

## ABSTRACT OF A *TREATISE OF HUMAN NATURE*

1: We should try for a science of man with the same accuracy as that of natural philosophy; we do this by finding a few simple principles, based on experience, explaining human action.

2: The science of human nature will be the ground of other sciences: logic, morals, and politics.

("Logic" here means what we would call epistemology, and because of Hume's position here, also metaphysics: space and time, causality, etc.)

3: Leibniz points out that philosophers spend too much time on demonstrations, and not enough time on probabilities, which are what our practical life relies on.

4: Definitions. Perceptions = what is present to the mind. Impressions = passions or sensory images of external objects; these are lively and strong perceptions. Ideas are reflections on passions or non-present objects; they are fainter and weaker perceptions. This distinction is as evident as that between feeling and thinking.

5: First proposition. All ideas are derived from impressions. This looks like Locke's denial of innate ideas, but it's not, since for Hume impressions and passions are "innate."

("innate" = "original" or non-derived, not "what you're born with; see ECHU 2, note 1 [note 10, p 13 of our edition]).

6: The derivation of ideas from impressions can help resolve – or dissolve – longstanding philosophical disputes.

Impressions are precise, so if you have an ambiguous idea you can make it precise by tracing it back to its original impression.

Even worse than ambiguous ideas are empty terms, words that have no idea annexed to them. If you can't find an impression for the idea a term pretends to designate, then the term is "insignificant."

Using this method, he dismisses "substance" and "essence."

"When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning fact and existence?* No. Commit

it then to the flames: For it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion." (ECHU 12)

7: Reasoning about "matters of fact" depends on causality. Using the method of tracing impressions, and the example of billiard-balls, the idea of "cause" of things present to the senses resolves to three "circumstances":

- a: Contiguity in time and space of two objects
- b: Priority in time of one object to another
- c: Constant conjunction of similar events: every time something like this happens, the same kind of event occurs

There is nothing else to be found in the idea of causality.

8: Now, what about inferences from a present effect back to a past cause, or from a present cause to a future effect? This ability to infer cause and effect is the foundation of practical life.

9: The key is experience. A brainy Adam would be unable to infer causes from mere observation; if he could, this would be a demonstration, but there are no demonstrations here, because it's not impossible that anything at all could happen. So Adam needs experience, that is, a "sufficient number of instances of this kind," for him to "conclude without hesitation" that the expected effect would occur.

("His understanding would anticipate his sight, and form a conclusion suitable to his past experience." We will see how Kant will ground this anticipation of sight by understanding.)

10: So, all reasoning about causes is based on experience and presupposes that "the course of nature will continue uniformly the same."

Adam would not be able to demonstrate this presupposition of natural continuity; for "it is possible the course of nature may change, since we can conceive such a change."

He wouldn't have even been able to give a probabilistic argument!

11: It's only custom or habit that allows the anticipation of sight by understanding.

12: The powers by which bodies operate (e.g., what makes a billiard ball able to move another by contacting it) are unknown; we know only their sensible qualities; and why should we think the same qualities are always hiding the same powers?

13: So it's not reason, but custom, that guides our lives.

14: Belief vs conception. Demonstrations rely on contradiction between a proposition and its contrary; but in matters of fact, you can always conceive the contrary, even if you can't always believe it.

15: Beliefs do not add new ideas to your conceptions. Rather, they are a different manner of conceiving an object; a belief in something feels different from merely imagining that something. A belief is more lively, more vivid, firmer, or more intense than a mere entertaining of an idea. You can see this with art, which never hits our emotions like real life.

16: experience is not always uniform, so we believe the most common pattern, although we can conceive the less common patterns; again, belief is only a different feeling from mere conception, not another content.

17: the same reasoning about cause and effect in the material world holds for cause and effect in our mental operations. Mere observation of a volition to move the body or to think another thought is not enough to predict the effect; we need experience here too to ground our inferences from cause to effect. Experience is that which provides the habit by which the mind moves from the observation of the cause to the conception and belief of the usual effect.

18: going back to the idea of causality, Hume says that, besides what he found in that idea – contiguity, priority, and constant conjunction – other people talk about a "necessary connexion" of cause and effect and about "power," "force," or "energy."

But these are empty terms; there's no idea attached to them, because you can't find impressions for them.

The Cartesians admit that you can't see any sort of "power" of matter with your eyes, so they reserve it for God.

But, says Hume, our idea of God is nothing but a projection of our reflections on the operations of our mind.

But you can't find a "power" of our minds any more than you can find it in matter.

So either "power" is an empty term, or it just means experience-based habitual determination of thought to pass from cause to effect.

19: THN is skeptical with regard to understanding; reasoning is based on experience and belief is a "lively conception produced by habit." Even the existence of external things or their continued existence after perception of them is interrupted is only belief qua sentiment. We would be lost to this skepticism if nature were not too strong.

(This is a very important point; Hume is saying that philosophy gives no theoretical grounding to practical life. And yet practical life goes on. That is, people will believe in external object and causality whether or not they can give a demonstration grounding those beliefs. So we philosophers should turn to examine how practical life operates though nature, custom, and habit.)

20: personal identity: the soul or mind is nothing but a "system or train of different perceptions." They are "united together," but w/o simplicity or identity.

(This is very important: what is unity w/o identity? This is the key!)

Two ideas must be done away with:

The Cartesian claim that thought in general is the essence of the mind.

(This is "unintelligible" since "every thing, that exists, is particular.")

The notion that the mind is substance in which perceptions inhere.

(We have no impression of substance; we know only particular qualities and impressions.)

The mind is "composed" of perceptions, united in a system w/o identity.

21: infinite divisibility is a philosophical notion that Geometry cannot ground.

22: the passions are the topic of book 2 of THN. Although the objects that excite these passions are very varied, there are common circumstances for them.

(The Abstract doesn't go into the topic, but there is a fascinating discussion in the THN about the inevitable relation to self in "pride." So here there's a distinction between Hume's "bundle theory" of the self, which ungrounds so many ordinary beliefs about the identity or substantiality of the mind, and the passionate reference to the self. Another example then of the distinction between the skeptical effects of philosophical theory and the careful examination of how beliefs operate in practical life.)

23: regarding free will, Hume goes back to causality in matter: it's only [contiguity, priority, and] constant conjunction that ground our inferences. The same holds in observing human action: there's an inferential link based on the constant conjunction of motives and actions, given probabilities based on experience. On these inferences almost all practical life rests.

24: this reliance on inferred causality in practical life puts the advocates of free will in a bind. They must allow the linkage of motive and action, but when they deny that inferences based on constant conjunction is the totality of what is meant by "necessity," they must then show what else is operating in matter, and that they cannot do.

25: The notion of "association of ideas" is the most inventive aspect of THN.

The imagination can separate, join, and compose ideas into "all the varieties of fiction."

Nonetheless, there is a "secret tie or union" among ideas which leads to their greater frequency of mental conjunction and appearance one after the other. This is a chain of thought that holds even in the loosest of reveries.

There are three principles of association: resemblance, contiguity, causation.

You cannot over-estimate their importance for the science of human nature; for our mental life, these are the only links that bind the universe together and relate us to external things.

Since a thing has to appear to our mind to excite our passions and tie our thoughts together, "they are really *to us* the cement of the universe."

(The "to us" indicates our divorce from the "secret powers" of nature [see point 12 above].)

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## HUME, *ENQUIRY CONCERNING HUMAN UNDERSTANDING*, 2-3

### Section 2: Of the origin of ideas

1: Hume proposes vivacity as a dividing characteristic of perceptions of the mind.

There's a great difference between feeling pain or pleasure, and recalling in memory or anticipating in imagination those feelings. Memory and imagination can copy or mimic sense perceptions but not match their vivacity. Except for a mind "disordered by disease or madness."

(Recall how Descartes in Med 1 starts off his skeptical journey with a reference to madness, but then backs off.)

Reflections on perceptions of the mind such as the passions are true copies, like a faithful mirror, but "the colours are faint and dull."

2: So we can divide perceptions into two categories:

Ideas, which are less forcible and lively, and produced by reflection on impressions

Impressions, such as sensory images (produced by sight and hearing and seeming to come from outside things) and emotions and passions (love, hate, desire).

3: The imagination seemingly has an unbounded power, but it's actually bound to "compounding, transposing, augmenting, or diminishing the materials afforded us by the senses and experience." That is, ideas are copies of impressions.

4: Two arguments will demonstrate the Copy Principle.

One, if we analyze our ideas we can resolve them into simple ideas copied from impressions.

For example, our idea of God is just a projection of ideas we get by reflecting on our mental capacities and exaggerating them.

(Recall how Descartes needs to have the idea of God be something he could not construct.)

Hume issues a dare: show me an idea, and I will produce the impression when it came.

Second, the deficiency argument, which has three areas: senses, objects, and mental capacities.

If you are deficient in a sense, then you won't have ideas of that sort; a blind person has no ideas of color and a deaf person no ideas of sound.

Same thing with objects: if you have never tasted wine you can't know how delicious it is.

And same thing with mental capacities: if you're mild-mannered, you'll have no idea what the thirst for revenge is.

5: The "missing shade of blue." Is Hume justified in saying this is so singular it doesn't hurt his copy principle?

6: Here's how to get rid of the metaphysical jargon that is plaguing philosophy: whenever you suspect that a term has no meaning or idea attached to it, then ask what impression is the supposed idea derived from?

Ideas, especially abstract ones, are "naturally faint and obscure" while impressions are strong and vivid, with sharp limits.

(Compare Descartes: "clear and distinct ideas")

### Section 3: On the association of ideas

1: Ideas, in memory or imagination, have a "principle of connexion" such that they follow one another in regular fashion.

You can notice this in a number of contexts: when you are seriously thinking, a thought that breaks the chain is noticed and rejected. You can even find a train of thought in reveries or dreams or conversations.

2: There are three principles of connexion:

Resemblance  
Contiguity (in time and place)  
Cause or Effect

3: Examples of these principles:

4: All we can do to prove that this is a complete list is to go over examples of connected thoughts and extract the principle of that connection, making the principles as general as possible.

We will see Kant wrestle with this problem of completeness (of categories).

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HUME, *ENQUIRY CONCERNING HUMAN UNDERSTANDING*, 4-5

Section 4: Sceptical Doubts concerning the Operations of the Understanding

Part I

1: Relations of Ideas vs Matters of Fact.

Relations of Ideas	Matters of Fact
Geometry, Algebra, Arithmetic	Experimental science and practical life
Mere operations of thought	Knowledge depends on cause and effect
Intuitively or demonstratively certain	Probabilities, not demonstrations.
Contraries are contradictions; they cannot be clearly conceived	Contraries are not contradictions; they can be clearly conceived.

2: How do we arrive at knowledge of cause and effect (CE)?

It arrives from experience, not reason. Adam could not reason his way to CE. But we imagine that we could reason to CE. Custom is so strong that not only does it fool us into thinking we know (rationally) what we don't know (rationally)(CE); custom "hides itself" (so that we are fooled by imagination into thinking we have rational knowledge of CE).

3: Just looking at things, we can imagine all sorts of events following each other, so any such invention of an effect must be arbitrary. So must any connexion btw CE. This means, "every effect is a distinct event from its cause."

4: The "secret powers of nature." All we really know are surface qualities (color, texture, etc); we don't know the "ultimate springs and principles" by which things produce the effects they do. The best we can do are general principles like "elasticity, gravity," etc. So philosophy teaches us "human blindness and weakness."

Part II:

1: CE is based on experience. How exactly does that work? It doesn't work by reason.

2: we don't know the secret powers of nature; we don't know why billiard balls move each other or why bread nourishes us.

3: NONETHELESS, we still presume that there is a link btw sensible qualities and secret powers and expect them to operate the way they have done in our experience. We "foresee, with certainty" the expected effects from like objects. (Compare the phrase from the Abstract: "understanding anticipates sight.") How does this anticipation work?



4: there's an inference from A) these effects have followed these causes in the past to B) similar objects will work like those in the future.

5: the presupposition is that nature will continue in its course. But this is based on experience. It's not a contradiction to think the course of nature may change. So we have only probable reason to think past CE is a guide to future CE. And we can't PROVE future will resemble past, because that would be a probability argument, and all probability arguments are based on CE and hence experience, and all experience / CE depends on future resembling the past. So to attempt to prove that would be circular.

6: We're talking about a principle of human nature that grants authority to experience. This is not reason, but custom. Experience relies on inductive reasoning, not deductive; you can't immediately see the succession of CE; you have to build up examples. BUT, you don't rationally infer connexion between sensible qualities and secret powers.

7: again, experience is the basis of CE, not reason: you can't prove the future resemblance of nature to the past, since all experience based knowledge relies on that presupposition.

8: BUT practice doesn't require rational arguments!

### Section 5: Sceptical Solution of these Doubts

#### Part I:

1: "Academic" or "Sceptical" philosophy has many benefits in curbing arrogance and credulity by reining in our pretensions to rational grounding. But it's not well liked.

2: We needn't fear that skeptical philosophy will interfere with practical life; in practical life ("reasonings from experience") we always take the step of assuming the future will resemble the past, even though we have no rational arguments there. What induces the mind to take that step?

3: Rational Adam won't discover CE, since the powers at work never appear to the senses. But with experience, you have an immediate inference from C to E or E to C, but no experience grants access to secret powers.

4: So it must be custom or habit that allows CE inferences. Custom or habit only names a principle of human nature; it doesn't explain how the inference works.

5: Without custom, we could have no practical action.

6: The anchor principle. In CE reasoning we have to have an anchoring impression.

7: So we need an anchor, and a "customary conjunction" btw the anchor and another object. Then the mind is carried from one to the other and we necessarily have a belief (a vivid sentiment distinguishing belief from mere contemplation). This is all a matter of "natural instincts" w/o reason.

8: Transition: what is going on with belief and customary conjunction? See Part II.

Part II:

1: Imagination can freely mix and match ideas to produce fictions. (ECHU 2, p 11)

2: belief is distinguished from contemplation of fiction by a feeling that arises when the mind undergoes the passage from one object to another in a CE situation.

3: we can't define belief, but we can describe it as "more vivid," etc.

4: principles of association of ideas are: Resemblance, Contiguity, and Causation. (see ECHU 3, p 14).

5. Belief arises from all three principles of association when they are at work in the mind.

6: you have to believe in the anchoring object in order for belief in the associated object to arise.

7: here we see a sort of "pre-established harmony" of course of nature and succession of our ideas. We can't establish this rationally, since we don't have access to the secret powers of nature, yet our principles of human nature serve us well in guiding our practical life: that is, custom works for us.

8: in fact, custom works so well and is so necessary for our survival that nature wouldn't have entrusted its work to something as weak as human reason. So here we see the wisdom of nature in making associative principles be instinctual for us.

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## HUME, *ENQUIRY CONCERNING HUMAN UNDERSTANDING*, 6-7

### Section 6: Of Probability

1: Ontological claim: there is no chance (thus everything has a sufficient reason; nothing escapes a causal web). Epistemological claim: our ignorance of "real causes" (= "secret powers") makes us think that there is.

2: "Chance": Higher probabilities of results provoke greater (more vivid, steady, and secure) beliefs. But we have the idea of chance if we think that any result is unrelated to probability, that is, has an equal probability. But insofar as experience teaches us that in similar cases in the past there has been a greater number of one event (result / effect) than another, we come to expect the event (result / effect) that has occurred a greater number of times.

3: "Probability": Some causes are entirely regular; no exception has ever been noted in the past. Other causes are irregular; there have been exceptions. Philosophers attribute this irregularity to hidden causes; but we don't take note of this. When different effects have been produced from apparently similar causes, we believe the greater probability cause is at work, based on a past experience.

### Section 7: On the Idea of Necessary Connexion

1: Overview (based on the recap on p 52): although there is no impression of a necessary connexion when viewing a single instance of operation of bodies or minds, when we have viewed many similar instances, there is a feeling of customary connexion as the mind moves from one object to its successor. This feeling of the customary motion of the mind is the impression upon which the idea of CE is based. The first instance of an event does not let us (rationally) infer a result; we only can make an inference after experience.

#### Part I

1: Geometry vs the moral or metaphysical sciences

Geometry	Moral or metaphysical sciences
Relations of ideas	Matters of fact
Exact definitions / long inference chains	Ambiguous definitions / short inferences

2: Most obscure metaphysical ideas: "power, force, energy, necessary connexion."  
Let's follow our method and look for the impressions that should be there.

3: Gotcha! There are no such impressions. In a single instance, we can never find any necessary connexion of events; we can never even guess what's going to happen next, because the powers of nature are hidden from our senses.

4: Don't we have an idea of inner power? This would be an "idea of reflection" arising from inner perception. So the question is: don't we have an impression that our will moves our muscles or directs our thoughts?

5: Bodily movement. What we observe is succession: we feel our will and we feel its result, a movement of the body. But we don't know how this works, and never will. A) the union of soul and body is mysterious; B) we can't move all our organs with the same authority; C) anatomy teaches us that the first object of power of our will is the nerves and the path from there to the muscles is hopelessly complex. So, in conclusion, there is no impression of power in internal affairs.

6: Control of thought. Same thing; there are no impressions of power, just feelings of succession. A) We don't know how ideas arise; it's a creation out of nothing; B) our control over our thoughts is even more limited than our control over our bodies; C) our mental self-control varies.

7: Long discussion of Malebranche and the occasionalists.

Part II:

1: Recapping the first section: in single instances, we can never find anything other than succession; there are no impressions of power linking events. "All events seem entirely loose and separate." They follow each other, but at best they are conjoined, not connected. So it seems to be the case that there are no ideas of power or necessary connexion; these are merely empty words.

2: But don't give up yet! Even if we can't even guess what's going to happen when we don't have experience, when we do have such experience we can foretell what will happen next. We then use the language of CE, supposing that there are powers involved. (NB: we don't see powers, but we suppose them to be in operation.)

3: So our idea of necessary connexion arises from repetition of similar instances of constant conjunction of events. What happens after a sufficient number of repetitions is that the mind moves by habit from one event to the expected successor. So the impression that provides the birth certificate for the idea of power or necessary connexion is the "customary transition of the imagination."

4: Now CE is the basis for all investigation of matters of fact; from there we find the "immediate utility of all sciences," which is, "to teach us, how to control and regulate future events by their causes."

5: First two definitions of cause: A) the regularity definition: we find succession of objects conformable to experience of similar cases; B) the counterfactual definition: the first object is the necessary condition of the second: "if the first object had not been, the second never had existed."

6: Third definition of cause: C) an object followed by another; the first object always conveys the mind to the second. That is, the appearance of a cause always carries the mind by customary transition to the idea of the effect.

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#### HUME ON PERSONAL IDENTITY: *Treatise* 1.4.6

I benefited from reading Jane L. McIntyre's essay in the *Cambridge Companion to Hume* in preparing these notes.

1: Some philosophers claim to have an idea of the perfect identity and simplicity of the self, based on the evidence of self-consciousness. But following his usual procedure, Hume can't find an impression that is constant and invariable.

2: What does he find upon introspection? Only particular perceptions, "of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure." What he never finds is some self other than the succession of perceptions.

3: So, all we find is "a bundle or collection of different perceptions ... in a perpetual flux and movement." Even though Hume tries out the metaphor of mind as theater, he takes it back quickly; there are only perceptions and we have no idea "where" they occur or what the "materials" of the perceptions.

4: But why then do we ascribe an identity to ourselves? This is one of Hume's basic questions: we don't observe – we have no impressions of – necessary connection or identity of the self, and yet we believe in causation and selves? How are we to explain this tendency to believe where there is no direct evidence?

5: There are two questions here: identity relative to thought or imagination (the topic of THN 1.4.6) and identity relative to self-concern (dealt with in THN 2). That is, we want to know about the formation of an identity belief relative to the knowing subject and to the practical agent.

6: We tend to confuse the idea of identity with that of connected succession or "diversity."

This is because the action of the imagination responsible for those ideas feels very much the same: in succession of related objects there's a very smooth transition of the mind from one object to the other, as smooth as the

transition in the contemplation of an unchanging, identical, object. The two feelings resemble each other in their smoothness and are therefore often confused for each other.

7: Since this confusion is so common we need to justify our taking of diversity for identity, and we feign a principle that connects the diverse impressions, and we come up with "soul," "self," or "substance."

8: So we need to show that what we commonly take to be identities without strict observation of their unchanging continuity are really just a succession held together by the principles of the association of ideas: resemblance, contiguity, and causation.

9: Four tricks of the mind that produce the misattribution of identity.

A: Some changes to material objects are so slight that the transition of the mind is so smooth that we think we're just observing an unchanging object. (The slightness of the change is relative to the size of the object – you could take a mountain off a planet and not notice the difference.)

B: If the change is gradual and insensible that will also lead us to misattribute identity.

C: When there is a common end or purpose to the parts, they can be changed but we still think the object is the same; e.g. a ship whose parts are changed is still thought to be the same ship.

D: Reciprocal cause and effect, as in organisms. Here we think it's still the same organism even under great changes of "form, size, and substance" (meaning "material stuff").

I'm skipping two more points Hume raises.

10: Now, we move on to the question of personal identity. This too is only fictitious, and is like that we ascribe to organisms; thus it is an operation of the imagination (in mistaking diversity for identity due to the similar feeling of the transition of the mind in the two cases.)

11: In observing the mind, we never have an impression of necessary connection, so that our idea of CE in this realm is based only on customary association of ideas. So the identity of the mind or self is only based on the feeling of the easy transition of ideas via the principles of association – resemblance, contiguity, and causation.

12: Resemblance: memory links ideas by resemblance: our present recalled idea resembles the original perception.

13: Causation: there are many causal links in the mind: impressions give rise to ideas, and vice versa (a thought can trigger a passion: thinking of Jones can provoke a feeling of pleasure or pain). So,

the true idea of the human mind, is to consider it as a system of different perceptions ... which are link'd together by the relation of cause and effect and mutually produce, destroy, influence, and modify each other.

14: So, the important faculty is really memory, as that's what enables us to have the idea of CE (you have to have constant conjunction of ideas in similar cases; this is built up in experience by memory). BUT, once you have CE, you can actually go beyond active, conscious memory and reconstruct past activities that you have forgotten. So memory doesn't really produce personal identity; rather it "discovers" it by letting us see causal chains among our perceptions: starting with a present anchor – this diploma in my hand – I can work my way back through the events of the past and discover the personal identity between my present self and the past events that got me to this point.

15: Thus we have explained the tendency we have to talk about and believe in a self even though there is nothing absolutely identical to it; it is rather a system of ideas related by CE.

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HUME, *ENQUIRY CONCERNING HUMAN UNDERSTANDING*, 8  
"Of Liberty and Necessity"

1: Hume will try to show that the dispute over "liberty and necessity" (that is, free will), is merely verbal, and he proposes definitions of terms that would dissolve the dispute (not "resolve" it, but dissolve it).

2: Everyone agrees material things are caused, in the sense of regularity of succession; this regularity of nature is the basis on which our habits of inferring CE rest. If there weren't regular patterns of similar actions, there would be no constant conjunction and customary inferences; and these last two are the only bases we have for thinking necessity or connection.

3: Regarding human voluntary action we find that same regularity of succession and customary inference is assumed by our practical life. CE here is between motive and action. We find that the entirety of social life relies on the ability to infer relations between motives and actions, and this in turn relies on a great similarity in human nature (across historical and cultural differences) regarding the way passions

motivate actions. So history is like a repository of experiments by which we learn the regular patterns of action that constitute human nature.

4: However, regularity doesn't mean no variability; of course there is variation in patterns of action (and hence in the relations of passions which cause action) in individual cases, across historical and cultural differences, between the sexes, and at different stages of life.

With regard to cultural difference Hume says we can see the effects of custom and education, but he adds that natural rather than educational differences cause the differences in behavior between the sexes. Keep that in mind for when we read Wollstonecraft.

5: What about uncertainty of results? There is never any real contingency; everything is caught in a causal web, but some causes are hidden from view, and they account for the odd or unexpected results we can sometimes observe. For instance, the human body is so complex that we are often unable to predict its responses; but that doesn't contradict the regularity of nature when it comes to human physiology.

6: If we are to be consistent, we have to apply the same reasoning to voluntary actions. There is a general pattern of human action, even if there are often cases where we cannot untangle the causal web.

7: And this observable regularity of behavior linking motives and actions underlies mutual social dependence by allowing constantly used inferences about human behavior based on experience of predictability. So we have always assumed "necessity" in the sense of regularity of behavior and ability to predict by inference from motives to actions. We see this in historical investigation, in literary criticism, and in everyday life.

8: In fact we blend together natural and "moral" necessity in explaining complex social "assemblages," such as the prison / punishment example Hume gives.

9: Now why have people been reluctant to acknowledge such necessity in human action and what can we do about it?

If you pay attention to things, material causality is only constant conjunction and customary inference.

But people still have a strong tendency to believe that they see a necessary connection in material things.



So when they introspect, and feel no internal necessary connection, they think the mental realm must be different from the material realm w/r/t to causation.

But if you strictly attend to the material realm you will realize that there is no impression of necessary connection there.

Then the reduction of causality to constant conjunction and customary inference – which is admitted to occur in human action – will be accepted as the totality of the idea of mental causation.

10: Okay, now to consider "liberty." If we mean by that the power of acting according to the will, then everyone allows that, except in the case of someone in chains.

11: Whatever other definitions we allow, we have to account for plain matters of fact and we have to have a consistent definition. In so doing we have to admit an inescapable causal web so that "chance" qua causal contingency is no real thing.

## Part II

12: On to moral considerations: just because some people think that not having free will – in the sense that volitions are uncaused, not in the sense that our volitions can move us – will have bad moral consequences is no argument against the truth of the claim against uncaused volitions.

13: In any case, Hume is going to claim that his definitions of liberty and necessity are actually essential to the support of morality.

14: Necessity, in Hume's sense of a regularity of succession between motive and action and smooth mental inferences based on that observed regularity, is what lies behind laws, which work by reward and punishment. Similarly with moral blame: there has to be something in the motives and character and passions of the subject of an action in order for there to be any moral judgment of him, rather than a sheer evaluation of the action. For example, people aren't blamed for actions done out of ignorance.

15: Let's now turn to Hume's sense of liberty, as ability to act according to the will (not ability of the will to be uncaused). Here again, actions are only blameworthy insofar as they indicate the internal character of the actor.

16: Objections: an unbreakable causal web ends in God being the author of all volitions. So either human actions cannot be blamed, because the volitions are causally determined by God, or God is as blameworthy as the actor.

17: Hume divides the objection in two and answers each part in turn. First, if God causes human actions these can never be blameworthy, because of God's perfection. Second, if there are indeed blameworthy human actions, then God cannot be perfect and is in fact Himself blameworthy for these actions.

18: First response: the moral sentiments are the source of attributions of good and evil, and these aren't counter-balanced by "remote and uncertain speculations" as to God's perfect plan, that is, a Whole of events into which evil events supposedly fit and which on the basis of that fit is supposed to dissolve the evil.

19: Second response: philosophy has no business getting involved in such mysteries and endless verbal disputes; far better that philosophers focus on our "true and proper province, the examination of common life."

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### Hume on Virtue and Vice in General: *THN*, 3.1.1-2

With help from the *SEP* article and several articles in the *Cambridge Companion*.

#### Presuppositions of the discussion in THN 3.1

1: The THN has 3 parts, understanding, passions, and morality. We're now on morality, the most important thing in common life.

2: In THN 2, Hume shows that passions are unique, singular impressions; they are emotions, feelings, or desires. They are what motivate our actions – a desire connected to an action is a volition or act of will: I want that! Volitions or motivating passions are caused by sensory impressions, ideas, or other passions. Remember the discussion of free will (ECHU 8): we are free in the sense that we can act on our desires, but we are not free in the sense that our volitions are uncaused.

3: Passions / desires / volitions are not directly caused by reason, which can only arouse a passion by pointing out an object for a passion; or it can show CE connections to enable us to satisfy a passion.

Notoriously – or famously, depending on your position – Hume says "reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions" (THN 2.3.3)

#### THN 3.1: Morals aren't derived from reason

1: THN 3.1.1 is a negative section, with Hume fighting against moral rationalists.

2: Hume reminds us of the distinction of impressions and ideas. Where can we classify the origin of moral judgments as to virtue or vice, impressions or ideas? If you say they come from ideas, you're a rationalist. Hume now goes on the attack.

3: Hume first claims that morals influence our passions and feelings, so they can't arise from rational judgments, which are inactive, non-motivating, as shown in THN 2.3.3.

3: One argument showing the non-motivating nature of reason: reason discovers truth or falsity, that is, agreement with real relations of ideas or real matters of fact. But passions aren't in agreement with anything else; they are brute facts; they don't refer to other passions. So a passion can't be true or false; it can't even be unreasonable: "Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger" THN 2.3.3.

4: When it comes to the supposed ability to derive moral judgments from relations of ideas, Hume shows that the same relation of ideas – killing a parent – is called evil in humans, but is not condemned in animals. Same with incest.

5: If the rationalists are right, you should be able to demonstrate moral truths. By saying that, they say morality is not about matters of fact amenable to probabilistic investigation.

6: But you can never find virtue or vice in examining the action; you only find it in the moral sentiments that arise in you when you contemplate the action.

#### THN 3.1.2: Moral distinctions are derived from a moral sense

1: Morality is about feeling more than judgment

2: When we observe virtue (a virtuous character, rather than a virtuous action – we move back from acts to motivating passions and character by inference; actions are the signs of character) we get an agreeable impression; and from vice, an unpleasant impression.

3: Now the moral sentiments are approbation and disapprobation; they are particular kinds of pleasure and pain. Why do we get such impressions? What are the causes here?

4: It's not an inference from finding a character is pleasing to thinking it is virtuous. Rather, in feeling pleased by a character we are just by that fact feeling it is virtuous.

5: Now we have to have a disinterested contemplation of character in order to have the kind of feeling that qualifies a character as morally good or evil.

6: Hume now moves to setting up the rest of THN 3. What are the principles behind the arising of the moral sentiments? First, there must be some general causes here; there are so many occasions that provoke moral sentiments that there can't be unique principles for each occasion. That's not how nature works.

7: Ah, very interesting word, "nature." Tell me more.

First, we can't just mean "nature" as opposed to "miraculous," because that's not saying much; no one could claim that every moral sentiment was a miraculous appearance, so of course they are "natural" in this minimal sense.

Second, "nature" can mean "common," "not rare," or "what happens most of the time." There's no firm standard for what is frequent vs rare, but every human society and every person – short of the sick and mad – experience these feelings. So they are part of human nature, we could say.

Third, "nature" can be opposed to "artificial." Now we're onto a very interesting topic, and the answer is "sometimes it's one, sometimes the other."

8: Hume goes on the attack against those who equate "virtue" with "natural" and "vice" with "unnatural." This doesn't hold up under any of the sense of "nature" discussed above.

9: What's good about the present discussion is that we are now clear that what we have to discuss is why moral sentiments arise from the contemplation of actions, sentiments or character.