Hume and Practical Reason: A Non-Sceptical Interpretation[1]

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It is widely assumed that Hume's polemical, sceptical remarks against 'philosophical reason' (T 3.1.1.12)[2] – the cognitive faculty that his rationalist contemporaries assumed could discover necessarily true facts or mathematical propositions – dispute the possible existence of practical reason. On this view of Hume, just as reason can never ascertain the truth of certain propositions, it has no intrinsic normative authority over our practical action. Instead, Hume is said to appoint a minimal function to our reason: its role is to process and represent our empirical experience and information rather than ascertain the objective truth of moral values. This position is influenced by what I follow Strawson in calling 'strict naturalism' which maintains that 'the naturalistic or objective view of human beings and human behaviour *undermines* the validity of moral attitudes and reasons and displays moral judgment as no more than a vehicle of illusion.'[3] In short, this version of naturalism assumes, as features of the natural world, natural facts *exclude* moral values / judgements. In this paper I refer to this very specific strand of naturalism which may reject or affirm things that other naturalist positions do not.[4] A strict naturalist reading of Hume maintains that he has an account of *instrumental* practical reason; the benefit of Humean reason so defined is that it sidesteps any problematic metaphysical or objectivist normative claims.[5] As an information-processing faculty, reason will have an influence on our practical action in solely providing the means-end, causal information needed to obtain a desired end.

By contrast, some interpreters argue that Hume is a thoroughgoing sceptic of practical reason in all its forms, including an instrumentalist account, since reason exerts no motivational or normative force over our practical conduct. I call this the 'sceptical reading', which is represented mainly by Kantian constructivist interpreters. This view argues that any philosophical account of practical reason needs to explain reason's authority over human conduct, without which reason would have a merely 'theoretical', not

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'practical', function. The underlying agenda of the sceptical reading is to challenge the reductivist model of human agency and moral scepticism represented by strict naturalism: if no intrinsic connection is said to obtain between moral reason and practical reasoning more generally, we might end up endorsing as practically rational ends which we nonetheless believe to be immoral on independent grounds.[6] However, against the strict naturalist, the sceptical reading maintains that conceptions of instrumental rationality necessarily presuppose a categorical rational norm of some sort. Hume is said to have understood this insight in denying the existence of practical reason even in its instrumentalist form. However, the implications bleed into his political thought with some unforeseen consequences: his treatment of justice appears to be self-contradictory since individual adherence to the artificial virtues is seemingly justified through a surreptitious appeal to normative reasons.

The purpose of this paper is twofold: first, to challenge the sceptical reading and argue that a non-Kantian conception of practical reason can be found in Hume. Both the sceptical and strict naturalist readings of Hume have become extremely dominant in the interpretive literature. Because of their misinterpretation of Hume, his ideas have been used to do some philosophical work that his theory was never designed to do, such as provide a model of reductivist practical motivation and moral subjectivism. The interpretive difficulty is that Hume's philosophical works offer no clear systematic treatment of practical reason: the term 'reason' alludes to speculative thought rather than practical deliberation; and to complicate matters further, Hume often conflates practical reason with calm passions or 'strength of mind', all referring to developed, habitual character. Despite these difficulties, I argue that Hume's conception of inferential reason contains a cognitive, practical orientation which makes possible the reasoned articulation and affirmation of human moral, practical activities and values.

Clarifying Hume's position on practical reason will help sidestep the charge of inconsistency on other aspects of his philosophy – such as his account of political justice and the artificial virtues. Questions of why one adheres to conventional rules and virtues of justice are closely intertwined with how the more natural, moral virtues are both normative and motivational.[7] If Hume cannot fully explain normative reasons in general – for example, how the general rules of morality held in one's society are prescriptive and move

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[6] See Christine Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*, ed. Onora O'Neill (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 256-8.

[7] I am not concerned with the 'artificiality' and 'naturalness' of justice and morality respectively, as this moves me beyond the scope of my paper. Most Humeans would suggest that these rules of morality are prescriptive insofar as they appeal to natural human sentiment; however, in positing the crucial role of practical reasoning in moral judgements my position obviously differs in an important respect from this more customary reading.

agents – it seems we are in an even weaker position to understand those cases where an individual adheres to conventions of justice even when it is against their egoistic interests. For this reason, it is important that I tackle the underlying root of this charge in the first instance and claim that the subtlety of Hume's conception of practical reasoning demands the suspension of some deeply entrenched Kantian presuppositions reflected in the sceptical reading. Setting these aside will allow me to show how the internalisation and affirmation of sociable virtues writ large is in fact reinforced by his conception of practical reason.

Second, this paper is engaged partly in a project of historical retrieval. I want to show that scepticism of the motivational and normative authority of reason presupposes a very specific historical tradition of thinking about practical reason. According to this predominant view, reason is a guide to discrete, right action through universally authoritative rational procedures: as my paper explains below, this reveals 'proceduralist' and 'justificatory' biases.[8] But there is another valid historical tradition of practical reason which focuses on the development of dispositional character and the articulation of human values. Hume sits much more comfortably in the latter. By disentangling Hume from the stronghold of the justificatory and proceduralist biases in contemporary philosophy, what emerges is Hume's unique conception of the intersubjective normativity which frames and situates his account of practical rationality. These metaethical considerations are significant for broader debates in political theory, as it requires us to acknowledge the intrinsic social embeddedness of practical rationality and its function in *articulating* our collective social and political values. Humean practical reasoning as intertwined with intersubjective articulation reflects some crucial communitarian insights about how practical understanding and action is objective insofar as it is necessarily an evaluative undertaking or task, but its content will be socially and culturally constituted.[9] Thus, we have in Hume an important foil to the presumed universalism and individualistic focus of the predominant Kantian and economic instrumentalist models used in contemporary liberal political thought.

Moreover, my non-sceptical interpretation differs in three salient ways from others who have also suggested that Hume cannot be understood as a sceptic about practical reason; included among these readings would be the work of David Owen, Don Garrett, Rachel Cohon, Elizabeth Radcliffe, and David

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[8] I follow Charles Taylor in naming this a 'proceduralist' bias, see *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: 1989).
[9] In fact, we see this insight increasingly recognised in the liberal legal tradition in recent judicial cases determining mental and litigation capacity, where the quality of relationships and communities of individuals is becoming a key factor in deciding an individual's capacity to reason and make decisions.

Phillips. First, though I am sympathetic to the overall readings of Owen and Garrett, both do not go so far as to explain how Hume's scepticism about reason in an *epistemological*, *theoretical* function leads directly to a coherent and much more substantive conception of practical reason than typically attributed to Hume.[10] Second, my reading agrees with the basic tenets of Radcliffe's claim that a Kantian conception of practical reason informs the sceptical interpretation of Hume, as well as with Phillip's suggestion that the sceptical reading imports assumptions about authoritative norms of reason which are simply nonexistent within Hume.[11] In contrast to Radcliffe as well as Phillips, however, this paper will contend that disentangling Hume from the Kantian framework of the sceptical reading will lead to a *non-instrumentalist* conception of practical reason for Hume. Third, the reading presented here is sympathetic to a number of Cohon's interpretative claims. At root, Cohon is right to say that Hume's stance on reason does not entail a commitment to ethical noncognitivism, moral subjectivism, nor to logical principles which our moral terminological distinctions must adhere to.[12] But she states inaccurately that the representational content of ideas – which can in fact create motivating, action-guiding passions – is not caused by reason.[13] Unlike Cohon (as well as Phillips), I want to suggest that Hume isn't just making a descriptive point about faculty psychology, whereby the processes of reasoning and of moral discrimination are distinct from each other. In general, current non-sceptical interpretations of Hume downplay the *practical orientation* of inferential reasoning in Hume by focusing too much attention on his sentimentalist ethics as a response to rationalism. Though important, I suggest that his account of practical reason should not be understood as a mere subsidiary of his moral sentimentalism. Rather his conclusion is even more far-reaching: Hume's account is philosophically significant because it highlights a much-neglected notion of practical reason in an *articulatory function*[14] which disregards the justificatory and proceduralist aspirations of his rationalist – and indeed, our own philosophical – contemporaries. For this reason the purpose of my paper is not to provide a comprehensive description of how my interpretation differs from these non-sceptical readings, but rather to

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[10] See David Owen, *Hume's Reason* (Oxford, 2002), Don Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy* (Oxford, 2000).

[11] Elizabeth Radcliffe, 'Kantian Tunes on a Humean Instrument', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 27:2 (1997): pp. 247-70; David Phillips, 'Hume on Practical Reason', *Hume Studies* 31 (2005): pp. 299-316. Phillips refers to this reading as the 'nihilist' reading.

[12] See Rachel Cohon, *Hume's Morality* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 63-95.

[13] Ibid., pp. 77-8.

[14] I take inspiration from Charles Taylor's use of the term in 'Explanation and Practical Reason', *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA, 1995), pp. 34-60.

put an entirely different inflection onto Hume's practical reason so as to highlight the deeper social and political significance of his account.

Section I provides an outline of the sceptical interpretation. I show that proponents of this reading import a Kantian conception of practical reason into the Humean framework. As a result, they generate dilemmas not originally present in Hume, encouraging a misunderstanding of his famous is/ought distinction. Section II examines the roots of this misunderstanding in some detail, exposing the proceduralist and justificatory biases informing the sceptical reading which must be set aside for Hume's own conception of practical reason to be appreciated in its own right. In Sections III and IV, I set out my alternative account of Humean practical reason. On the basis of my alternative account, Section V shows that Humean sympathy is capable of responding to worries concerning how normative judgements of reason have motivational authority over agents.

I.

Hume writes that 'reason, in a strict and philosophical sense, can have an influence on our conduct only after two ways: Either when it excites a passion by informing us of the existence of something which is a proper object of it; or when it discovers the connexion of causes and effects, so as to afford us means of exerting any passion' (T 3.1.1.1). According to the sceptical reading, this passage states two things: first, reason has no motivational force and is only causally implicated in our practical action. Second, the dictates of reason are not normative because reason possesses no special, intrinsic authority that we necessarily ought to obey. In contemporary debates the motivational and normative questions can be separated – reason can be normative without being motivational or vice versa. However, it is common to link normative reasons with the motivational structure of an agent through an internalist requirement. Internalism stipulates that normative practical reasons have motivational force because these reasons correspond to an agent's pre-existing subjective motivational set.[15] Both naturalist and Kantian constructivist theories of practical reason claim that an adequate theory of practical reason must explain how reason has a motivational and/or normative grip on an agent, and therefore has the power to guide intentional action.

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[15] For example, see Bernard Williams, 'Internal and External Reason', in *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-80* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 101-13.

In the cited passage, Hume seems to deny explicitly that reason has any motivational or normative authority over an agent. His scepticism about reason seemingly extends to the realm of practical reason. Scepticism of practical reason includes not only thicker models that connect standards of practical deliberation with moral rightness and obligation, but also simple instrumentalist models upheld by contemporary proponents of strict naturalism. Naturalists, according to this sceptical interpretation, miscast Hume as the historical progenitor of an instrumental model of practical reason. The sceptical reading's view appears to be confirmed when Hume famously writes,

'Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger. 'Tis not contrary to reason for me to choose my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an *Indian* or person wholly unknown to me. 'Tis as little contrary to reason to prefer my own acknowledg'd lesser good to my greater, and have a more ardent affection for the former than the latter. (T 2.3.3.6)

Conventionally, Hume is thought to be saying that reason cannot condemn our desires or passions as irrational, particularly if it is not founded on false or mistaken information about the means to our end. In itself, the desire to choose one's total ruin cannot be condemned as irrational, in the *theoretical* sense of reason. Later in this paper I suggest that Hume endorses a more nuanced position in terms of *practical reason*, despite putting these remarks so strongly against theoretical reason in the *Treatise*.

Hampton's interpretation uses this passage as evidence that it is *solely* desire that has the authority to tell agents what to do. She places to the fore the problem of motivational scepticism in order to indicate how Hume cannot have a conception of practical reason. For Hampton, Hume is questioning the motivational authority of instrumental reason: so 'while we can act "against reason" in the sense that we fail to act according to its information, we cannot act against its (motivationally efficacious) authority over our action, because such authority does not exist'.[16] The failure to enact the means to an end would not be called 'irrational' or 'mistaken' since objective rational norms do not exist. On these grounds Jean Hampton argues that a Humean view of reason

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[16] Jean Hampton, 'Does Hume Have an Instrumental Conception of Practical Reason?' *Hume Studies* 21 (1995): p. 66.

does not provide us with a normative standard by which to judge action. So someone who fails to act so as to achieve his ends, in a situation where he has no desire to perform the actions required to achieve those ends, does nothing wrong. He violates no rational standards of action; and indeed, that's the point of this Humean view – *there are no rational standards of action*.[17]

In the same vein Elijah Millgram states, '[t]he conclusion of [Hume's] argument […] is evidently not that all practical reasoning is instrumental, but that there is no such thing as practical reasoning at all.'[18]

According to Hampton's account of instrumental reason, a categorical norm of reason must be invoked in order for a theory of instrumental reason to properly account for irrational action. She argues that the normativity of instrumental reason presupposes non-instrumental justification; its foundation hinges on categorical or objective norms of rationality.[19] To say irrational or mistaken behaviour cannot be judged according to any rational standard would violate the claim which Hampton sees all theories of instrumental reason as committed to: 'an action is *rational* to the extent that it furthers the attainment of an end.'[20] Accounts of means-end reasoning must incorporate the possibility of 'irrationality', exhibited in the behaviour of the agent who lacks the *motivation* to take the means to their desired ends. Hampton claims that, for Hume, desires are 'the only force within us that can "tell us what to do";'[21] thus, it is not against reason if a person prefers a lesser good over a 'greater' good. But for Hampton, the fact that we would intuitively call such an agent, 'irrational' or 'mistaken', suggests that our practical reasons have a prescriptive and motivationally authoritative character. Deeper analysis of our instrumental reasons would reveal a categorical standard of rational criticism.

According to Hampton, Hume recognises that hypothetical imperatives of instrumental reason presuppose a categorical norm of rationality; his scepticism regarding the latter means he therefore rejects all models of practical reasoning. Contemporary proponents of instrumental reason, by contrast, are guilty of

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[17] Ibid., pp. 57-74, 68.

[18] Elijah Millgram, 'Was Hume a Humean?' *Hume Studies* 21 (1995): pp. 75-93, 77.

[19] Hampton, 'Practical Reason', p. 74, n. 19. Also Korsgaard, 'Skepticism About Practical Reason', *The Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986): p. 21. Hampton and Korsgaard both have in the background Kant's description of hypothetical imperatives in *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton (London, [1785] 2003) 45 [417]. Not all theories of instrumental reason agree with this controversial claim, for instance, see Simon Blackburn, *Ruling Passions; A Theory of Practical Reasoning* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 239-43.

[20] Hampton, 'Practical Reason', p. 66, emphasis added.

[21] Ibid., p. 64.

disregarding Hume's fundamental insight into the true normative source of instrumental reason. Hampton writes:

> Hume abandons the idea that there is practical reason, and thus the idea that actions can be condemned as irrational, because he understands, better than many contemporary proponents of instrumental reason, that even this (seemingly minimal) understanding of practical reason is still positing a kind of normativity that will be problematic for any naturalist.[22]

Hampton's primary target is contemporary strict naturalists and moral sceptics who uphold instrumental reason as the only conception of rationality a scientific worldview can plausibly accommodate. But though Hume is more aware of the metaphysical connotations of normativity underlying an instrumental model, she alleges that ultimately he makes a mistake similar to strict naturalists when he discusses the artificial virtues in the *Treatise*. Hume states:

> There is no passion […] capable of controlling the interested affection, but the very affection itself, by an alteration of its direction. Now this alteration must necessarily take place upon the least reflection; since 'tis evident, that the passion is much better satisfy'd by its restraint, than by its liberty. (T 3.2.2.13)

Hampton exploits the ambiguous statement, 'must necessarily take place' when she writes:

> One gets the feeling he means that such an alteration "ought" to take place, and yet that would mean recognizing the authority of something like the instrumental norm […] I suspect Hume "slips" here because the way in which we normally understand reason includes the idea that it necessarily has authority over action when it supplies accurate cause-and-effect information regarding action.[23]

Though wiser than contemporary naturalists, in the end Hume cannot justify other aspects of his philosophy, like the artificial virtues, since the reflective process by which these virtues are internalised, affirmed and

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[22] Ibid., p. 70.
[23] Ibid., p. 71.

renewed involves recognising a prescriptive, authoritative force to our reasons. Hume's scepticism of practical reason thus fundamentally threatens the coherence of his account of political justice.

The sceptical reading however is misguided in several important respects. First, to speak of Humean 'hypothetical imperatives' is misplaced and anachronistic terminology. It is highly questionable that Hume would describe instrumental reasons – or the means to an end – as 'imperatives'. The imperatival form ascribes a property of 'oughtness' or obligation to reasons; already, conformity of action to norms of rightness is the principal philosophical concern, signalling that the sceptical reading begins with certain Kantian presuppositions. Hampton's conclusion that 'the Humean view does not count as an instance of the instrumental theory of reason as I have defined [...] because it violates [the] thesis [...] that "an action is rational to the extent that it furthers the attainment of an end"' betrays a distinct Kantian bias in her use of the term, 'rational'.[24] The sceptical reading superimposes a Kantian conception of instrumental practical reason onto Hume, yet it remains entirely unclear why theories of practical reason should privilege this predominant – but very specific – tradition to the exclusion of other existing historical strands. Hume's own views become progressively more obscured but somehow he comes to endorse the normative philosophical conclusions of the sceptical reading.

If the two are properly disentangled, Hume's unique conception of practical reason can be better appreciated. Hume's naturalist framework may preclude formal, procedural norms of rationality in the Kantian sense, but can nonetheless accommodate norms of reason based on a certain kind of *content* or *value*. The authority of reason is derived, not from some ontological property of 'reasons',[25] nor from its formal universal procedures, but rather, from its practical, substantive content, based on an inescapably anthropocentric perspective. Hampton is right to say that, for Hume, 'there are no rational standards of action.'[26] But as we will see below, this is right because the criterion of 'rationality' means nothing when removed from the internal viewpoint of common practices.

II.

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[24] Ibid., p. 66.

[25] A common view held by Hume's rationalist contemporaries, but the sceptical reading does not make this particular mistake.

[26] Hampton, 'Practical Reason', p. 68.

We need to examine more closely the philosophical agenda driving the sceptical reading's interpretation of Hume. These presuppositions rest on a widespread but mistaken interpretation of the is/ought, fact/value distinction, and have far-reaching normative implications on the way practical reason is thought of more generally.

It is a widespread view that Hume exposes how 'ought' cannot be deduced from 'is'. '[O]*ught, or ought not*', he writes, 'expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary [...] that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it' (T 3.1.1.27). Orthodox readings of this passage take Hume to be exposing the fact/value gap: G. E. Moore famously argues that the naturalistic fallacy is committed when a natural property is taken as an ethical property. Descriptive facts cannot be invoked in order to explain moral statements, mainly because the former are distinct from ethical properties. Thus, philosophical attempts to bridge 'is' and 'ought' effectively confuse one class of statements for another.

Given what Hume is widely presumed to be saying about the fact/value gap, the sceptical reading attributes to him a non-cognitivist, subjectivist ethical position: morality cannot be justified through an appeal to facts of the matter. Nor can it be justified through rational argument. Subjective, emotive states are all we can appeal to, since Hume's radical scepticism of practical reason means that there can be no *rational* justification for any ought claims, be it instrumental or moral. Hampton writes:

Hume's famous dictum that you cannot derive an "ought" from an "is" has been forgotten by moral skeptics who believe, nonetheless, in the existence of an instrumental practical reason. [...] The fashion for seeing moral imperatives as hypothetical rather than categorical has assumed that naturalists are able to accommodate the hypothetical "ought" in a way that they cannot accommodate the categorical "ought". But Hume implicitly understood that this is not so; even if hypothetical imperatives strike us as more congenial or more understandable by virtue of their connection with desires, nonetheless, insofar as they generate authoritative reasons for action, which "apply" to us no matter what our occurrent desires, then their prescriptivity is just as "queer" and problematic from a naturalistic point of view as the prescriptivity of categorical imperatives.[27]

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[27] Ibid., pp. 70-1.

Here Hampton could be understood as targeting the neo-Humean strand of strict naturalism, such as Philippa Foot. In varying degrees, naturalists accept Moore's analysis that the is/ought passage expresses Hume's doubt that moral claims can be derived from descriptive statements. In response to this doubt, they attempt to give an account of morality as subjective, instrumental rationality. Foot argues that, at root, moral claims are reducible to a subjective sentiment, so '[t]he new element in a proposition [refers to] [...] nothing new in the object but in ourselves'.[28] Morality as subjectively valid 'hypothetical imperatives', as instrumental rationality, is therefore acceptable and better analysable from a scientific point of view, and 'put[s] an end to the hunt for mysterious extra properties'.[29] In other words, moral prescriptions avoid committing the naturalistic fallacy if they are framed conditionally and instrumentally, rather than unconditionally and categorically. Moral prescriptions characterise a change within the sentiments of agent, rather than an actual property of goodness or of the external natural world. In response, Hampton claims that Hume acknowledges the non-naturalism of instrumental reason. By virtue of its intrinsically prescriptive character, practical reason, whether it be moral or strictly instrumental, is problematic from a naturalist point of view.

Whether Moore's description of the naturalistic fallacy is plausible is not my main concern here. Rather, I am interested in whether a Moore-inspired reading of the is/ought passage accurately represents the views presented in original text or reflects certain anachronistic biases imported back into Hume. The sceptical reading bases their interpretive claims on this division between fact and value, between explanation and practical reason, said to originate from the elemental truth expressed in Hume's is/ought distinction. But if this were our starting point, Hume himself would violate the is/ought rule in his discussion of justice. Obligations of justice depend on existing descriptive concepts of common interest; the 'ought' in this case is explicable only through such presupposed, commonly agreed upon concepts.[30] One could follow Hampton and say that Hume is simply inconsistent. But there are good reasons to reject this conclusion, even aside from the principle of interpretive charity. If Hume does not adhere to the presuppositions underlying the Moore-inspired reading, it seems that the sceptical interpretation cannot lay claim to an accurate understanding of Humean practical reason. I want to first expose the presuppositions underlying the fact-value gap, and contest Hume's presumed adherence to these presuppositions.

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[28] Foot, 'Hume on Moral Judgement', in *Virtues and Vices* (Oxford, 2002) p. 79.
[29] Ibid., 7p. 9. See also 'Morality as Hypothetical Imperatives' in *Virtues and Vices.*
[30] A. C. MacIntyre, 'Hume on "Is" and "Ought"', *The Philosophical Review* 68 (1959): pp. 451-68, 457-8.

At their core, the sceptical reading reflects certain presuppositions which subsequently inform their response to Hume's supposed identification of the naturalistic fallacy. First, this view adheres implicitly to current moral philosophy's preoccupation with questions of how our moral claims, beliefs, or practices are justifiable. I call this the *justificatory bias*. The preoccupation with justification suggests that Kantians aim to obtain some moral truth. This is a controversial claim, particularly considering that for Kant ethics is *sui generis* and non-reducible to epistemology. However, let me explain it this way. Though they may not be committed to the same epistemologically driven aspirations of the strict naturalist or traditional rationalist, the Kantian sceptic nonetheless transports the goal of truth into the practical, moral domain. At root this focus on justification prioritises the moral vocabulary of the disengaged observer over the self-explanation and articulation of the good from the agent's standpoint: disengaged, rational argument is needed to settle moral disputes – preferably achieving a kind of moral truth which people can agree upon. Thus, this moral truth need not have a strong realist status that requires verification of its descriptive propositions, but rather truth in a weaker sense. Christine Korsgaard, another Kantian sceptical interpreter of Hume,[31] argues that moral language does indeed admit truth or falsehood, 'for the correct conception of a concept will be a guide to its correct application, and when a concept is applied correctly, what we get is truth'. She continues, '[b]ut what makes the conception correct will be that it solves the problem, not that it describes some piece of external reality'.[32]

Moreover, moral truth is to be achieved through an objective procedure of reason, leading to what I call a *procedural bias*: in order for our moral reasons or beliefs to be justified, they must be subject to scrutiny and analysis by a formal procedure of reason. Objectivity is defined and conferred by a specific method of reasoning or thinking which then prescribes obligatory actions. This differs from accounts of practical reason which are constituted by substantive conceptions of the good, whereby the function of practical reason is to reflect and articulate existing intersubjective goods or ends. The procedural bias focuses attention on the structure or method of reasoning, remaining neutral on the substantive content of one's ends.

Deeper analysis of the sceptical reading reveals that the justificatory and procedural bias has crept into the way standards of practical reason are analysed and assessed. Ultimately, these biases lead the

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[31] See Korsgaard, 'Skepticism About Practical Reason', pp. 5-25.
[32] Korsgaard, 'Realism and Constructivism in Twentieth-Century Moral Philosophy', *Journal of Philosophical Research, Centennial APA Supplement* (2003): pp. 99-122, 117.

sceptical reading to mistakenly attribute to Hume, first, an exclusively theoretical, epistemological function of reason, and second, a subjectivist account of practical motivation and moral value. But these attributions are inaccurate for two reasons.

Firstly, in the is/ought passage Hume's main worry is not about the method of rational argumentation in the pursuit of moral truth, and he is unconcerned about the proper classification of descriptive and normative statements. The sceptical reading poses the question, does the normativity of 'hypothetical imperatives' stem from categorically binding norms of reason? But this concern tries to locate and ascertain the objective source and procedures of rational normativity so as to assure us that our embodied practices justified; however, this issue of justification is entirely beside the point for Hume. Hume is drawing attention not to how normative statements – as non-natural properties – have no truth-value or justification, but rather, to the fact that normative judgements require a different 'cognitive orientation'.[33] In other words, *both* practical and descriptive statements require the same cognitive skills of probable, inferential reasoning, imagination, and memory, but the latter tackles issues and concerns which are unlike those of the former.[34]

Second, since Hume does not share the justificatory bias of the orthodox Moore-inspired reading, he cannot be endorsing any particular ideal procedure of rational justification. The traditional interpretation of the is/ought passage mistakenly assumes that Hume is asking, 'can moral rules be deductively derived from factual claims' and then proceeds to show how derivation rules disallow this transition. In the famous is/ought passage it may appear that Hume supposes that an inference is 'deductive or defective': because deduction is upheld as the standard procedure of reason transitions between 'is' and 'ought' are invalid. But the is/ought passage needs to be situated within his broader agenda, designed to question the claims of his rationalist contemporaries who argue that morality – and the truth of moral objectivity – is a matter of demonstrative arguments. For Hume, the rationalist who tries to show through deduction the existence of moral properties is using the wrong sort of argument. Moreover, unlike its current association with logical entailment, Hume throughout his writings has a different notion of 'deduction' which denotes the type of *inference* incorporated in *inductive* argument.[35] On a more fruitful reading, Alasdair MacIntyre suggests that Hume's question should be understood as, 'how and if moral rules may be *inferred* from factual

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[33] W. D. Falk, 'Hume on Is and Ought', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 6 (1976): pp. 359-378, 362.
[34] Ibid., p. 362.
[35] MacIntyre, 'Hume on "Is" and "Ought"', p. 461.

statements.'[36]   Importantly, Hume validates our inductive beliefs because they rely on natural cognitive mechanisms *a posteriori* to experience, not *a priori* demonstrative arguments. Like inductive arguments, moral arguments cannot be rendered deductively. Thus, if Hume does not adhere to the procedural bias, the fact that prescriptive statements are not demonstratively valid, or fail to adhere to some objective procedure of reason, should not be the deciding factor as to whether or not he has a conception of practical reason.

The orthodox misreading of the is/ought distinction exposes how contemporary philosophers are preoccupied with formal, procedural structures of reason as well as the proper classification of rational statements in light of Moore's reading. But we risk committing a serious anachronism should we read Hume in light of these historically recent concerns. By disentangling the two, my corrected reading makes interpretive space for a plausible, non-sceptical understanding of Humean practical reason: more specifically a conception that is receptive to salient contextual details and intersubjective moral rules, where the discursive articulation of substantive content has more normative significance than Kantian formal procedures of reason.

III.

As we saw in the previous section, transitions between 'is' and 'ought' may be disallowed if we were to adhere to the justificatory and procedural biases of the Kantian reading. Because Hume subscribes to neither bias, transitions from 'is' to 'ought' are both valid and possible within the constraints of his naturalist framework[37] common to both ethical content and practical deliberation.

Ultimately, Hampton endorses the conventional Moore-inspired reading of the is/ought passage in order to expose how objectivist commitments necessarily underlie instrumentalist models of reason to demonstrate how contemporary neo-Humeans such as Mackie cannot use this conception of rationality to support a morally sceptical position. The Kantian worry is: if our conception of reason does not preserve a robust notion of critical objectivity through its method or procedures, then we are trapped into a kind of natural determinism and ethical subjectivism. What is desirable is too rooted in and bound by human

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[36] Ibid., p. 461, emphasis added.

[37] Hume's naturalism is different from what I call in this paper the strict naturalist position. I do not have the space to explain fully how the two are distinct; for my purposes here Hume's negative sceptical and positive naturalist strands in his epistemology do not commit him to robust physicalism which contemporary strict naturalists are themselves committed to. For more on this, see Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume* (New York, 1966); Barry Stroud, 'The Constraints of Hume's Naturalism', *Synthese* 152 (2006): pp. 339-51.

contingent circumstances, and therefore cannot provide sufficient critical distance from existing practices in order to generate universal norms of morality or rationality. And without the latent justificatory and procedural biases, practical reason is supposedly incapable of specifying actions which are objective and valid for everybody.

But for Hume, morality is not an autonomous sphere that is removed from our natural desiderative constitution.[38] From Hume's perspective, the Kantian view privileges impersonal rational norms and procedures that are irrelevant or even harmful to morality, given their abstraction from the unique situational context which grants our practical action apposite meaning and significance. Even a morally thick account of practical reason requires some balance between universal norms and desiderative content – both of which should be malleable as required by the particular situation. Such balance is captured, for example, in Aristotle's description of practical reason as determining the 'universal particular'. For Aristotle, the person who possesses practical wisdom possesses has both rational *and* non-rational impulsions within the soul correctly orientated so they can react appropriately to the circumstance. This is what qualitatively distinguishes the man of practical wisdom from a merely clever person. Similarly, Hume would not want to say that a person of good character has to accord with an abstract procedural norm of reason since a virtuous character emanates proper moral feelings; ethical distinctions are grasped more with sentiment rather than discovered by reason (T 3.1.2.1). Hume's psychological hedonism involves the process of critically shifting our evaluative point of view, a process where the content and quality of our desires or ends come to matter and can be *moral* orientations, just in the same way that our reasoned reflection and judgements can be. In Hume's words, '*reason* and *sentiment concur* in almost all moral determinations and conclusions' (EPM 1.9, emphasis added).[39]

The procedural bias of the sceptical reading assumes that the content of the good is unspecified and undetermined by reason; if ends are rational they must be generated by a specific method of thinking and detached from desire. But Hume believes that the moral virtues are psychological dispositions which display the right deliberative orientation towards the right things: what is 'desirable' is also morally and normatively good. The two can intersect because like Aristotle, Hume deploys 'bridge notions between "is" and "ought":

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[38] MacIntyre. 'Hume on "Is" and "Ought"', pp. 462-6.
[39] David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, hereafter abbreviated to *EPM*. All citations from the *EPM* refer to the edition ed. by Tom Beauchamp (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006).

wanting, needing, desiring, pleasure, happiness, health.'[40] In particular, 'bridge notions' are invoked in the hedonistic origins of instrumental reason; this puts normative weight on the substantive *content* of what is desired, wanted or needed. For Hume, the structure of natural human desire is such that we unavoidably allude to the normatively good, revealing a common insight about the nature of human valuing: the pleasurable is not necessarily isolated from what is good, nor is good necessarily isolated from what is pleasurable.[41] Hedonistic ideas or impressions are necessarily accompanied by the notion of 'goods and evils'; indeed the 'good' and 'desirable' or 'pleasurable' appear to be reciprocal concepts, inseparable from natural features of human motivation (T 1.3.10.1). The intersubjective criterion guiding both our moral distinctions and our use of instrumental reason involves a perfectly valid transition from what ends or desires *do* engage and motivate us, to what ends or desires we *ought* to have.

Conversely, Hume also claims that scepticism concerning these transitions – reflected in the Kantian interpretations' adherence to Moore's fact/value gap – is to mistakenly privilege certain presumptions about the way valid epistemological and ethical arguments must proceed. Even with the contextual nature of social reason and morality, Hume has a standard of objectivity, just not of a Kantian variety. Similar to how '[n]ature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breath and feel' (T 1.4.1.7), morality, as Hume says, 'depends on some internal sense or feeling, which nature has made universal in the whole species' (EPM 1.9). Objective standards are not the exclusive domain of procedures of *reason*, but a matter of human *nature* – which includes desires and passions *as well as* reason, and all fall broadly under the rubric of individual character. Hume even describes specific character traits that are universally praised and blamed: '[w]riters of all nations and all ages concur in applauding justice, humanity, magnanimity, prudence, veracity; and in blaming the opposite qualifies'.[42] Hume's naturalist framework has a determinate idea of what ends have motivational force and are also considered objectively 'good' or valuable: pursued ends and desires *should* and *ought* to be amenable to the society we inhabit. It is therefore from our inescapable human vantage point – as natural culture-formers, discursive and social beings with a certain degree of innate benevolence to our fellow being – which we reason about, appoint and articulate moral value to the content of specific desires over others.

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[40] MacIntyre, 'Hume on "Is" and "Ought"', p. 462. In saying this, I am not claiming that Hume has an Aristotelian account of reason, but simply reiterating how his moral psychology has some Aristotelian elements, especially when we consider Aristotle's account of how early moral habituation.

[41] Ibid., p. 463.

[42] Hume, 'Standard of Taste', in *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis, 1987), p. 228.

To summarise, the intersection between the good and desirable in instrumental rationality means that our *explanation* of the natural world will be intimately bound up with our practical valuations of, and motivation towards, moral goodness and moral activity. As Hume says, 'when we consider how aptly *natural* and *moral* evidence link together, and form only one chain of argument, we shall make no scruple to allow that they are of the same nature, and derived from the same principles' (EHU 8.19).[43] Hume therefore does not follow Moore's fact/value distinction. This makes positive space for a conception of practical reasoning which differs from the Kantian tradition. I turn my attention to this precise reasoning process in the next section.

IV.

The remainder of the paper attempts to show how Humean practical reason, in what I call an 'articulating' function, represents an important but historically neglected conception: namely practical reason as less preoccupied with obligatory action, but concerned with the determination, articulation, and communication of intersubjective moral norms functioning, as an evaluative mirror to society's substantive values. Though Hume may not thematise 'practical rationality' in an explicit way, it is implied in the inductive forms of knowledge we gain from our implicit, everyday moral learning and social habituation. Specifically, practical reason is used, first, in our acquisition and articulation of practical, moral experience of social norms; and second, in the merit judgements of the character traits of others and ourselves. These judgements are, in turn, a crucial prerequisite to the formation and correction of moral sentiments.

My reading assumes a relatively coherent strand in both Hume's *Treatise* and *Enquiry*. Falk notes that Hume's position seems to waver between the two works.[44] Indeed, one might argue that the numerous rhetorically charged passages in the *Treatise* warrants the sceptical reading, whereas the non-sceptical interpretation is better supported by the *Enquiry*. There is, however, significant overlap between Book III of the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*'s discussion of moral reasoning. It is more plausible to suggest, as both Annette Baier and Peter Kail do, that Hume is guilty of overstating his view in the polemical passages

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[43] David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, hereafter abbreviated *EHU*. All citations from the *EHU* refer to the edition ed. by Tom Beauchamp (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000).
[44] W. D. Falk, 'Hume on Practical Reason', *Philosophical Studies* 27:1 (1975), pp. 1-2.

against the rationalist position in *T* II.iii.[45] If a full picture of Hume's conception of practical reason is desired, it is necessary to contextualise those debatable passages in light of his opposition to his rationalist contemporaries and read the *Treatise* in conjunction with his other philosophical works.

Hume's unique brand of naturalism orientates humans towards practical activity and common society with others (*T* 1.4.7.8-12).[46] Given this orientation, Humean practical reasoning is situated within a horizon comprised of collective judgements, which are beneficial to 'the peace and security of human society' (EHU 8.35). These judgements, along with '[t]he great force of custom and education mould the human mind from its infancy and form it into a fixed and established character' (EHU 8.11).[47] Customary, educational appraisals – essentially inferential, inductive experience – aid the development of socially beneficial character traits, including a dispositional capacity to instrumental reason in a way which reflects ease with our naturally appointed role as practical, socially engaged agents.[48] Thus, common, everyday practical inferences represent an inductive accumulation of practical experience, drawing upon internalised, socially generated rules of morality.[49] These rules become 'affect-related'[50] when they supervene on and correct subjective desires, tastes and sentiments.

This process is in the *Enquiry*. Hume first explains that '[t]he final sentence [...] which pronounces characters and actions amiable or odious, praise-worthy or blameable' and 'that which renders morality an active principle and constitutes virtue our happiness, and vice our misery' is down to 'some internal sense or feeling, which nature has made universal in the whole species' (EPM 1.9). This initially seems to suggest that practical reason is reducible to his sentimentalist ethics. But he then continues: 'in order to pave the way for such sentiment, and give a proper discernment of its object, it is often necessary, we find, that much reasoning should precede, that nice distinctions be made, just conclusions, drawn, distant comparisons formed, complicated relations examined, and general facts fixed and ascertained' (EPM 1.9). Though reason does not influence our sentiments towards natural kinds of beauty in particular, 'in many orders of beauty [...] it is *requisite* to employ much reasoning, *in order to feel the proper sentiment*, and a false relish may frequently be corrected by argument and reflection' (EPM 1.9, emphases added). Hume finally concludes,

[45] See Annette Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 158-60 and P. J. E. Kail, *Projection and Realism in Hume's Philosophy* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 192-6.
[46] See also *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, 2nd edn, ed. Norman Kemp Smith (London, 1947), 1pp. 34, 205.
[47] Cf. Hume, 'The Sceptic', in *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, pp. 170-1.
[48] Terence Penelhum, 'Hume's Moral Psychology', in *Themes in Hume; The Self, the Will, Religion* (Oxford, 2003), p. 154.
[49] Cf. Philo statements in *Dialogues*, p. 134.
[50] Falk, 'Hume on Is and Ought', p. 373.

'moral beauty partakes much of this latter species, and demands the assistance of our intellectual faculties, *in order to give it a suitable influence on the human mind*' (EPM 1.9, emphasis added).

To make sense of this passage, we have good textual warrant to assume that Hume is describing 'practical reason' in an expanded sense, though the actual term is unmentioned. Causal inference is an assessing, judging, reflective process: with a practical, cognitive orientation, we observe, compare, and describe objects, fact-knowledge, and character traits, leaving us with socially-communicated moral values and motivating sentiments. To say the same thing a bit differently, reason's object exploration works in tandem with the unique affective disposition of the individual, in order to generate valid moral beliefs. These beliefs contain practical content that is both motivating and normative. Hume discusses notoriously how moral good and evil are discerned by feeling rather than reason. However, in the same passage, he continues:

But these sentiments may arise either from the mere species or appearance of characters and passions, or from *reflections* on their tendency to the happiness of mankind, and of particular persons. [...] [B]oth these causes are intermix'd in our *judgments* of morals; after the same manner as they are in our decisions concerning most kinds of external beauty: Tho' I am also of opinion, that *reflections on the tendencies* of actions have by far the greatest influence, and determine all the great lines of our duty. (T 3.3.1.27, emphases added)

As a cognitive faculty, practical reason reaches explanatory and evaluative conclusions which allow us to determine moral beauty, value, and duty. Moreover, when Hume describes the calm passions, they are not described as impetuous, pathological forces of great intensity, but are closely related to commonsense notions of how it is to conduct oneself according to reason and admirable pragmatic reflection. Included in the calm passions are '[e]very valuable quality of the mind, whether of the imagination, judgment, memory, or disposition; wit, good-sense, learning, courage, justice, integrity' (T 2.1.2.5). When a passion 'pronounces its verdict' on an object's value, it 'considers not the object simply, as it is in itself, but surveys it with all the circumstances, which attend it'.[51] Surveying all the circumstances attending an object brings to mind a causal inference, so the passions must involve some kind of cognitive activity; without which object

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[51] Hume, 'The Sceptic', p. 172.

and circumstance remain disjointed, incoherent isolates, and the value of an object cannot be determined. Similarly, in the essay, 'Of the Standard of Taste', the incapacity to discern and be moved by beauty and virtue is attributed to an indelicate imagination – namely a cognitive mechanism that is part and parcel of the practical reasoning:

Many and frequent are the defects in the internal organs, which prevent or weaken the influence of those general principles, on which depends our sentiment of beauty or deformity. Though some objects, by the structure of the mind, be naturally calculated to give pleasure, it is not to be expected, that in every individual the pleasure will be equally felt. Particular incidents and situations occur, which either throw a false light on the objects, or hinder the true from conveying to the imagination the proper sentiment and perception. One obvious cause, why many feel not the proper sentiment of beauty, is the want of that *delicacy* of imagination, which is requisite to convey a sensibility of those finer emotions.[52]

If we took reason in a Kantian, procedural sense we would be hard-pressed to comprehend the general meaning of these textual passages. The words 'reflexion', 'judgments', 'surveys', 'imagination' and all that comprises 'valuable qualities of the mind', would be incoherent if we did not take Hume to be describing practical reason in a more expanded sense of the term. Let me explain.

For Hume, inferential rationality – which concerns the transitions between mental states – includes qualitative judgements and assessments which are not constrained exclusively to the first-person execution of a means-end connection, but encompasses third-person, cause-effect appraisals of individual character traits and virtues. Causal inference between *objects* is therefore only a partial dimension of practical deliberation: more fundamentally, the content of practical reason has broad *practical* significance because it allows us to determine the consequences of specific character traits, and generate moral approval or disapproval accordingly (T 3.3.1.16).[53] The objectivity of practical deliberation stems from its substantive content in the form of such qualitative judgements, not reason's method, procedure, or rules. We see the emphasis on content over obligatory action when Hume justifies many aspects of good character and sociable virtues, such as benevolence, prudence, and other virtues beneficial to oneself (like patience, industry; qualities of

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[52] Hume, 'Standard of Taste', p. 234.
[53] Penelhum, 'Hume's Moral Psychology', p. 144.

the mind like learning, courage, and integrity), irrespective of their potential consequences or conditional utility. Hume writes, 'virtue in rags is still virtue; and the love, which it procures, attends a man into a dungeon or desart, where the virtue can no longer be exerted in action, and is lost to all the world' (T 3.3.1.19). Virtuous character is *valuable in itself*; there is quasi-objective merit to good character which transcends the achievement of ends or actual obligatory act.

Thus, the 'practical' function of reason is not constrained to the first-person execution of a means-end connection but encompasses third-person, cause-effect appraisals of individual virtues which affirm the qualitative values promoting social life. Hume illustrates this point when he argues that sympathy cannot be the sole source of our praise of virtue, for if that was the case, 'imperfect means' which 'fails of its end' can 'never acquire any merit from that end' (T 3.3.1.19). Rather, Hume states:

The goodness of an end can bestow a merit on such means alone as are compleat, and actually produce the end. *To this we may reply, that where any object, in all its parts, is fitted to attain any agreeable end, it naturally gives us pleasure, and is esteem'd beautiful, even tho' some external circumstances be wanting to render if altogether effectual. 'Tis sufficient if every thing be compleat in the object itself.* (T 3.3.1.19-20, emphasis added)

Our esteem of a person's character does not seem to be based solely on their successful execution of a means-end connection *in action*. Inferential reason permits the objective valuing of certain moral traits from an observational, third-personal point of view, and good character that readily promotes the good of society will impart evaluative worth and value to attempted means, even when the ends are enacted unsuccessfully. In the case of a person who is admired for their sociable character, it does not matter that circumstances rendered ineffective their intended action. We as observers effectively judge the person for the general tendencies or 'rule' of action which displays an enduring quality or temperament; we know that in this instance their lack of success was 'out of character'. Or we realise that the person intended a good effect, and had the circumstances been right, they would have succeeded. Based on how we judge their character we render the means and ends complete even when they are not, by filling in the situational and dispositional gaps to the story. In short, the practicality of reason lies partly in those causal judgements which connect

character with specific effects, and thereby facilitate the normative reflection and a quasi-objective determination of moral virtues and vices relevant to our society.

But one might ask, how exactly is this reason *practical*? The sceptical reading could argue that this is evidence of why reason can exist only in a theoretical rather than practical function for Hume: the fact that we use inferential reason to make judgements about an individual's character implies that these reasons are merely inactive theoretical, judgements. The Kantian view suggests that even if they relate directly to human practical life and experience, factual statements about the empirical world do not qualify as instances of practical reason. But as indicated so far, Hume's specification of reason's 'practicality' is far more expansive than allowed in the dominant Kantian strand – defined, not by obligatory action which accords with objective rational procedures, but by the articulation of qualitative, societal values. It is important to appreciate the crucial groundwork done by Hume's epistemology, where reason's speculative aspirations are discredited in order to assert its practical utility.[54] Hume's scepticism of reason's capacity to advance theoretical knowledge means that 'factual', inferential statements – particularly if its content is relevant to the promotion of social interaction and reciprocity – are indeed 'practical'. For Hume *practical* reason or knowledge affirms, first, the objective truth of how humans are ensconced within a natural and inescapable framework of intersubjective values reflected in ordinary experiences and customs; second, practical reason must guide humans in their social interactions with one another so that engagement in common life is fostered. The person who is rationally 'mistaken' and 'wrong' in the Humean sense would not necessarily be guilty of violating an objective procedure or method of thought, but could be the individual who isolates herself through anti-social behaviour, thus deviating from the objective value of social life.

The full import of correcting the is/ought passage now comes to the fore, where we set aside entrenched philosophical prejudices which confine practical reason to a certain method or procedure of thinking. Third-person character inferential judgements illustrate precisely a dimension of practical reason so often neglected in contemporary debates in both political and moral theory: namely practical reason as the explicit explanation, inferential *articulation* of normative human values, embedded in everyday practice and implicit moral understanding. Practical reason is constituted by linguistic idioms and moral terminological

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[54] Unfortunately, I cannot fully explain this point given my purposes here. For more on this, see Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume*, Part 3.

distinctions held in common, used in social communication. Language proves how humans are natural articulators of value:

This great unanimity is usually ascribed to the influence of plain reason; which, in all these cases, maintains similar sentiments in all men, and prevents those controversies, to which the abstract sciences are so much exposed. So far as the unanimity is real, this account may be admitted as satisfactory: But we must also allow that some part of the seeming harmony in morals may be accounted for from the very nature of language. The word *virtue*, with its equivalent in every tongue, implies praise; as that of *vice* does blame.[55]

When Hume says that people usually attribute the existence of similar sentiments to the 'plain reason' of the 'abstract sciences', he is referring to reason in the rationalist sense, where converging sentiments are viewed as evidence of demonstrable truths deducible by reason. That said, does he mean to draw a sharp distinction between language and *practical* reason in the expanded sense? If, as Hume says elsewhere, '[t]he intercourse of sentiments, therefore, in society and conversation, makes us form some general inalterable standard, by which we may approve or disapprove of characters and manners' (T 3.3.3.2), it makes little sense to understand him as drawing this distinction. There is no way we can discursively convey approbation or disapprobation if we are incapable of making causal, reasoned judgements, connecting character traits with effects. Since we are all invariably ensconced within a linguistic framework, the development of individual character will imply an intimate acquaintance with broader discursive idioms of moral judgement and their implicit social value (EPM 1.10).

V.

     Crucially, means-end reasoning from the first-person standpoint and the more evaluative third-person perspective become linked through sympathy, a natural mechanism common to all humans:

For besides the relation of cause and effect, by which we are convinc'd of the reality of the passion, with which we sympathize; besides this, I say, we must be assisted by the relations of resemblance and

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[55] Hume, 'Standard of Taste', p. 228.

contiguity, in order to feel the sympathy in its full perfection. And since these relations can entirely convert an idea into an impression, and convey the vivacity of the latter into the former, so perfectly as to lose nothing of it in the transition, *we may easily conceive how the relation of cause and effect alone, may serve to strengthen and enliven an idea*. In sympathy there is an evident conversion of an idea into an impression. (T 2.1.11.8, emphasis added)

For Hume, sympathy is the natural, sensible identification with the situation or feelings of others which involves the same cognitive mechanisms engaged in the practical reasoning process. Far from being a one-way motivational channel from impressions to ideas, cognitive mechanisms can 'convert an idea into an impression', conferring onto the former a vivacity and force that the latter naturally possesses. Indeed, natural cognitive mechanisms, such as resemblance and contiguity, often aid our sympathetic responses to others, rendering our ideas of another's experience more immediate and dynamic. Thoughts of another person's situation, of another person's evaluative judgement of character traits or moral values, are always fainter when compared to our firsthand experience. Sympathy however enlivens these third-personal experiences to the point of actually experiencing similar passions, and enlivening otherwise impotent causal ideas and beliefs.

Understood as such, sympathy illustrates how one's broader socio-cultural context – essentially comprised of normative, inferential judgements – impact on self-identity and first-personal motivation. Our natural sympathetic inclinations help us to activate general judgements about morality or assessments of character which are held by our larger discursive community (EPM App. 4.18). Personal development involves the internalisation of such judgements, and is fuelled by the desire to possess a reputation worthy of praise, such that we would voluntarily change our character. '[S]ympathy we sometimes carry so far,' Hume writes, 'as even be displeas'd with a quality commodious to us, merely because it displeases others, and renders us disagreeable in their eyes; tho' perhaps we can never have any interest in rendering ourselves agreeable to them' (T 3.3.1.26). Since the substance of the self consists of assessable character traits, these appraisals are normative, as they inevitably affect one's own self-conception.

Hume clearly has in mind this sympathetic, evaluative process when he rather oddly refers to the self as 'object' rather than the more common term, 'subject'. When we speak in evaluative terms it is often in relation to an object rather than a subject; we identify ourselves as a 'self' only by having another

comparative stance. To refer to the self as 'object' therefore suggests a change in the evaluative viewpoint, to a characteristically stable and intersubjective perspective. Perception of the self as 'object' moreover involves taking a degree of pride in oneself, especially when the judgements of others reflect favourably upon us. Without a notion of the self and its attending pride our ideas, beliefs, or reasons would remain inactive, yet without common social and linguistic references, these beliefs remain arbitrary and our identity would be fragmented. For its stability, the self therefore requires the mediation and reflection others provide, so that self-identity possesses a deeper significance, as opposed to the trivialities commonly dominating individual choice. Such shifts from subject to object are possible only within a landscape of common, existing moral terms and distinctions. For Hume practical reasoning is not restricted to the first-person question, 'what are the means to this desire or adopted end?' Nor is it restricted to the third-person evaluative standpoint asking, 'what is the broader impact of this character trait on society?' Rather, sympathy's subtle operation in practical reason shows how both stances mutually imply one another, meaning the first-person must, and for Hume, does ask, 'how does this end reflect my character, and how will others judge me'?

Practical reason is consequently a matter of personal character and social development: it combines our natural hedonist inclinations and feelings with the evolving yet stable social conventions and linguistic artefacts; together they cultivate our natural moral sensibilities through time. Practical reason conceived as such highlights the intersubjectivity and social valuing that contextualises human activity. It is *this* context that forms the crucial motivational and normative foundation of Hume's practical reason. Thus, in itself, the fact that some desiderative or hedonistic state may initiate means-end reasoning should not at all suggest that our practical action originates from an undeveloped, primitive psychology, absent of integrated reasoned judgements of some sort.

Conclusion

Above I have challenged the sceptical reading and established how Hume has a conception of practical reason which does not adhere to a Kantian conception of practical rationality. This involved setting aside some prevalent misconceived ideas about the underlying function and normative source of practical

reason. Hume has a complex and plausible answer to the sceptical reading's question of *how* and *why* evaluative, normative reasons or beliefs become practically activated in the practical reasoning process. It is up to the sceptical interpreter of Hume to answer why practical reason should be understood within the historically specific confines of a Kantian framework.

One may ask, why is it even important to reiterate how Hume's practical reason is not a Kantian conception? Could we not just say, as many contemporary Humeans do, that for Hume, practical reason is reducible to our common-sense statements or beliefs; practical reason does not actually exist, but we just talk as though it does? In other words, Hume has no theory of practical reason – he is simply making an ordinary language point about our reason. As a simple anatomist, Hume only describes rather than makes normative judgements about our practices and beliefs.

But the fact that Kantian sceptics and strict naturalists have both claimed Hume as support for their divergent philosophical agendas should arouse some deep suspicion about this contemporary Humean view. In fact, it should alert us to the fact that many sympathetic, contemporary Humean interpretations, have not taken seriously enough the fact that Hume has a proper *theory* and *conception* of non-instrumental practical reason – and indeed, one that is not reducible to our common-sense statements or beliefs. Ultimately, the challenge is for Humeans to reclaim Hume from the sceptical Kantian and strict naturalist, and re-examine how Hume provides us with a philosophically coherent and relevant account of practical rationality.[56]

Even more importantly, Hume's treatment of practical reasoning has broader implications in debates about rationality in normative political thought. By bringing to the fore a crucial, articulatory dimension to practical reasoning, Hume challenges the presumed justificatory and proceduralist biases underlying the most influential accounts of practical reasoning in contemporary liberal theory, such as the Kantian and economic instrumentalist models. Reason is not just practical in the sense of "prescribing" and "directing" what we ought to do, therefore not preoccupied simply with ensuring the objective validity of disparate individual action. Nor is it simply a matter of providing procedural content linking the means to one's desired end. As Hume's account ultimately shows, part of its function is to gain practical knowledge, to understand and articulate that conception of goodness and value which moves and orientates us in our collective lives. It involves the explicit explanation and clarification of our surrounding implicit social, and political landscape and of the qualitative values reflected there. This conception of practical rationality provides us with a

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neglected but richer contender to the other alternatives, while reflecting more accurately our inescapable intersubjective condition. Contemporary communitarians will thus find previously unexplored theoretical tools in this Humean model which encourages further critical reconsideration of whether the procedural and justificatory aims in competing conceptions of practical rationality are in fact appropriate ideals in current liberal thought.