

THE 'IS/UGHT' RELATION IN HUME

The last paragraph of Book III, section I, part i of Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*¹ has been called the "most influential passage" of the *Treatise*, by Harrison who introduces his explication of this text by also mentioning that it seems to have been "inserted almost as an afterthought" [69]. Harrison continues his exposition by citing the text in full, and, if I might be allowed to imitate the more renowned scholarship,² it would be appropriate to begin by citing Hume's complete text :

I cannot forbear adding to these reasonings an observation, which may, perhaps, be found of some importance. In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no propositions that is not connected with an ought or ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this *ought*, or *ought* not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. But as authors do not commonly use this precaution, I shall presume to recommend it to the readers: and am persuaded, that this small attention wou'd subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see, that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relation of objects, nor is perceiv'd by reason. [T 469-70]

Since I already have aped the commentators in supplying Hume's full text, I will now further emulate them by using one of their opening paragraphs as an introduction to my own analysis :

Thus ends Section I, part i, of the third Book of the *Treatise*—a quotation so familiar that it recently has been described as ‘an old, well-scarred, and still fascinating battle ground’. To add yet another article on the subject might seem inexcusable, but I believe that Hume’s own view has not yet been quite correctly presented. [Yalden-Thomson 89]

To add another paper on Hume’s meaning may seem inexcusable, but not for the reason Yalden-Thomson believes. Another paper may be inexcusable because Hume’s view is already correctly, and I will argue, quite clearly presented, not by any of the commentators, but by Hume himself. It is the purpose of this paper to show that concerning the ‘is/ought’ dichotomy, Hume meant nothing mysterious or inconsistent with the principle theses of his own philosophy. When Hume entitles the section in question, “Moral Distinctions not deriv’d from Reason,” [T III, I, i] it is because he simply means that no evaluative judgement can be produced solely from fact, that is, that no ‘ought’ can come directly from an ‘is’. This paper will examine the commentaries on Hume’s moral philosophy, and will argue to the conclusion that though Hume is able to propose a system of morality empirically based, he does maintain that moral distinctions are logically separate from those of reason.

Part I: Deriving ‘Ought’ from ‘Is’

MacIntyre’s “Hume on ‘Is’ and ‘Ought’” is a classic study of Hume’s position, and almost no English language article dealing on this subject would be complete without referring to it. The first section of this paper will focus mainly on MacIntyre and the other commentators who support or attack his interpretation. MacIntyre believes that what he calls “the standard interpretation of Hume,” [242] that is, that no ‘ought’ can be derived from an ‘is’, is “inadequate and misleading” [242]. He claims this is so for several reasons. Hume’s logic is flawed, Hume himself does not observe his own principle, Hume has been incorrectly interpreted, and the incorrect interpretation of Hume has led to problems in contemporary moral philosophy which are solved if one adopts MacIntyre’s premises [242].

MacIntyre argues that if one were to attempt to derive ‘ought’ from ‘ises’, the only way to proceed would be by deduction, since,

he claims, that Hume rejects induction because he holds that demonstrative arguments are either deductive or defective [246]. Inductive reasoning is not allowed: "... there can be no *demonstrative* arguments to prove, that those instances, of which we have had no experience, resemble those, of which we have had experience" [T 89]. However, in deriving a moral statement from factual statements, he finds that unless one of the premises contain or were actually a moral statement, there would be no possible deductive connection between the moral conclusions and the factual premises [246]. This is exactly Hume's point, but since there are moral statements, the only way that MacIntyre thinks we can derive them is through entailment ---that the 'oughtness' of a conclusion is somehow entailed by the 'isness' of the premises; "And certainly entailment relations must have a place in moral argument, as they do in scientific argument" [MacIntyre 245]. The problem here is that entailment, as presented by MacIntyre, is really a species of influence, and this procedure has already been argued to be defective. To MacIntyre, it seems that Hume is at once rejecting induction and also accepting it as a connection between factual premises and moral conclusions (since they are not connected through deduction) [246; cf. 256]. This is the flaw in logic which MacIntyre sees in Hume.

MacIntyre, however, notes that the particular use of words by Hume seems to argue against the 'standard interpretation'. Though he has previously argued that the 'standard interpretation' cannot hold since 'oughts' are derivable from 'ises' via entailment, he now suggests that Hume's arguments have nothing to do with entailment at all. Instead, following the *Oxford English Dictionary's* listings, MacIntyre concludes that Hume's "deduction" in the passage in question really means "inference" [253]. He supports his claim with one citation of Hume's "That politics may be Reduced to a Science" showing that Hume did seem in that one instance to use the word "deduce" when he actually meant the word "infer"[254]. He thus concludes that Hume does suggest that moral statements may be inferred from factual ones, albeit not by deductive means.

MacIntyre then moves on to demonstrate that it is possible to infer an 'ought' from an 'is', and he does this to counter the claim that Hume does assert the autonomy of morals. His

counter-example reads :

If I Stick a knife in Smith, they will send me to jail;
 but I do not want to go to jail;
 so I ought not to (had better not) stick a knife in him. [256]

The inference is undeniably valid, and it works, according to MacIntyre, because the transition from 'is' to 'ought' is made by the notion of 'wanting' "We could give a long list of the concepts which can form such bridge notions between 'is' and 'ought': wanting, needing, desiring, pleasure, happiness, health—and these are only a few. I think there is a strong case for saying that moral notions are unintelligible apart from concepts such as these" [257-8]. By making this claim, MacIntyre also believes that this shows that Hume is, as a moralist, not too far removed from Aristotle and not especially similar to Kant [264]. By MacIntyre's interpretation, Hume (and Aristotle) both hold out that morality may be guided by a hypothetical imperative ('counsel of prudence'), and such imperatives are clearly rejected by Kant as not having any moral significance.

The argument that MacIntyre gives, however, is flawed since, in it, a pure 'ought' is not derived from pure 'ises' because an 'ought' is already included among the premises—namely, one ought to do what is good for one to accomplish what one wants (or not do what would result in a situation one does not desire). Hudson remarks that the wanting or the goodness of an action is not truly part of the deduction from the 'is' to the 'ought', but just happens to be among certain circumstances involved with the actions, though by no means required by the actions [251]. Harrison also notes that the concept of 'good' really does not belong to the factual realm [75-7] "It would be good if this clock is (were) correct' is to say that 'this clock ought to be correct', but neither statement is at all equivalent to 'this clock is correct' [cf. Harrison 73]. MacIntyre's example cannot stand as a counter-example to Hume because the minor premise entails not just a factual statement, but also an evaluative one.

MacIntyre might find support in Searle's argument, "How to Derive 'Ought' from 'Is'," which is a critique of the 'is/

ought-dichotomy which he claims to dissolve even though he is not particularly "concerned with Hume's treatment of the problem" [43]. Searle's contention is that it is very possible to provide at least one counter-example which logically relates evaluative (ought) statements to descriptive, factual (is) statements [43-4]. Searle does provide what he believes to be such a counter-example in a five step series involving promise keeping, which, all things remaining equal, is based only on factual statements of what it means to keep a promise, but concludes with the evaluative statement that the promise ought to be kept:

Jones uttered the words "I hereby promise to pay you, five dollars."

Jones promised to pay Smith five dollars.

Jones placed himself under (undertook) an obligation to pay Smith five dollars.

Jones is under an obligation to pay Smith five dollars.

Jones ought to pay Smith five dollars.[44]

Searle holds, again all things remaining equal, that the move from the first four steps to the fifth is an example of deriving an 'ought' from an 'is'. Factual statements which contain words like "promise," "five dollars," "married," or "home run" are, according to Searle, statements which presuppose certain types of institutions [54]. Without the institutions which underlie each of these concepts, the concepts do not describe anything meaningful, for each of them are founded in constitutive rules on which their existence is logically dependent [Searle 55]. For example, the statement, 'if one is playing baseball and is tagged out at second base (a factual statement), then one ought to leave the field' (an evaluative statement), can make sense only given the constitutive rules of the institution of baseball. Thus, Searle maintains that there are some facts which occur in the context of certain institutions which are made of constitutive rules which involve obligations and commitments, and within these systems it is very possible to derive 'ought' from 'ises' [57]. If this is true, then Hume cannot be taken to mean that no moral judgements are derivable from factual ones without at the same time being terribly mistaken.

Harrison believes that Searle is in error on this point. Because 'institutional' statements are synthetic and not analytic, says Harrison, they entail both a factual and a non-factual statement at one and the same time [74]. Harrison may be correct, but I will leave Searle's position alone for the present time.

MacIntyre further asserts that Hume himself is guilty of not following the principles which he prescribes. He notes that Hume justifies his defense of justice with the presumed factual observation that to act justly is in one's best interest [248]. The following text, although not cited by MacIntyre, supports this claim: "And justice establishes itself by a kind of convention or agreement; that is, by a sense of interest, suppos'd to be common to all" [T 498]. That 'one *ought* to do what is in one's best interest' is not, says MacIntyre, a moral statement for Hume, but has to function as "at best a kind of compressed definition," [249] but it is from this definition that Hume derives the moral conclusion that one ought to be just. Even though this interpretation is similar to the refuted interpretation above of acting because of self-interest, MacIntyre believes it to be one of several examples, where Hume himself derives an 'ought' from an 'is'. He also interprets Hume to appeal to this type of reasoning in his essay, "On Suicide" [248].

Against the position that Hume has been correctly understood, MacIntyre points out that the 'standard interpretation', which is that 'Hume holds for the autonomy of morals from reason, is plainly mistaken. Referring to the passage given at the beginning of this paper, MacIntyre stresses that Hume writes that it "seems altogether inconceivable" and not that it "is altogether inconceivable" that 'ought' statements should be derived from 'is' statements [252]. This notion is also stressed by Hunter: "It seems inconceivable that ought-propositions should be deducible from is-propositions, but is not in fact inconceivable" [150]. What both men go on to suggest in light of this point is that while Hume does hold that moral conclusions can be derived from factual statements, no system with which Hume was familiar yet had done so successfully [Hunter 150; MacIntyre 253].

Flew clearly rejects this interpretation. According to Flew,

that Hume writes "seems altogether inconceivable" is nothing other than an "ironically modest way of putting the point that it is altogether inconceivable, and hence that a reason *could* not be given" [292]. This is a very simple point, and I would agree with Flew's reading of the statement, however, I would add that the reason why Hume was not familiar with any prior system which legitimately did derive evaluative statements from factual statements was because there were none, and according to Hume, there could be none.

Almost as an aside, MacIntyre poses the question of whom it is that Hume accuses of making the illegitimate passage from 'is' to 'ought' [258]. MacIntyre believes that the "all the vulgar systems of morality" against which Hume rails are nothing other than eighteenth century religious moralities of the day [259]. What Hume wishes to do is found morality, not on the basis of any religious claim to the affirmation of duty, but on empirical matters of fact of the passions [260]. Thus Hume is shown to hold there is an incorrect way to move from 'is' to 'ought', namely via religious grounds, even though MacIntyre believes that Hume himself holds that such a transition is possible.

Capaldi disagrees with MacIntyre's understanding of the vulgar. It is not any one particular group to whom Hume refers, but to all systems in which moral distinctions are external and independent of human perceptions [131]. Hume does write that his system opposes "all the vulgar systems of morality", and this is reminiscent of earlier in the *Treatise* where he mentions the "fallacy of all this philosophy" [T 413] (*italics added*) which presupposes the efficacy of reason over the passions. It is more likely that instead of any religious group, Hume is more challenging the rationalists [cf. Capaldi 127-8] or any who do not distinguish between objects and perceptions.

In the near-conclusion of his article, MacIntyre claims that he has been able to show what it is that Hume actually means in the 'is/ought' passage. He maintains that Hume did believe that one could make the transition from an 'is' to an 'ought', but that the transformation is difficult and not deductive; that Hume himself actually does make the transition in his account of justice;

and that one of Hume's purposes was to warn against making this passage to the 'ought' in a faulty manner.[258]. Furthermore, against the 'standard interpretation', Hume does not assert the autonomy of morals, but by MacIntyre's example of a moral conclusion derived from what he considers factual premises, MacIntyre thinks that he provides evidence that 'ought' can be derivable from 'ises' [261]. MacIntyre maintains that Hume's main concern in the passage is to found morality in human nature, [264] the knowledge of which, after all, Hume does suggest is "founded on the observation of an uniformity in the actions" [T 403].

Other interpreters besides MacIntyre also support the thesis that Hume actually does allow that evaluative statements may be derived from factual ones, Hunter, as noted above, agrees with MacIntyre that Hume remarks only that it "*seems* altogether inconceivable" that an 'is' be derived from an 'ought' and not at all that it *is* indeed inconceivable that such be the case [Hunter 150]. That both commentators believe that Hume later goes on to show that it is possible to make the logical transition from 'is' to 'ought' leads to the conclusion that Hume must think that the two kinds of statements are linked, or else he would have to reject his own theory.

Hunter makes other suggestions for interpreting Hume so that we might understand him to mean that there is not a valid 'is/ought' dichotomy. One of these, which is also endorsed by Yalden-Thomson, [91-2] is that "sentences expressing *ought*-propositions are paraphrases expressing *is*-propositions, and paraphrasing is not deducting" [Hunter 150]. According to Hunter, what Hume means is that evaluative statements cannot be deduced or inferred from factual statements because they are, in effect, the same statements. "What rules out the inference of 'ought' from 'is' is not that 'ought' is too far from 'is', but that it is *too close*" [Hunter 150]. Yalden-Thomson makes a similar point by stating that for Hume, to say 'one should do X' (an 'ought'), is the same thing as to say 'if one were to do X, one would meet with moral approbation of an impartial spectator'(an 'is'); the one statement is merely the paraphrase of the other [93].

Hunter and Yalden-Thomson are clearly correct in pointing

out that many 'ought' statements can be reduced by paraphrase to 'is' statements. In the next section, I will suggest that the type of 'ought' sentences derivable from Searle's 'institutional facts' are cases in point. It is, however, quite another matter to claim that *all* 'oughts' are likewise reducible. This not only plainly contradicts Hume's express statement concerning 'ought' statements, but also seems contrary to ordinary (moral) sense.

That Hume is mistaken regarding moral judgements is argued further by Hunter. He takes seriously Hume's claim that "[a sentiment] is a matter of fact; but 'tis the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not in the object" [T 469]. Hunter maintains that from this it follows: "The distinction of vice and virtue is not founded *merely* on the relations of *objects*, because it is founded on the *sentiments* felt by *people contemplating* relations of objects. It is not perceived by reason alone, because these sentiments themselves are the objects not of reason but of feeling" [151]. Because moral judgements are based on individual sentiments, Hunter fears that Hume's theory, if interpreted to assert a logical gap between moral judgement and statement of fact, will lead to logical contradictions :

For among other things, it has the consequences that if one person says of an action that it is wholly virtuous and another person says of the same action that it is wholly vicious, these two people would not be contradicting each other, since one is saying the logical equivalent of 'I [Smith] feel a peculiar sort of pleasure, and I do not feel a peculiar sort of pain, on contemplating this action', while the other is saying the equivalent of 'I [Jones] feel a peculiar sort of pain, and I do not feel a peculiar sort of pleasure, on contemplating this action', and both these statements could be true. If they were both true, and Hume's analysis were correct, then one and the same action would be both wholly virtuous and wholly vicious, which in the ordinary senses of the words used, is absurd [151-2]

Just as there are many interpreters of Hume who claim that he does not mean to establish an 'is/ought' gap or, that even if he did, it cannot be defended, there are others who do claim that Hume does very much believes there to be an 'is/ought' gap, and that this position is defensible. The next

section will examine more closely Hume's text with the intent of showing that Hume does mean to claim an unbridgeable gap between the descriptive and evaluative. What we will discover is that the 'is/ought' dichotomy is consistent within Hume's philosophical framework and that though many are puzzled by Hume's meaning in this famous paragraph, it actually bears its significance quite close to the surface.

Part II: The 'Is/Ought' Relation

While Hume and the 'is/ought' dichotomy have both their supporters and their detractors, it is interesting to note that the question of the 'is/ought' gap does not even arise for many of the French commentators. They, along with some anglophone interpreters of Hume, do not seem to concede that there is such a problem, and they are able, then, better to understand Hume's moral principles to the extent that none of them gets caught in any web of words trying to determine what else it may be that Hume means; their interpretation of Hume is rather literal, and it is based on the corpus of his writings rather than the select paragraph concerning the putative 'is/ought' question. For them, the question is not whether Hume actually held or merely seemed to suggest that moral statements were not derivable from the factual, but rather a more basic inquiry: if evaluative judgements cannot come from descriptive judgements, then how do we get them?

To answer the above question, we will have to examine better than in the previous section Hume's notions of passion, reason, and sentiment. What we will find, I believe, is that 'ought' and 'is' actually do have a very intimate relationship, though it will emerge that this relation is not one of Hume's four philosophical relations, nor could it ever be possible for Hume to base any moral principles on reason alone.

From Book II of the *Treatise* we already know that "reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will" [T 413], and this is in accord with what we find in the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*:³ "Reason being cool and disengaged, is no motive to action" [E 294]. What does move the will, though, is the passions, both violent and calm. This is not to say that

reason cannot have an effect on the passions, for it is certain that it may direct the passions insofar as it informs them of means to the passions' ends. Indeed, as Harrison observes, reason cannot affect the passions except to the extent that there might be a passion to be reasonable [8].

Passions alone, then, are what can motivate the individual, and passions, we are told, are founded on pleasure and pain, through which the mind, "by an *original* instinct" naturally tries to pursue (good) or to avoid (evil) [T 438].

DESIRE arises from good consider'd simply, and AVERSION is deriv'd from evil. The WILL exerts itself, when either the good or the absence of the evil may be attain'd by any action of the mind or body.

Besides good and evil, or in other words, pain and pleasure, the direct passions frequently arise from a natural impulse or instinct, which is perfectly unaccountable... These passions, properly speaking, produce good and evil, and proceed not from them, like the other affections. [T 438]

If this is true, however, then it seems to sever not only the necessary connection (if there were one) between what is done and what *reasonably* might be done (since what is done is accomplished through the passions which affect the will, and these may operate without the least tincture of reason), but also the connection between what is done and what ought to be done, unless what ought to be done *is based solely* on the passions themselves which have already been shown to have no relationship to reason. "[O]n peut conjecturer que la morale ne se fonde pas sur la vue de certaines relations découvertes par la raison" [LeRoy 209]. This, however, is precisely Hume's point.

Morality has no foundation at all in the reasonable, and can be based only on the passions: "Morality, therefore, is more properly felt than judg'd of; tho' this feeling or sentiment is commonly so soft and gentle, that we are apt to confound it with an idea" [T 470]; "[M]orality is determined by sentiment. It defines virtue to be *whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation*; and vice the contrary" [E 289]. This has

not escaped the attention of some commentators: "...le vrai moteur de notre action et, le vrai juge des valeurs, c'est le sentiment pur, parfaitement indépendant des facultés intellectuelles" [Boss 665].

If it is the case that morality is based on the sentiments, then it follows that it is the sentiments, and not reason, which is the judge of morality. It is no surprise, then, that this is just what Hume maintains. "All sentiment is right; because sentiment has a reference to nothing beyond itself, and is always real, whenever a man is conscious of it" [*Of the Standard of Taste* 84]. Vice and virtue are determined by personal sentiments:

Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compar'd to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind: And this discovery in morals, like that other in physics, is to be regarded as a considerable advancement of the speculative sciences; tho', like that too, it has little or no influence on practice. Nothing can be more real, or concern us more, than our *own* sentiments of pleasure and uneasiness: and if these be favourable to virtue, and unfavourable to vice, no more can be requisite to the regulation of *our* conduct and behaviour. [T 469] (italics added)

Furthermore, "Truth is disputable, not taste [sentiment]: what exists in the nature of things is the standard of our judgement; what each man feels within himself is the standard of sentiment" [E 171].

If the basis of morality is "founded on the sentiments felt by people contemplating" [Hunter 151], then it follows that no universal morality can be postulated—that is, different people may posit different moral judgements regarding the same events. This, however, 'seems altogether' to be one of Hunter's objections to Hume's program, and that is because it *is* one of Hunter's objections. If we refer earlier in this paper to his work, we see that he argues that a logical contradiction could arise between what Smith and Jones take to be a virtuous act: "If... Hume's analysis were correct, then one and the same action would be both wholly virtuous and wholly vicious, which, in the ordinary senses of the words used, is absurd" [152]. But in this claim Hunter is guilty of seeing

the action from the vulgar point of view instead of from the philosopher's, for he confuses what is perceived with the actual object. The "one and same action" is, in example, not one and the same perceived both as virtuous and as vicious. It is instead the same action which is perceived by Jones to be vicious and by Smith to be virtuous. Note, that 'perceived' may be read as 'felt' or 'experienced'. That two people might have different experiences of the same happening is not that unusual, so I do not see the force of Hunter's objection except to remark that the outcome he predicts is a likely and correct one. That it is not what Hunter might prefer, or that it does not offer a universal ground on which to base morality, should not surprise one who has been following carefully Hume's text.

Hume did write, after all, that he believes that his moral system "wou'd subvert all the vulgar systems of morality" [T 470], and I believe that what he meant was that he knew that his system based on the egoism of the passions rather than external moral rules would be contrary to the established morality posed by the religious authorities of the day (*pace* MacIntyre) or to most other systems commonly believed by non-philosophers. I follow Capaldi here in thinking that by the "vulgar" Hume only refers to what he has previously referred to as the "vulgar" — the common masses who do not distinguish between perceptions and objects and believe in the continued and distinct existence of immediate objects of perceptions [130-1; cf. T 157, 192-3, 222-4]. I would not doubt, either, that Hume also has in mind the moral philosophy of his day which he believes is founded in "metaphysical arguments" based on the supposed "eternity, invariableness, and divine origin" of reason [cf. T 413].

From these considerations, it appears that the mystery has been taken out of the 'is/ought' question, since it is rather clear that ought statements can come only from the sentiments which have no direct basis in reason, and it is clearly underlined by Hume why this might subvert the vulgar systems of morality. For this reason, one might maintain that no more needs to be addressed on the issue. This, however, would be remiss for it ignores Hume's own desires to explain fully how his discoveries and principles

apply to morality and society which "lies under such a deplorable ignorance in all these particulars" [T 271]. What remains to be seen is how Hume is able to develop a collective morality from his doctrine of (psychological) egoism.

Though Hume believes that each person has an individual grounded in his or her distinctive sentiments, nevertheless, there is still a uniformity in what all people feel. This uniformity is what Hume calls "We may begin with considering a-new the nature and force of sympathy. The minds of all men are similar in their feelings and operations, nor can any one be actuated by any affection, of which all others are not, in some degree, susceptible" [T 575-6].

Thus it appears, *that* sympathy is a very powerful principle in human nature, *that* it has a great influence on our taste or beauty, and *that* it produces our sentiment of morals in all the artificial virtues. From thence we may presume, that it also gives rise to many of the other virtues; and that qualities acquire our approbation, because of their tendency to the good of mankind. This presumption must become a certainty, when we find that most of those qualities, which we *naturally* approve of, have that tendency, and render a man a proper member of society. [T 577-8].

This has been noted by at least one commentator: "L'existence des lois morales est donc reconnue généralement même par les hommes les plus corrompus, qui ne peuvent se défendre d'avoir égard à la morale de leur groupe et au devoir social, sans même penser aux contraintes qui pourraient s'exercer sur eux" [LeRoy 207].

The effects of this sympathy may be discovered and used by reason in an effort to better direct the passions.

Puisque 'toute la moralité dépend de nos sentiments' [T 636] et que les sentiments varient non seulement selon les individus mais aussi chez chaque individu, comment un quelconque jugement moral peut-il acquérir la moindre stabilité? A cette objection, Hume répond que l'entendement corrige les variations affectives spontanées, sans pour autant les annuler jamais. [Brahmi 219: cf. E 285]

Reason, as "slave of the passions" [T 415] is needed, then, not because it can cause any of the passions, but because it

may direct them [T 414]. "...et c'est aussi l'avis de Hume— que sentiment et raison s'unissent intimement en morale. Le sentiment y est principe d'action; la raison lui montre quels objets et quelles conduites lui permettent de satisfaire ses fins; elle est un quide utile; mais elle n'est qu'un quide" [LeRoy 211].

Reason, by acting as only a guide, is now in a position to inform the individual, not as to the morality or immorality of action *x*, (again, it is the passions which determine morality of any action [cf. Brahami 223] but as to the likelihood of the approbation or disgust of others toward action *x*. It is not that the opinions of others, even if there were one hundred per cent agreement, that makes action *x* virtuous or vicious, but that the presumed opinion of others might shape the individual's sentiments toward action *x*.

The main point to be emphasized is, of course, that Hume never accepts 'all or most people approve of *x*' as justifying, by equivalence of meaning, the statement '*x* is virtuous'. Knowledge of what people approve of is, all the same, very relevant to our own approvals and disapprovals, not as evidence, but as a causal factor which may operate through sympathy. [Ardal 193]

Furthermore,

Le jugement moral est essentiellement la contemplation désintéressée d'un caractère. L'observation et l'expérience nous apprendront que les sources de l'approbation morale sont tout ce qui est utile ou immédiatement agreable à la personne ou aux autres [T 717]. et jamais, condition impérative de la validité du jugement. à celui qui juge. [Brahami 220]

Hume's moral philosophy is, on this count, quite far from that of the vulgar; it is based on individual human natures and not at all in external, metaphysical concepts. Yet, in the introduction to the *Treatise*, Hume claims that he will present a system which might put moral science on a par with the certainty of natural science. [T xix] and if he claims that morality is based on the individual rather than universal concepts, some may agree that his program is thereby lost. I would like to suggest, with the support of several commentators, that this is not so. Hume does find a connection between the 'is' and 'ought' which binds them altogether, and which also provides for the same amount of certainty

as is allotted to natural science, although this link is not one of his four philosophical relations.

Following Hume by maintaining a sharp distinction between the descriptive and the evaluative, I suggest that the relation between them is the same kind of connection as exists between necessity and causality. Just as I never can know certainly what will occur when the moving billiard ball strikes the one stationary ball, so too I never can know certainly whether any action *x* will be virtuous or vicious until after it has been subjected to my sentiments. I cannot judge this for my own action, nor even less am I able to judge others' actions. I am not alone in my thinking here; others also hold similar theses: "La vertu et le vice sont plus sentis que jugés; nous les percevons exactement comme nous percevons la nécessité de la connexion causale" [LeyRoy 214]; "The truth is, therefore, that 'is' and 'ought' propositions are not *themselves* related at all; the states of affairs to which they *refer* are related causally, the notion of cause being analyzed in the usual Humean way" [Jones 59]. This causal-like relation may be that relation to which Hume refers in the 'is/ought' paragraph, and if it is taken to be that, I do not see any contradiction within that paragraph, nor within the whole of the text.

This interpretation now frees Hume having to accept Searle's postulated institutional facts' — which were claimed to be what is needed to go from factual statements to moral judgements. The baseball player who is tagged out at base ought to leave the field, not because of the "institutional" fact of the rules of baseball, but because of a judgement made which indicates probable moral disapprobation in light of this fact if the player does not leave the field. There is a quasi-descriptive element here, which depends on our anticipation of the feelings which the player has (and possibly our sympathy with those feelings); but this descriptive sense is not moral or prescriptive, and is common in ordinary contexts ("the toaster was repaired yesterday, so it *ought* to work").

Likewise, Jones will pay Smith the five dollars because Jones, based on experience, anticipates moral approval for doing so. In all cases, the 'is' is related to the 'ought' which follows, but the 'ought' is never derived from the 'is'. The 'ought' is always based on the individual's sentiments at the time, and as such, it seems altogether inconceivable that the actions which follow are guaranteed to occur, though, like the stationary billiard ball's

projected movement in face of the other ball's moving toward it, we can easily, from experience, suppose the outcome.

The puzzles that have been 'discovered' in the 'is/ought' text of Hume now appear to be resolved. Morality is based on an empirical foundation, has no basis in reason alone, and is freed from the vulgar notions of externally applied criteria for morality. 'Is' propositions have been shown to have no logical connection with 'ought' statements, and the relation between 'is' and 'ought' sentences is one of certainty, though it is not one of the philosophical relations. Natural philosophy has been freed from superstition and is raised to the same level as natural science. This is the goal which Hume says he means to achieve by writing the *Treatise*, and he has indeed reached it.

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NOTES

1. Citations from Hume will be from the *Treatise* and are denoted by 'T.' The Selby-Bigge's edition is used throughout.
2. MacIntyre, Hunter, Hudson, Capaldi, Harrison, Pigden, and Yalden-Thomason each cite the passage in full at the opening of their works on this subject.
3. Citations from this work are denoted by 'E'. The Selby-Bigge's edition is used throughout.

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