. 4.
25 D. Hume, *An Abstract of a Book Lately Published; Entitled, a Treatise of Human Nature*, reprinted in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. D. F. Norton and M. J. Norton, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 [1739–1740]; D. Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human*

Understanding, ed. T. L. Beauchamp, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 [first published 1772].

26 Hume, *Treatise*, Intro., p. 4.
27 Hume, *Treatise*, Intro., p. 4.
28 Hume, *Treatise*, Intro., p. 7.
29 Hume, *Abstract*, p. 2.
30 Hume, *Abstract*, p. 1.
31 Hume, *Abstract*, p. 2.
32 Hume, *Human Understanding*, 1.13.
33 Hume, *Treatise*, Intro., p. 4.
34 Hume, *Treatise*, Intro., p. 10.
35 Hume, *Human Understanding*, 1.8.
36 Hume, *Human Understanding*, 1.3.
37 Hume, *Human Understanding*, 1.13.
38 Hume, *Human Understanding*, 1.6.
39 Hume, *Human Understanding*, 1.9.
40 Hume, *Human Understanding*, 1.6.
41 Hume, *Human Understanding*, 8.7. See also Hume, *Treatise*, 2.1.11.5.
42 D. Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. T. L. Beauchamp, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998 [first established 1751], *A Dialogue*, 2.5.
43 A. Cohen, 'In Defence of Hume's Historical Method', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 13, 2005, pp. 489–502; W.H. Walsh, 'The Constancy of Human Nature', in H. D. Lewis (ed.), *Contemporary British Philosophy: Personal Statements: Fourth Series*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1976, pp. 274–91; C. J. Berry, *Hume, Hegel, and Human Nature*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982. See also D. W. Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, Chapter 8.
44 Walsh, 'Constancy', p. 276.
45 D. Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975, p. 119. See also R. Dees, 'Hume and the Contexts of Politics', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 30, 1992, pp. 219–42.
46 Hume, *Treatise*, Intro., p. 10.
47 Hume, *Abstract*, p. 1.
48 Hume, *Treatise*, Intro., p. 8.
49 Hume, *Treatise*, Intro., p. 10.
50 Hume, *Treatise*, Intro., p. 9.
51 P. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001, p. 33.
52 Hume, *Principles of Morals*, 6.3n26.
53 For further discussion of Hume's account of the virtues, see D. O'Brien, 'Hume and the Virtues,' in A. Bailey and D. O'Brien (eds.), *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hume*, London: Bloomsbury, 2015, pp. 288–302.
54 Hume, *Principles of Morals*, 9.3.
55 See M. Lind, 'Hume and Moral Emotions,' in O. Flanagan and A. Oksenberg Rorty (eds.), *Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990, pp. 133–47; J. Spector, 'Value in Fact: Naturalism and Normativity in Hume's Moral Psychology,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 41, 2003, pp. 145–63.
56 See M. B. Gill, 'Hume's Progressive View of Human Nature,' *Hume Studies*, 26, 2000, pp. 87–108; Gill, *The British Moralists*, pp. 227 and 238.
57 See J. T. King, 'Hume on Artificial Lives with a Rejoinder to A. C. MacIntyre,' *Hume Studies*, 14, 1988, pp. 53–92. Like King, Baier argues for such Humean progressiveness in juxtaposition to the monastic life, as does Taylor, who speaks of 'a dynamic process of social negotiation, in which we employ the idiom of moral sentiment to construct, confirm, contest, and so on, our notions of ideal, decent and immoral characters.' See J. Taylor, 'Hume on the Standard of Virtue,' *The Journal of Ethics*, 6, 2002, pp. 43–62. See also A. Baier, 'Civilizing Practices,' in A. Baier, *Postures of the Mind: Essays on Mind and Morals*, London: Methuen, 1985, pp. 246–62; J. Taylor, 'Humean Humanity versus Hate,' in J. Welchman (ed.), *The Practice of Virtue: Classic and Contemporary Readings in Virtue Ethics*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006, pp. 182–203.

58 See also Boulter, 'Can the Sciences Do Without Final Causes?' (Chapter 7, this volume).
59 A. Bailey and D. O'Brien, *Reader's Guide to Hume's Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, London: Continuum, 2007, p. 146.
60 J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P.H. Nidditch, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975 [1689], I.i.1.
61 For such a conception of our place in nature, and the image of God hypothesis, see E. Craig, *The Mind of God and the Works of Man*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1987.
62 Hume, *Treatise*, 1.3.16.1.
63 These thoughts on animal cognition are taken from Hume, *Human Understanding*, p. 9: and A. Bailey and D. O'Brien's commentary on this section of the Enquiry. See *Reader's Guide*, pp. 96–101.
64 For speculation concerning Hume's influence on Darwin, see W.B. Huntley, 'David Hume and Charles Darwin', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 33(3), 1972, pp. 457–70.
65 See, for example, R. Millikan, *Language, Thought and Other Biological Categories*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984.
66 Wolterstorff takes Hume to be a 'precursor' to such 'proper functionalist' accounts of good reasoning. See N. Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 166n6.
67 Hume, *Human Understanding*, p. 10.
68 L. Falkenstein, 'Naturalism, Normativity, and Scepticism in Hume's Account of Belief,' *Hume Studies*, 23(1), 1997, p. 31.
69 See Hume, *Treatise*, 1.4.2 (for scepticism with respect to the external world), 1.4.6 (per- sonal identity), 1.3.6 (inductive reasoning) and 1.4.1 (deductive reasoning).
70 See R. Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006; J. Greene, *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason and the Gap between Us and Them*, London: Atlantic, 2013; Cain, 'What Is the Function of Morality?' (in this volume) discusses this approach in depth.
71 Morality, for Hume, involves sympathetic mechanisms and these are to some extent present in animals: 'It is evident, that sympathy, or the communication of passions, takes place among animals, no less than among men.' (*Treatise*, 2.12.2.6).
72 See O'Brien, 'Virtues'.

Bibliography

Baier, A., 'Civilizing Practices,' in A. Baier, *Postures of the Mind: Essays on Mind and Morals*, London: Methuen, 1985, pp. 246–62.

Baier, A., *Death and Character: Further Reflections on Hume*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Bailey, A. and O'Brien, D., *Reader's Guide to Hume's Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, London: Continuum, 2007.

Bailey, A. and O'Brien, D., *Sick Men's Dreams: Hume's Critique of Religion*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2013.

Berry, C.J., *Hume, Hegel, and Human Nature*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982.

Cohen, A., 'In Defence of Hume's Historical Method,' *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 13, 2005, pp. 489–502.

Craig, E., *The Mind of God and the Works of Man*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.

Dees, R., 'Hume and the Contexts of Politics,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 30, 1992, pp. 219–42.

Falkenstein, L., 'Naturalism, Normativity, and Scepticism in Hume's Account of Belief,' *Hume Studies*, 23 (1), 1997, pp. 29–72.

Foot, P., *Natural Goodness*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001.

Forbes, D., *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

Gill, M. B., 'Hume's Progressive View of Human Nature,' *Hume Studies*, 26, 2000, pp. 87–108.

Gill, M. B., *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Graham, R., *The Great Infidel: A Life of David Hume*, East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2004.
Greene, J., *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason and the Gap between Us and Them*, London: Atlantic, 2013.
Harris, J., *Hume: An Intellectual Biography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Herdt, J. A., *Religion and Faction in Hume's Moral Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
Hume, D., *Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932.
Hume, D., *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. N. Kemp Smith, Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1947 [first published 1779].
Hume, D., *History of England: From the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, 6 volumes, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund Press, 1983 [first published 1778].
Hume, D., *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. E. F. Miller, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund Press, 1987 [first published 1741].
Hume, D., *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. T. L. Beauchamp, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998 [first published 1751].
Hume, D., *An Abstract of a Book Lately Published: Entitled, a Treatise of Human Nature*, reprinted in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. D. F. Norton and M. J. Norton, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 [first published 1739–40], pp. 407–17.
Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. D. F. Norton and M. J. Norton, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 [first published 1739–40].
Hume, D., *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. T. L. Beauchamp, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 [first published 1772].
Huntley, W. B., 'David Hume and Charles Darwin,' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 33 (3), 1972, pp. 457–70.
Hutcheson, F., *An Essay on the Conduct of the Passions and Affections with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, London: J. Darby, 1728.
Joyce, R., *The Evolution of Morality*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006.
King, J. T., 'Hume on Artificial Lives with a Rejoinder to A. C. MacIntyre,' *Hume Studies*, 14, 1988, pp. 53–92.
Lind, M., 'Hume and Moral Emotions,' in O. Flanagan and A. Oksenberg Rorty (eds.), *Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990, pp. 133–47.
Livingston, D. W., *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
Locke, J., *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. H. Nidditch, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975 [first published 1689].
Millikan, R., *Language, Thought and Other Biological Categories*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984.
O'Brien, D., 'Hume and the Virtues,' in A. Bailey and D. O'Brien (eds.), *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hume*, London: Bloomsbury, 2015, pp. 288–302.
O'Brien, D., 'Review of J. Harris, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography*,' *History of Political Thought*, 38 (2), 2017, pp. 371–81.
Russell, P., *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise: Skepticism, Naturalism, and Irreligion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
Shaftesbury, A. A. C., *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue, or Merit*, ed. D. Walford, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977 [first published 1699].
Smith, A., *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976 [first published 1759].
Spector, J., 'Value in Fact: Naturalism and Normativity in Hume's Moral Psychology,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 41, 2003, pp. 145–63.
Taylor, J., 'Hume on the Standard of Virtue,' *The Journal of Ethics*, 6, 2002, pp. 43–62.
Taylor, J., 'Humean Humanity versus Hate,' in J. Welchman (ed.), *The Practice of Virtue: Classic and Contemporary Readings in Virtue Ethics*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006, pp. 182–203.

Taylor, J., *Reflecting Subjects: Passions, Sympathy, and Society in Hume's Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Walsh, W. H., 'The Constancy of Human Nature,' in H. D. Lewis (ed.), *Contemporary British Philosophy: Personal Statements: Fourth Series*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1976, pp. 274–91.

Wolterstorff, N., *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.