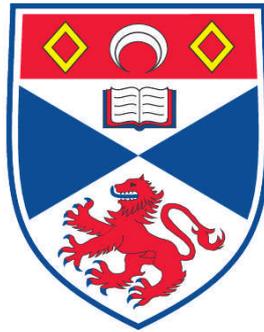


# THE ROLE OF THE IMAGINATION IN HUME'S SCIENCE OF MAN

Christopher Bernard

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St. Andrews



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Christopher Bernard

Thesis submitted to the University of St. Andrews for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy, September 8th 1989.



## The Role of the Imagination in Hume's Science of Man

In recent years there has been an explosion of writing on David Hume. His scepticism, his writings on morality, politics, and religion, have all received substantial attention. What I attempt to do in this thesis is to suggest that his revolutionary contributions in all these fields can be better understood if we consider his attempt to found the sciences on the imagination.

What little work there is on the imagination in Hume's writings is almost all concerned with Book I of the Treatise. As regards Book I, I suggest that Hume's overarching problem is to argue that belief is dependent on the imagination, whilst still keeping a contrast with the whims of the 'fancy'. He wants to disabuse us of the idea that we believe on account of reason; but he wants to distinguish the claims of science from the claims of poets.

But I also examine why he thinks his explanation of the production of passions support his conclusions about belief. And I argue that his former account guides conclusions found in other genres. So for example, I examine certain essays and letters about politics, and his explanation of religious events in the History of England.

Why do men falsely believe that they are distinguished from the animals through possessing reason? On the one hand Hume tries to explain the origin of the sciences; on the other hand, he tries to show how men have come to have a false conception of themselves. A central aim of the thesis is to bring out these themes through showing the use Hume makes of principles of the imagination. I pay special attention to Hume's attempt to argue that Christianity plays a major role in the sustaining of the false view.

(i) I, Christopher Bernard, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 98,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

September 8th 1989

(ii) I was admitted as a research student under Ordinance No. 12 in October 1984 and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.d in October 1984; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St. Andrews between 1984 and 1989.

September 8th 1989

(iii) I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Ph.d in the University of St. Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

September 8th 1989

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## Contents

Acknowledgements	p. vii
Abbreviations	1
INTRODUCTION	
1.	3
2.	10
3.	23
4.	27
Chapter I <u>Belief</u>	
Part I	
introduction	32
1. background	34
2. the first sense of 'imagination' or 'the fancy'	39
3. the imagination and belief	46
Part II	
introduction	54
4. the imagination and the <u>First Enquiry</u> ; passions and poets	56
5. general rules	63
6. the wise, and the fanciful	69
7. necessity	80

## Chapter II Scepticism

1. introduction	87
2. reason and the imagination	90
3. of scepticism with regard to the senses	95
4. still more errors	103
5. excessive and moderate scepticism	109
6. small world	118
7. sceptical principles	126

## Chapter III The Passions

introduction	133
1. preliminaries and analogies	135
2. sympathy and experimental principles	139
3. Hume the moralist	146
4. Wright; Phillipson; slavery	157
5. the principle of the conversion of passion	167

## Chapter IV Morality

1. preliminaries	178
2. 'moral realism'	183
3. objectivity and 'a productive faculty'	188
4. dangers	198

## Chapter V Politics

introduction	207
1. judgment and prejudice	211
2. justice and government	219
3. politics and the arts	227
4. faction and moderation	234
5. factions	241
6. factions, Whigs, Tories, and Christianity	248

## Chapter VI Religion

introduction	257
1. the development of religion (A)	263
2. the development of religion (B)	268
3. hidden desires	274
4. toleration	284
5. false religion	289
6. the imagination, rectitude, and Christianity	296
7. the <u>Dialogues concerning Natural Religion</u> (A)	305
8. the <u>Dialogues concerning Natural Religion</u> (B)	314
<u>Notes</u>	323
<u>Bibliography</u>	327

for my parents

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## Abbreviations

- T A Treatise of Human Nature, edited by L.A.Selby-Bigge, second edition, revised by P. H. Nidditch, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1978).
- E I An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, third edition, revised by P. H. Nidditch, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1975).
- E II An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, third edition, revised by P. H. Nidditch, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1975).
- NHR The Natural History of Religion, edited by H. E. Root, Stanford: Stanford University Press (1956).
- D Dialogues concerning Natural Religion, edited by Norman Kemp-Smith, Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill (1957).
- H The History of England, six volumes, Liberty Classics, (1983).
- G The Philosophical Works, edited by T. H.Green and T. H. Grose, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1875).
- LG A Letter from a Gentleman, edited by E. C. Mossner and J. V. Price, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press (1967).
- MOL My Own Life, in Dialogues concerning Natural Religion, edited by Norman Kemp-Smith, Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill (1957).
- L The Letters of David Hume, edited by J. Y. T. Greig, 2 volumes, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1932).

NL New Letters of David Hume, edited by R. Klibansky and  
E. C. Mossner, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1954).

A reference to [T555] refers to page 555 of the Treatise;  
[G I 109] refers to page 109 of Volume One of The Philosophical  
Works.

## INTRODUCTION

### section 1

In the Preface to Anarchy, State, and Utopia, Robert Nozick speaks of two views about how to write a work of philosophy. One view, he says, is that the author should have thought through all the details of his position, and should have refined them into a 'finished, complete, and elegant whole' [Nozick p.xii]. The other view is that there should be room for a less complete work, 'containing unfinished presentations, conjectures, open questions, and problems, leads, side connections, as well as a main line of argument' [ibid]. Now the main line of argument in the present work is that what Hume calls his 'Science of Man' is best understood as an attempt to found the sciences on a single faculty, the imagination. Such an argument necessarily involves a study of diverse subjects, and (here) this calls for an admission of incompleteness and inelegance.

However, there is another reason why the sort of open ended work that Nozick describes seems suitable in the present instance. A great deal of the interest in studying the role Hume assigns to the imagination arises from seeing how he adapted the conclusions of others. To different degrees Hume is a Ciceronian, a Malebranchian, and a Sentimentalist. Moreover, without also seeing something of the debates that his work attempts to resolve, we would be left without a sense of the the great ambition that his work represents. For in attempting to discover a foundation for the sciences, Hume assigned to the imagination unprecedented functions. Some of these functions, for example the role of the imagination in our reasoning about causes and effects, have received a great deal of attention from commentators. Others have been neglected. When, however, we turn to these other areas of Hume's thought, we can see how we cannot fully account for his conclusions about scepticism,

politics, economics, religion, and the study of history, without considering his employment of certain fundamental principles of the imagination. Such principles, for example, that postulate the association of ideas and the association of impressions; that postulate that an idea can be converted into an impression; and which describe how we are to account for the effect of particular circumstances on our passions - circumstances such as opposition or uncertainty. But this appreciation has its price in a lack of completeness in any single issue. For the presentation of these influences and problems has to give way to the main task of finding a unity in his own thought in the postulated way.

The present work is indebted to various efforts made by historians of philosophy, philosophers and historians. And, in a manner, it aims to provide an example of one of Hume's most deeply held beliefs about philosophy: that progress becomes possible through dialogue. However, if there has been very real progress in the study of Hume in recent years, there is still great disagreement about many of his central doctrines. It is not without reason that in one of the most original of recent commentaries, John Wright suggests that a brief look at the competing interpretations of Hume 'will leave the uninitiated reader completely baffled' as to what Hume's beliefs really are [Wright (1) p.1]. For is Hume a sceptic, and if so, what sort of sceptic? Should he be considered, as David Norton claims he should, a 'moral realist'? Did Hume believe in a deity? It might plausibly be argued that Hume scholars have displayed one of the tendencies that Hume thought moderate scepticism can counteract: the often unproductive tendency to gather into sects around questions.

But if a brief look at recent general interpretations shows contradictions, a brief look at the studies of the imagination in Hume's Science of Man shows only inspiring work by Wright which I will discuss in section 4 of Chapter III. To be sure,

'the imagination' is briefly discussed in nearly all commentaries on Hume's epistemology and philosophy of science; and Jan Wilbanks has written a monograph called Hume's Theory of the Imagination.

What is missing is a systematic commentary which explains that the imagination is not only crucial to understanding Hume's epistemology; it is also at the centre of his writings on the passions; and, because of this, central to his work on morals, politics, economics, art, and religion. From this point of view, an account of the role of the imagination in the Science of Man may be seen as a necessary corrective to a general epistemological bias which has prevented us from appreciating the strange nature, and huge ambition, of Hume's Science of Man. For what Hume is interested in, is nothing less than providing a new foundation for all the sciences:

'In pretending therefore to explain the principles of human nature, we in effect propose a compleat system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new, and the only one upon which they can stand with any security' [T xvi].

As I say, this does not seem to have been properly appreciated.

Wilbanks' work is a good example of this epistemological bias. In his Introduction, Wilbanks quotes the following words from Basson:

'What we need with Hume perhaps above all others is some sort of clue which will guide us through his works, and enable us to extract some sort of pattern' [Basson p.26].

Wilbanks remarks:

'In a sense, this is precisely what I have tried to do with regard to Hume's statements about the imagination' [Wilbanks p.3].

This is incorrect: he does not find a way to guide us through Hume's 'works'. He is only interested in Book I of the Treatise and the First Enquiry. He has indeed set himself the much narrower task of determining,

'how Hume's theory of the imagination is related to, or involved in, the generic features and main lines of argument of his philosophy of the human understanding' [ibid p.1].

But nor is it enough, if we want to understand Hume's project, to study only the Treatise, even if we go so far as to include Books II and III. I shall argue that we should also consider Hume's essays, and the History of England. For in these works we can see Hume put into practice the principles which he earlier outlined in the Treatise.

Hume's first readers, of course, did not have this advantage; and famously, the Treatise 'fell dead-born from the press' [M.O.L.234]. Perhaps one reason for this was that Hume was not as clear, in the Introduction to that work, as he might have been about the nature of the 'Science of Man'. I will now discuss that Introduction, and return later to the particular question of the role of the imagination in the Science of Man.

In the Advertisement prefaced to the first two volumes of the Treatise, he says that 'My design in the present work is sufficiently explain'd in the introduction' [T xii]. There seems reason to doubt this. For Hume does not make it easy for the reader to make the imaginative leap that is required to understand the 'design' of this revolutionary work. The announcement of his programme in the Introduction to the Treatise, seems clear; but as soon as one tries to find the details one run into difficulties. For example, what does he mean by the 'Science of Man'?

He seems to suggest that the science of man is the science of human nature that can provide the foundation for all other sciences. That is, it is distinguishable from, and prior to, those sciences. For ''Tis evident,' he says,

'that all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature; and that however wide any of them may seem to run from it, they still return back by one passage or another' [T xv].

This, he says, applies not only to the sciences of 'Logic, Morals, Criticism, and Politics', whose connexion with human nature is 'close and intimate'; but also to 'Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Natural Religion', which are, 'in some measure dependent on the science of MAN', since these subjects are 'judged of by... [the]... powers and faculties' of men [ibid]. Thus, he says that

'Tis impossible to tell what changes and improvements we might make in these sciences were we thoroughly acquainted with the extent and force of human understanding, and cou'd explain the nature of the ideas we employ, and of the operations we perform in our reasonings' [ibid].

But perhaps this sentence suggests that the science that is prior to all other subjects, viz., 'the science of man', is 'logic'? This is the opinion of James Noxon; or at least half his opinion, in that he believes that Hume uses the term 'science of man' ambiguously. Sometimes, Noxon says, Hume means 'logic'; and sometimes he means the four moral sciences [Noxon p.4].

However, the following words from Hume show that Noxon's interpretation cannot be right. Here Hume is talking of a science of human nature that is the capital 'of these sciences' (that includes 'logic'). We can capture, Hume writes, the 'capital or center of these sciences...human nature itself', then we 'may extend our conquests' over the sciences that

'intimately concern human life' (which are, we have seen, 'Logic, Morals, Criticism, and Politics'); and after this we may 'proceed at leisure to discover more fully those, which are the objects of pure curiosity' [T xvi]. Of course, that the conceit is not as plain as one would hope is part of my

account of the failure of the Treatise. Nevertheless, it does seem to rule out Noxon's idea that 'logic', or the study of the 'principles and operations of our reasoning faculty, and the nature of our ideas' is one meaning of the phrase 'science of man'. To use Hume's conceit, it is a castle, but not the capital. From this point of view, Noxon's thesis is an example of the epistemological bias that I mentioned above.

In fact, if we look for a study of human nature that can be distinguished from his study of the four moral sciences, we will be looking in vain. So it seems that 'the science of man' is contained in study of the foundations of these subjects, which, with the exception of 'criticism', are found in the Treatise.

The 'science of man', then, is both the science of human nature, and the four subjects mentioned above. The paradox is there because Hume studies human nature by considering the sciences that human beings develop. And the way he studies the sciences is by considering the 'powers and faculties' of 'the mind' [T xvii]. So on the one hand, we are discovering the 'powers and qualities' of 'the mind' by considering the way that human beings develop the sciences; on the other hand, we are discovering the nature of the sciences by considering the 'powers and qualities' 'of the mind'.

This may become plainer if we consider another closely related problematic notion in the Introduction. This is Hume's talk of a 'foundation' for the sciences. Evidently, by saying that the sciences are founded in human nature, Hume immediately distinguishes his project from that of Descartes. Nor of course

is it assimilable to a Kantian project of finding in concepts a justification of an a priori nature. Rather, this 'foundation' is a matter of explaining the genesis of our beliefs; what Kant was to call the 'de facto mode of origination' [Kant A 85/B 118].

This involves attempting to find principles that may be used to explain any number of different events. For example, we will see how he thinks that principles of the imagination can 'explain' events as seemingly different as our pity for a beggar, and our belief that B will follow A. Just as the natural scientist will attempt to explain why an apple falls and the sea has tides through a law of gravity, so, with his understanding of the nature of 'explanation', will Hume attempt to explain the origin and nature of the sciences through general principles. Nor does the comparison with the natural sciences stop here. For these circumstances can only be known, he believes, through observation. This is necessary, for 'the essence of the mind' is equally unknown to us with that of external bodies,

'it must be equally impossible to form any notion of its powers and qualities otherwise than from careful and exact experiments, and the observation of those particular effects, which result from its different circumstances and situations' [T xvii].

The result is that we must 'glean up our experiments' from 'a cautious observation of human life'. And when we compare our experiments, he says,

'we may hope to establish on them a science, which will not be inferior in certainty, and will be much superior in utility to any other of human comprehension' [T xix].

## section 2

With the above discussion of the Introduction to the Treatise in hand, I will now turn again to the question of the imagination in Hume's work by briefly indicating some of the lines of argument of the present work.

I suggested above that Hume wants to make his principles as universal as possible; and so explain all effects from the fewest possible causes. In this way, he imagines he is like a natural scientist; though his own aim is to 'found' the sciences by finding principles of human nature; and this involves studying what makes it possible for human beings to develop the sciences.

The principles he arrives at, his most universal principles, are principles of the imagination. He finds them sufficient, I shall argue, to explain the most seemingly different dispositions of man. So instead of considering man as a creature best defined by his possession of rationality, Hume sees him as controlled by the interaction of the imagination and the passions. Apart from the very limited domain of the comparison of ideas, the conclusions and the determinations of 'reason' are to be explained through this interaction; in particular through the ways that ideas associate in the imagination so as thus to guide passions and beliefs.

That the most economic way of explaining our behaviour is through principles of the imagination is a lesson which he teaches again and again. And, as we shall see, he loves to draw attention to the way that one part of his reasoning, say on the passions, gives 'confirmation' to another, say on the understanding. This is one way in which he draws our attention to his success in rendering his 'principles as universal as possible' [T xvii]. Without the seemingly arbitrary way which habit and experience 'operate upon the imagination' and 'make

me form certain ideas in a more intense and lively manner, than others', we could never carry our view beyond what is present to the senses [T 265]. It is for this reason that Hume says that 'the senses ...[and]...understanding are...founded on the imagination or the vivacity of ideas' [ibid]. Similarly, instead of saying that moral distinctions are arrived at through reason, Hume argues that we should think of the imagination converting ideas into impressions.

Here, though, a difficulty may arise. When a person reasons about causes and effects, he is not usually said to be using his 'imagination'; indeed, to say that someone is 'using his imagination for his facts' is one way of impugning that person's judgment. This is to note that Hume uses the term 'imagination' in a special, or technical, sense. But he also uses it in a sense which accords with a common use of the term, as when he is speaking of the 'liberty of the imagination to transpose and change its ideas' and create 'winged horses, fiery dragons, and monstrous giants' [T10]. (At such times he will often speak of the imagination as the 'fancy').

A chief purpose of Chapter I is to consider the relation between these two senses of the term. For unless Hume can find a coherent way of dividing the two senses, all his pretensions to an 'experimental method' must be considered as moonshine. If we are to make claims for science, that is, we must have some way of distinguishing such claims from those of poets.

In Chapter II, I will argue that in some moods, Hume thought this distinction between poets and scientists impossible. In his sceptical reasonings he finds that the principles of the imagination that are the only explanation of belief, seem in fact to be contrary to each other. If we accept the 'trivial' propensity of the imagination that makes the beliefs of common life possible, we should, to be consistent,

accept other suggestions that have no better heredity; so 'that we must at last become ashamed of our credulity'; for 'nothing is more dangerous to reason than the flights of the imagination' [T267]. But on the other hand, if we reject all 'the trivial suggestions of the fancy, and adhere to the understanding, that is, to the general and more establish'd properties of the imagination' we can find no reason to accept any belief - not even in the existence of body [ibid]. Then how are we saved? Not through a theoretical answer, but through another 'trivial property of the fancy' : the difficulty with which we enter into 'remote views of things', such as are presented by sceptical arguments [T268].

Now I shall argue that 'Hume's scepticism' as it is expressed in the Conclusion to Book I of the Treatise, is founded on a study of the imagination in more than one sense. And this is to imply that the tradition, as found, for example, in the work of Beattie and Reid, of seeing Hume as primarily a sceptic, misunderstands Hume's scepticism as well as it misunderstands Hume's scientific pretensions. For what is distinctive about Hume's scepticism, is that it is the product of a 'scientific' study of the mind: if we accept the conclusions of that study, we will believe that the threat of scepticism will always be with us. This is to say that unless we take seriously Hume's scientific pretensions we will misapprehend the nature of his sceptical analysis. As Barry Stroud well says, it is a misapprehension to consider Hume as a 'purely negative philosopher' [Stroud p.1]. On the other hand, I argue that writers such as Stroud do not take Hume's scepticism seriously enough.

However, what is perhaps most distinctive in Chapter II is the analysis of another way that 'Hume's scepticism' is informed by his work on the passions. And this is the way that his reasons for thinking that moderate scepticism is favourable to the progress of the sciences are grounded in 'scientific'

conclusions about the nature of man; conclusions which are only explained in Book II of the Treatise; and in A Dissertation on the Passions.

I can introduce what I mean here by briefly commenting on things Hume says in the Introduction to the Treatise which are, like the relevant work on the passions, always ignored by commentators seeking to understand his scepticism. Hume begins the Introduction by noting the 'present imperfect condition of the sciences' [T xiii]. He says that even 'the rabble without doors may judge from the noise and clamour, which they hear, that all goes not well within' [T xiv]. Hume makes clear, though, that the noise within is not a meaningless cacophony. Within are sects or schools of philosophers each attempting to make converts; but they can agree on nothing:

'Disputes are multiplied, as if every thing was uncertain; and these disputes are managed with the greatest warmth, as if every thing was certain' [ibid].

Reason takes second place to persuasion:

'Amidst all this bustle, 'tis not reason which carries the prize, but eloquence; and no man needs ever despair of gaining proselytes to the most extravagant hypothesis, who has art enough to represent it in any favourable colours' [ibid].

What he thinks is needed, as we have already seen, is a new foundation for the sciences; which includes an understanding that 'we cannot go beyond experience' [T xvii]. When we see, he adds, that

'we have arrived at the utmost extent of human reason, we sit down contented; tho' we be perfectly satisfied in the main of our ignorance, and perceive that we can give no reason for our most general and refined principles besides our experience of their reality' [T xviii].

Now in different ways, each of these last three quotations displays Hume's work on the imagination and the passions.

Whilst we must at some stage separate his epistemology from his psychology, we cannot understand the full reasons for his thinking that 'moderate scepticism' is favourable to the sciences without attending to his psychological speculations. For example, the first quotation is an expression of his belief that uncertainty and opposition from others will serve to increase the strength of any passion. This is because the 'uncertainty', which opposition from others increases, produces a variety of passions: 'All these produce an agitation in the mind, and transfuse themselves into the predominant passion' [T421]. The upshot is that without a proper foundation, rival theories become more and more extravagant in response to each other. (Moreover, our beliefs are made stronger through others sharing them, on account of the phenomenon of sympathy). Hume is hardly the only person in history to have believed this. He does seem to be alone, however, in having a theory of the imagination to explain it; and then drawing on that theory to understand why mitigated scepticism can be 'durable and useful' [E II 161]. If only, he says, men could become aware of the infirmities of their understanding, they would conduct themselves with more humility; and so lessen the irrational influence that they have on each other [ibid].

Then, to turn to the second quotation, they would no longer be so inclined to be under the sway of a sect. To which sect they would have been attracted not least on account of sympathy and the love of novelty. Sympathy and novelty, I shall also argue, are crucial notions in his understanding of the value of scepticism; they too have their theoretical grounding in his account of the imagination.

As to the third remark above, about sitting down 'contented', Hume says, optimistically, that if we come to understand that we can give no ultimate reason for our beliefs, then we will cease to worry:

'For nothing is more certain, than that despair has almost the same effect upon us with enjoyment, and that we are no sooner acquainted with the impossibility of satisfying any desire, than the desire itself vanishes' [T xviii].

So it is not only in the market place that what we have not tasted seems so attractive; so too in the study. This is how Hume explains the constant search for new views; of which the Treatise, is of course an example. The reverse of this, however, is that if the opposition to any good seems completely overwhelming, the desire itself will vanish. So if we are satisfied we cannot go beyond experience, we will 'sit down contented'; and, no doubt, apply ourselves to other more fruitful quests. And this too has its theoretical account in his work on the passions.

Because he has this psychology of inquiry, Hume's procedure is quite unlike that of his predecessors. To be sure, other sceptics, we shall see, had talked of the value of scepticism for providing us with the contentment about that which we can be content about. But they had not attempted to provide an 'experimental' underpinning for such talk. Locke had spoken of how we should

'sit down in a quiet ignorance of those things which, upon examination, are found to be beyond the reach of our capacities' [Locke (1) Introduction 4].

But Locke had not sought general principles that explain the relation between desire and satisfaction. And so what was missing in his work was a proper account of the activity of studying itself.

In Chapter II, then, I argue, amongst other things, that we cannot understand the nature of Hume's scepticism without attending to his 'experimental' work on the passions and the imagination.

One section of Chapter III contains a discussion of Hume's views on the relation between the imagination and the passions which informs all the later chapters; as well as, as we have seen, Chapter II. This I shall now introduce.

Hume's inversion of the roles previously accorded to reason and the passions is one of the best known events in the history of philosophy. However, his general account in the Treatise, of how the passions interact with the imagination, which, he thinks, is the proper way to explain variations in passions, has been given virtually no attention. One of the aims of the present work is to remedy this situation. For it is an unfortunate neglect: through his study of the imagination and the passions, Hume arrived at certain principles that were to inform his work for the rest of his life.

Such principles, I will argue, are thought by Hume to allow us a more economical explanation of variations in passions than that given by the traditional picture. Instead of a battle between reason and the passions, Hume suggests we should look to the temper of the individual and the situation of the object of the passion. It is the second of these factors that is susceptible to general principles. (Perhaps the representation of the first belongs to fiction?). One principle deserves special consideration. This is what I term the 'Principle of the Conversion of Passion'. It is first described in psychophysiological terms in the Treatise. When two passions are produced by separate causes, 'and are both present in the mind', the predominant passion will 'swallow up' the inferior passion and convert it into itself [T420]. Crudely, this is one way that a calm passion is converted into a violent one. However strange it may seem to our ears, Hume thinks that the process occurs 'within' the imagination.

I have already mentioned, in discussing his scepticism, one instance of how this theory affects Hume's conclusions: the uncertainty that dogmatic reasoners feel in the face of opponents transfuses their passions into their predominant passion: and so they become even more passionate in their espousals.

Now if the conclusions about reason and the passions discussed in Chapter III are found throughout the present work, so too is Hume's attack on Christianity. This is a theme of Chapter IV.

The ubiquity of this theme is perhaps worth emphasising. For one instance of the division of labour that is noticeable in Hume studies is the way that Hume's writings on religion are so often treated like his work, say, on national characters, which can be more or less adequately understood apart from his other work. But though of course many of his arguments on religion are interesting and fruitful in themselves, such a divorce has had consequences for our understanding of his philosophy.

I argue in Chapters III and IV that Hume's science of man is, from one point of view, a moral crusade against Christianity. For prudential reasons this was played down in the Treatise. But if we look at the rest of his work, we shall see, I believe, that the experimental 'foundation' for morality that is given in the Treatise is matched by a remorseless diagnosis of the horrors of Christian morality. In Chapter IV, I note his attempt to provide the foundations for a completely secular morality; whilst in the previous chapter, I argue that Hume's well known attempt to improve his prose style after the failure of the Treatise should be seen in the context of his secularising project. However, the most extensive examination of Hume's thoughts on Christian morality appears in Chapter VI. There I argue that Hume conceived of Christian morality as a malign inversion of ordinary morality. To be sure, he approved of course of a great deal of the behaviour of his friends in the Moderate wing of the Presbyterian church. But such behaviour he would not have explained as a product of theological beliefs. In so far as Christianity does have an influence, Hume believed that it functions as a cover for the

passions. For example, though it has been completely ignored by those commentators who take an interest in the History, a prominent theme of that work is the way that religion serves as a cover for the activities of certain groups. The weakness of religious belief is crucial here. The want of resemblance of the afterworld to our present life, and the general tendency we have to prefer the contiguous to the remote, mean that we are ruled in religion, as in all other areas of life, by our passions for things of this world. People do not believe what they pretend to affirm [T114]. In his technical language, the want of resemblance of eternity to our present life means that

'all the reasons we can invent, however strong in themselves, and however much assisted by education, are never able with slow imaginations to...bestow a sufficient authority and force on the idea' [ibid].

Yet we shall see that Hume does indeed think that religious believers have some belief; even if it does not 'approach' the beliefs of common life. Men have some fear of losing their belief on account of the punishments in the next world for those who renege. Thus it is this which leads men to surround themselves with like believers; who, on account of the effects of sympathy, support each other's beliefs. Religion begins to dominate society. And in the case of Christianity this has been so successful that our view of the sciences, including ethics, is perverted.

Thus Hume's interest in religion plays a crucial thematic role in the present work. And this alone may be some justification for attempting to view the Science of Man with, as it were, a wide angled lens. For when we do this we can see how Hume's thought on religion cannot be fruitfully considered in isolation from his understanding of, for example, morality, science, and politics; and nor can his writings on these subjects be understood in isolation from his writings on religion. The point is not just the matter of having to reject

the claims of religion in order to justify an experimental method: the point is also that a fascinating part of his discussion of these subjects lies in his attempt to explain how religion has introduced a false consciousness, a false view of what is happening, in these different areas of our lives.

It is not for nothing, then, that in the Introduction to the Treatise Hume singles out natural religion as a subject where we should hope for 'improvements' with especial fervour. For natural religion is not content with examining the 'nature of superior powers': it also seeks to know their dispositions towards us and our duties towards them; consequently,

'we ourselves are not only the beings, that reason, but also one of the objects, concerning which we reason' [T xv].

Well indeed; but I will suggest that he thinks that this reasoning about ourselves as God's creatures has enormous consequences for understanding the nature of the moral sciences. In this connection we will consider his attacks on those who see man as a creature of reason, and as thus different from the animals (Chapter I); his attacks on the philosophical assumptions of moralists (Chapter IV); and on the Whigs and Tories who, openly or covertly, base their theories on religious assumptions (Chapter V). This belief that men read into 'human nature' that which they bring from religious dogma is one of the main reasons why Hume is so interested in the different ways that men are led into false reasonings.

Certainly, he finds that there are propensities of human nature which make the domination by Christian thinking understandable; propensities, such as the thought explored in Chapter I that we are defined by 'reason', that will always be with us. Such philosophical errors serve to support the institutions of religion; and so the misery that religion

causes, can perhaps be lessened by a new vision of human nature.

### section 3

One of the chief preoccupations of Chapter V, 'Politics', is the way that Hume's theoretical writings on the imagination provided him with a way of understanding the politics of his own day.

For example, Hume, like many other writers of eighteenth century Britain, was quite obsessed with the iniquitous effects of political factions. However, what is distinctive about Hume's writings on faction, proceeds from his experimental starting point. Thus in Books II and III of the Treatise, he shows to his satisfaction that men are sociable creatures. But their tendency to gather into groups - to 'cantonise', to use Shaftesbury's expression - does not show, Hume thinks, that we possess an affection for all, as Shaftesbury and Hutcheson thought. Hume thinks that the most economic explanation can be provided by considering men as creatures who enjoy the company of others on account of the way that an idea of a passion becomes available; this is transformed into an impression in the imagination. And

'Every lively idea is agreeable, but especially that of a passion, because such an idea becomes a kind of passion, and gives a more sensible agitation to the mind, than any other image or conception' [T353].

But of course, not every person will have the same effect on us. Hume's very general way of explaining the variations that people will show in their reactions to each other is by hypothesizing an association of ideas. For example, other things being equal, we will enjoy the company of those who resemble us more than that of those who do not. Why? Because the stronger is the resemblance between ourself and another, 'the more easily does the imagination make the transition, and convey to the related idea the vivacity of conception' [T318].

Thus when in the late 1730's Hume turned to the essay genre and the questions of British factions, he already had a far more sophisticated account of the reasons as to why men factionalise than those given by other writers. Moreover, I shall argue that his discussions in the Essays Moral, Political, and Literary of the dangers of factions in eighteenth century Britain is likewise based on this earlier analysis.

In any society, he says, there will be persons with different inclinations; even if these persons have been educated in the same way [G I 266]. When we consider the British Constitution with this in hand, we immediately see in it a source of faction. For that Constitution demands a balance between the 'monarchical' and the 'republican' parts; yet some will incline towards the monarchy; and others towards the people. Given this institutional bias towards faction; and given the delicate balance of the Constitution; the dangers of faction had better be understood. Hume's essays (and letters) are his contribution towards this understanding.

I will mention two dangers here. The first is another illustration of the effects that opposition has on passions. Political opposition, he believes, will increase the vigour with which beliefs are held; moreover, such opposition will lead groups to become more and more extreme in their claims. Sympathy will raise the temperature even more. This account, it will be noticed, is parallel to the explanation offered above of the sources of immoderation in philosophy; the one, Hume thinks, offers confirmation of the other. In each case, non-rational factors can wreck judgment. In the political case it can be seen that under the sway of faction it becomes very difficult to impartially assess what is in the people's interest.

The second danger to the Constitution lies in the way that our need for approval can be served by finding approval from the members of our own faction. For this reason, when men act in a faction, they ride roughshod over the claims of morality when by doing so their faction's interest is served. This conclusion, however, is not the sort of isolated insight that any number of writers might have arrived at. For it can be defended in the language of Hume's foundational work. In Hume's theory of human nature, man needs approval for his actions and beliefs; this is one of the main reasons why he gathers into groups, whether in Westminster or on the football terraces, in the first place. Such groups, however, will evolve their own regulatory power; and so a point of view is constructed which does not coincide with the moral point of view as it has only the interests of the group as its end. Thus just as we usually consider how we will appear in the eyes of society when considering an action, here we consider how we will appear in the eyes of the group. For we care about our name and reputation; and, like the philosopher who is anxious to have others share his beliefs,

'we find it necessary to prop our tottering judgment on the correspondent approbation of mankind' [E II 276].

The party gives us that approbation if we share its point of view.

What is distinctive about Hume's analysis in these essays is the way that he attempts to view the question of faction impartially. And this political impartiality coincides with his scientific pretensions. On the one hand, the tendencies of all factions are included in his descriptions. On the other hand, the desire we have for approval of others in morality is an example of the general weakness of our passions and beliefs in isolation from others:

'Whatever other passions we may be actuated by; pride ambition, avarice, curiosity, revenge or lust; the soul or animating principle of them all is sympathy; nor wou'd they have any force, were we to abstract entirely from the thoughts and sentiments of others' [T363].

In other words, in describing these dangers, Hume is drawing on his earlier insights that were expressed in terms of the imagination, impressions, and ideas; language which was evidently not suitable for the genre of the polite essay. Appreciating this connection is appreciating how, from a few very simple principles, Hume attempted to put politics on the footing of a science.

However, it is not only these essays and the Treatise that I examine in this chapter. In the first three sections I discuss a series of letters that Hume wrote over the last fifteen years or so of his life. I attempt to show how an understanding of Hume's political theory helps us understand what might otherwise be a mystery: the reasons for Hume again and again describing the English as 'barbarians'; and his seeming to link this with his claim that they were wanting in political judgment. I argue that Hume believed that an appreciation of the arts has an essential role in a polity with a constitution as complicated as that of Britain's. The arts give us practice in finding a disinterested point of view; and of all peoples the English needed this ability on account of the difficult political judgments which a constitution such as the British Constitution calls for.

#### section 4

Now in this Introduction I have been passing over, chapter by chapter, some of Hume's arguments about various matters that I discuss in this work. These arguments, I will suggest, are, in a manner, the fruit of a few very simple principles of the imagination; such as, for example, the principle that men are more likely to associate resembling ideas than differing ideas.

I have laid a particular stress on two themes, partly through showing how they appear in different chapters, that a study of the role of the 'imagination' reveals. The first is the role Hume gives to the imagination in explaining how calm passions can be transformed into violent passions and vice versa. This has been ignored by commentators; yet it is, I will argue, of the last importance for understanding the relation between a wide variety of his arguments.

The second theme is that of religion. This is the subject of Chapter VI, though as I have indicated, it is also present in all the other chapters. For it is not enough to see Hume, as he is invariably seen, perhaps as a consequence of an ahistorical approach, as offering a few brilliant arguments against claims of religion. Hume believed, I argue, that the claims of religion had perverted thinking about metaphysics, morality, politics, and history. A new starting point was needed. Thus, before the publication of the Treatise, he wrote to his friend Ramsay:

'My principles are...so remote from all the vulgar sentiments on the subject, that were they to take place, they woud produce almost a total alteration in philosophy: and you know, revolutions of this kind are not easily brought about' [L I 26].

However, I want to end this Introduction by drawing the

reader's attention to a third theme, one closely related to that of religion. Hume desires not only to explain the origin of the sciences; he also wants to explain why philosophers have hitherto erred on so many questions. Now this is not a matter of following through the steps of an argument and saying: 'and here Plato/Aristotle/Descartes took the wrong turning; and this resulted in the sorriest consequences for the history of thought...etc'. Hume's explanation of error instead takes the form of using his principles of the imagination in order to give a causal explanation of our mistakes. For example, there is his famous remark that

'the mind has a great propensity to spread itself on external objects, and to conjoin with them any internal impressions, which they occasion' [T167].

A similar analysis is given of certain philosophical notions of 'the ancients'. Thus he writes in the Treatise of his belief that

'there might be several useful discoveries made from a criticism of the fictions of the antient philosophy, concerning substances, and substantial forms, and accidents, and occult qualities; which, however unreasonable and capricious, have a very intimate connection with the principles of human nature' [T219].

This is to say that he thinks the very mistakes of philosophers confirm his hypotheses about human nature.

However, there are two errors of philosophers which are far more important than the above errors. And in explaining these two errors, Hume thinks that he can explain, on the one hand, why men first believe X; and explain on the other hand the forces that uphold this belief. There is the propensity men have to create gods. Firstly, there is an explanation in the Natural History of Religion in terms of a universal propensity that human beings have of transferring to objects qualities they observe in themselves; so far the error is like the

philosophical errors of the ancients; with the difference that it is fear rather than curiosity that propels them; but, secondly, Hume also has an institutional account of the way that priests come to take advantage of this inclination.

The other error is that of believing that man is distinguished from the animals by his possession of a faculty of 'understanding' or 'judgment'. In the first chapter, I discuss how Hume tries to show how men naturally make this error. What he thinks seems to happen is this. Though in truth we are possessed of one 'faculty', the imagination, reflective social creatures like ourselves need to talk of an 'understanding' and the 'imagination' in order to distinguish between two sorts of beliefs. Firstly, there are the beliefs that allow us to control objects in the world; such as the conclusions of science. Secondly, there are the beliefs of poets, of children, and of the mad. The first sort of belief, we say comes from the understanding; the second, from the imagination or fancy. The problem arises when philosophers arrive on the scene and interpret such talk as showing the existence of two distinct faculties; and that 'the understanding' is the faculty which defines man. However, his explanation of error does not end here. For Hume also believes that he can point to forces which uphold this picture of man. Reason is held to be of 'divine origin' [T415]: man is held to be alone the creature who is possessed of this faculty, and who thus must fight against his passions.

Moreover, it is this faculty which informs man of the moral nature of actions or qualities (Chapter IV); again, it is this faculty which, according to Whig and Tory theorists, informs him of his political obligation (Chapter V).

All such teaching, Hume thought, served the interests of religion. For example, if moral distinctions are arrived at through reason, the undoubted differences in the reasoning

capacities that men have will mean that there will be 'experts' in morality who will be able to inform ordinary people of their duties. Thus after Hume presents his own view of morality in the Second Enquiry, he remarks that it is so obvious that there seems a 'reasonable presumption, that systems and hypotheses have perverted our natural understanding' when such an obvious theory 'could so long have escaped the most elaborate examination' [E II 268-9]. Certainly Hume was keenly aware how, in Europe, the history of the arts and sciences is intimately bound up with the history of religion. In the essay 'The Rise of Arts and Sciences', he remarks how monarchies,

'receiving their chief stability from a superstitious reverence to priests and princes, have commonly abridged the liberty of reasoning, with regard to religion, and politics, and consequently metaphysics and morals' [G I 187].

And he remarks in the History, that the power that the Church received on account of its domination of learning was not without its benefits. For example, this 'island possesses many ancient historians of good credit':

'This advantage we owe entirely to the clergy of the church of Rome; who, founding their authority on their superior knowledge, preserved the precious literature of antiquity from a total extinction' [H II 518].

In short, one aim of the present work is to show how Hume attempted to explain why it was that philosophy needed to be turned upside down. On the one hand, he wants to 'enquire seriously into the nature of human understanding, and show...that it is by no means fitted for such remote and abstruse subjects', as for example, those presented by superstition [E I 12]. On the other hand, the 'mental geography, or delineation of the distinct powers and parts of the mind' that this task involves, runs together with the

separate task of showing how men have come to be bewitched by a false picture of 'rational' man [ibid 13]. Hume desired, then, to explain why men are naturally led, without even the aid of priests, to mistaken beliefs. The first words of the Treatise are:

'NOTHING is more usual and more natural for those, who pretend to discover anything new to the world in philosophy and the sciences, than to insinuate the praises of their own systems, by decrying all those which have been advanced before them' [T xiii].

But Hume is not content with decrying: he wants to explain why others have been led to their positions.

How did Hume arrive at his grand vision? At times I make suggestions. Unsurprisingly, these are not always direct contributions to a history of the concept of imagination. It is true, Malebranche's conception of imagination plays a large role in this study. On the other hand, other elements of that writer's work also play their part. Again, Shaftesbury and Bayle are discussed at some length, but not on account of any beliefs they have about 'imagination'. We shall see, in fact, that the breadth of Hume's vision rules out limiting the discussion to writings on imagination. A more catholic approach is needed.

## Chapter I

### Belief

#### Part I

##### introduction

I suggested in the Introduction above that one of the great problems that Hume's ambition presents to us is discovering the method and assumptions that give unity to his writings. However, talking of this unity does not answer the question of where a discussion about his work should start. If the imagination is at the heart of the science of man, then does it matter where? Why should it be with Book I of the Treatise, as is usual in lengthy works on Hume? For example, perhaps we should start with Hume's work on religion, the implications of which, I have suggested, are so pervasive?

In fact there are more reasons than custom to start with Book I. For the imagination is a 'faculty' of ideas; and it is in Book I that we find Hume's most extended analysis of ideas. Nevertheless, this should not mislead us into thinking that the imagination is only a subject for epistemology. The point is that 'passions, desires, and emotions, which principally deserve our attention, arise mostly from ideas' [T8].

So what are these 'ideas'? How do they arise? And how do they relate to the imagination? Answers to these questions, which have such a wide bearing in Hume's work, will be given in the course of the first major task of the present work. This is seeing what led Hume to believe that:

'the memory, senses, and understanding are...founded on the imagination, or the vivacity of our ideas' [T265].

## section 1

### background

I want to tackle the question through considering the two different ways Hume uses the term 'imagination'. How is the broad sense of 'imagination', as that which refers to all mental 'faculties', including 'judgment', related to the faculty of the 'imagination' as that which conjoins and separates ideas in a seemingly capricious way, that is, what he sometimes calls the 'fancy'? In this section I begin answering this question by noting his assembling of the contents of the mind, and the means by which these contents are related. This I try to develop through showing how, from the 'way of ideas' starting point shared with Descartes, Locke and Berkeley, Hume goes on to forge a theory of mind which pretends to explain belief by reference to the faculty of the 'imagination'. Reason, Hume finds, cannot justify the inferences that we make; and so, he thinks, it must be the imagination that is responsible for belief.

Hume begins the first book of the Treatise by marking a division in the 'perceptions' of the human mind. Perceptions which strike upon the mind with the most 'force and liveliness' he calls 'impressions' [T1]. And here he comprehends 'all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul' [ibid]. Perceptions which are 'faint images' of the above he calls 'ideas' [ibid]. Thus ideas are defined as images: we can thus think about objects when they are not present to the senses.

The next division is that between simple and complex impressions and ideas. The former are 'such as admit of no distinction nor separation' [ibid]. But the latter - as with

the colour, taste, and smell of an apple - may be distinguished in their parts [T3].

Here, then, we have some order to the 'objects' of the mind. Hume now proceeds to consider their 'qualities and relations' [ibid]. A circumstance that immediately strikes him is the resemblance between impressions and ideas. When he shuts his eyes and thinks of his chamber, the idea he has is an exact representation of the impression that he 'felt' - that is, when he had his eyes open. But he quickly realises that it is only simple ideas that have exact copies in impressions. He can imagine a city such as the New Jerusalem which has pavements of gold and walls of rubies. Nevertheless, he challenges anyone to show a simple impression that has not a simple idea - or vice versa.

What other 'qualities' do impressions have? He asks 'how they stand with regard to their existence, and which of the impressions and ideas are causes and which effects' [T4]. The full examination of this question', he says, 'is the subject for the present treatise. For the moment he contents himself with establishing his first principle viz.,

'That all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent' [T4].

This principle he supports with an appeal to experience: by constant experience he finds that simple impressions 'always take the precedence of their correspondent ideas' [T5]. Thus if we want to give a child an idea of sweetness we present him with an impression of sweetness. We do not, he says, proceed so absurdly as to endeavour to produce the impression by exciting the idea [ibid].

Now it may seem extraordinary that Hume does not spend much time attempting to justify his 'way of ideas' approach to these issues. The reason is that the notion that we are directly acquainted with our perceptions was a commonplace assumption of the philosophers mentioned above.

For example, Locke, in the Essay Concerning Human Understanding, usually describes the contents of the mind, not as perceptions, but as 'ideas'. He defines his use thus:

'It being that Term, which, I think, serves best to stand for whatsoever is the Object of the Understanding when a Man thinks, I have used it to express whatever is meant by Phantasm, Notion, Species, or whatever it is, which the mind can be employ'd about in thinking' [Locke (1) Introduction 8.]

The general propriety of the 'way of ideas' method is pretty much taken for granted by Locke. In a tone that was to be echoed by Hume, he says, 'I presume it will be easily granted me, that there are such Ideas in Men's Minds: every one is conscious of them in himself' [ibid].

In the Principles of Human Knowledge, Berkeley is just as confident:

'It is evident to anyone who takes a survey of the objects of human knowledge, that they are either ideas actually imprinted on the senses; or else such as are perceived by attending to the passions and operations of the mind; or lastly ideas formed by help of memory and imagination - either compounding, dividing, or barely representing those originally perceived in the aforesaid ways' [ Berkeley p.65].

It is an implication, then, of Locke's and Berkeley's as well as of Hume's account, that our perceptions of external objects are to be lumped together with our thoughts of absent or fictitious objects. That is, what we imagine. The lack of a distinction here is ultimately due to Cartesian doctrine.

Descartes had doubted all and found that while he could doubt that his body existed, he could not doubt that 'he' existed. Thus he concluded, in the Discourse on the Method, that he was different from his body.

'From this I knew I was a substance whose whole essence or nature is simply to think, and which does not require any place, or depend on any material thing, in order to exist. Accordingly this 'I' - that is, the soul by which I am what I am - is entirely distinct from the body, and would not fail to be whatever it is, even if the body did not exist' [Descartes (1) p.127].

Elsewhere he states very clearly how this being that he is is a 'thinking being': and here we see why imagining and perception are placed together:

'By the term 'thought', I understand everything which we are aware of as happening within us, in so far as we have awareness of it. Hence 'thinking' is to be identified here not merely with understanding, willing and imagining, but also with sensory awareness' [ibid p.195].

Because if I say that I am walking, therefore I exist, I may be wrong - for I may be asleep.

'But if I take 'seeing' or 'walking' to apply to the actual sense or awareness of seeing or walking, then the conclusion is quite certain, since it relates to the mind, which alone has sensation or thought that it is seeing or walking' [ibid].

'External objects', then, are not directly accessible by the mind. The mind is left only with mental objects as its objects.

From this starting point, Descartes attempts to provide a foundation for the possibility of knowledge. Descartes finds his justification in the cogito. But Hume's analysis reveals that even after experience of constant conjunction reason cannot point out why we should extend the experience to the

future. It is this discovery we shall see that leads him to his special sense of the term 'imagination'.

And this is the main element in his explanation of belief. This is to say that whereas Hume shares the starting point of these other thinkers, his belief in the failure of reason to justify our inferences leads him to give to that faculty which, uncontroversially, can unite and separate ideas, certain propensities which mark off his special sense of the term 'imagination' from the sense in which he uses it when he wants to refer to capricious and irregular beliefs. Exploring this special sense, as it relates to belief, is the task of the chapter as a whole; but here it can be said that it encompasses that which was called 'judgment'. This sense is not discussed in the early pages of the Treatise for the same reasons that it cannot be discussed here: the need for it must be first shown.

## section 2

the first sense of 'imagination'; or the 'fancy'

I want to introduce Hume's 'ordinary' sense of the term 'imagination' in the same way as I introduced his 'way of ideas' approach in which it belongs. That is, by showing just how conventional his approach was. The chief reason for doing this is that in this way we can then better appreciate how Hume diverged from all other thinkers with his special sense of the term. But there is another reason. As mentioned in the Introduction to the present work, one of Hume's most tenaciously held beliefs was that progress in philosophy is usually made possible through dialogue. The importance for Hume of this belief is not only apparent in his explanation of the general progress of arts and sciences as discussed in the essay 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences'; it informs, we shall later see, his arguments about why moderate scepticism provides the healthiest attitude for philosophers; and it is reflected in the Introduction to the Treatise.

The imagination is introduced in the Treatise as that faculty of the mind that distinguishes itself from memory in two ways. Firstly, by means of the weakness of its ideas: when we remember any past event, 'the idea of it flows in upon the mind in a forcible manner; whereas in the imagination the perception is faint and languid' [T9]. Secondly, the memory 'preserves the original form in which its objects were presented' [ibid]; but the fables and poems we know teach of 'the liberty of the imagination to transpose and change its ideas' [T10]. When we read fables we find that,

'Nature there is totally confounded, and nothing mentioned but winged horses, fiery dragons, and monstrous giants' [ibid].

However, says Hume, if we think more carefully about the imagination, we shall see that it is not 'free' at all. Or better: certain principles may be discovered which describe its operations. For one thing, it is dependent on the impressions we have had; this we saw above. Secondly, we find that we can discover principles which describe the ideas which have their origin in these impressions. If ideas were 'loose and unconnected', then nothing, he says, 'would be more unaccountable than the operations of that faculty' [T10]. But there are, he believes, some 'universal principles' which 'render it uniform with itself in all times and places' [ibid]. There is a 'uniting principle' which is 'a gentle force, which commonly prevails'; it explains, for instance, why 'languages so nearly correspond to each other' [ibid]. Likewise, as he says in the First Enquiry, were the loosest conversation to be recorded, 'there would immediately be observed something which connected it in all its transitions' [E I 23]. What are these principles? The imagination, he says, will naturally associate ideas through their qualities of resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect.

The general importance of these principles for the science of man can hardly be overestimated. For with these seemingly trivial principles of the imagination, Hume attempted to provide a new foundation for the sciences. So it should be noted that when Hume introduces these principles, he is at pains to emphasise that it is the possibly wondrous purposes to which he is going to employ them that should interest the reader - not the discovery of the principles themselves. So he writes in the Treatise:

'Here is a kind of ATTRACTION, which in the mental world will be found to have as extraordinary effects as in the natural, and to shew itself in as many and as various forms' [T12-13].

And in the first ten editions of the Enquiry concerning Human Understanding, he explores (in paragraphs not given in the Nidditch edition) 'some effects of this connection upon the imagination and the passions' by considering what light his principles throw on literary criticism [E (Hendel) 33-39]. These 'loose hints' he says, are

'thrown together in order to excite the curiosity of philosophers, and beget a suspicion at least if not a full persuasion that this subject is very copious, and that many operations of the human mind depend on the connection or association of ideas which is here explained' [ibid 39].

The reason for this emphasis on what is to come is no doubt because of the fact that other philosophers had included in their accounts of the imagination principles which describe the connections between ideas. This may be seen if we now turn to two of these accounts.

The imagination, writes Hobbes, is nothing but 'decaying sense' [Hobbes p.9]. For after the eyes are shut, we still 'see' an image of the thing seen, though it is then more obscure than when we saw it with our eyes [ibid]. (In this, it seems, he is following Aristotle. Aristotle considered the imagination as an essential intermediary between the senses and reason. It is necessary that 'every time one thinks one must at the same time contemplate some image' [De Anima 432a]). When we would express, says Hobbes, that which is decayed, we refer to the 'imagination'; but when we would express the decay and signify that the sense is fading and old, then we refer to this faculty as the memory. 'So that imagination and memory are but one thing, which for divers considerations hath divers names' [ibid p.10].

But it is this faculty seen from another point of view that interests Hobbes the most. 'The imagination that is raised' in

man by means of 'words, or other voluntary signs' is that we generally call understanding' [ibid p.13]. He characterises this mental activity as a 'train of thoughts, or mental discourse', and says that it is of two sorts [ibid p.14]. Firstly, it can be 'unguided, without design' [ibid]. This occurs when there is 'no passionate thought, to govern and direct those that follow'; such are commonly the thoughts of men without company and 'without care of anything' [ibid]. Nevertheless, even in such cases, we can, he thinks, 'oft-times perceive the way of it, and the dependence of one thought upon another' [ibid]. Still, Hobbes has no particular principles to offer, such as resemblance and contiguity, in order to explain the connections.

The second sort of 'mental discourse' Hobbes notes is that which is 'regulated by some desire, and design' [ibid]. We share with beasts the tendency to imagine the cause of any effect that we imagine; but we distinguish ourselves by the tendency to seek, when we imagine anything, 'all the possible effects, that can by it be produced' [ibid p.15]. Sometimes a man wants to know the effects of an action: 'and then he thinketh of some like action past, and the events thereof, one after another; supposing like events will follow like actions' [ibid]. This is what we call 'prudence'; and it is 'a presumption of the future contracted with an experience of time past' [ibid p.16]. Similarly, there is a presumption 'of things past taken from other things, not future, but past also'. So if we understand why one civil war has taken place, upon the ruins of another state, we 'will guess the like war, and the like courses have been there also' [ibid]. However, though the imagination thus presented by Hobbes is a faculty which provides us with the ability to seek out causes, it is, by the same token, that which often leads us into error. For example, as in the case of religion:

'they that make little or no inquiry into the natural cause of things' and yet fear for themselves, 'are inclined to suppose, and feign unto themselves, several kinds of power invisible; and to stand in awe of their own imaginations' [ibid 69].

Hobbes, then, uses a concept of the imagination to explain error as well as success in our reasoning. We shall see Hume doing the same. It is also true of another writer whose thoughts on the imagination seem to have had far more influence on Hume than those of Hobbes. This is Malebranche, whose Recherche de la Vérité was recommended by Hume as an aid to understanding the Treatise<sup>1</sup>.

Malebranche uses the term 'imagination' when he wants to describe how we respond to the stimulation that our senses have received. This includes the way that ideas are associated so that we can respond without having to use our reason; 'the soul's power of forming images' [Malebranche p.88]. It also includes other ways that we respond to the information that our senses give us. Thus within the concept 'imagination', Malebranche includes memory, and habit [ibid p.106-7]. Now however strange it may seem, when Malebranche describes the functioning of the 'imagination' he does so through employing physiological language. It is impossible to summarise what he says without using it.

For instance, his account of the way that the mind associates ideas is presented in terms of the 'mutual connection of traces'. These are brain traces which are correlative to ideas. Thus he says at one point:

'As soon as the soul receives some new ideas, new traces are imprinted in the brain; and as soon as objects produce new traces, the soul receives new ideas' [ibid p.102].

Now there are connections between ideas which he thus 'explains' by postulating connections between traces. We can

notice connections between ideas if we think of those instances when we cannot remember a person's name, we 'single him out by this pocked face, or as this tall handsome man, this little hunchback' [ibid p.105]. Such connections are useful, indeed necessary for the preservation of life. Thus the

'trace...of a large body, about to fall on us and crush us, is naturally tied to the one that represents death to us, and to an emotion of the spirit that disposes us to flight and the desire to flee' [ibid p.106].

The 'cause' of this connection of many traces is the 'identity of the times in which they were imprinted in the brain' [ibid].

Most of Search After Truth is devoted to explaining how we are led into error. In this explanation, the association between ideas in the imagination plays an important role. For example, there is the case of resemblance. Because the 'apparent size of the moon is not very different from that of an ordinary head at a certain distance', and because we so 'often look at faces' 'we normally see a face in the moon' [ibid p.135]. Hume in fact was to use the same example in discussing the same confusion of ideas [NHR 29]. And he even offered up an explanation in terms of contiguous brain traces [T60-1]. John Wright, in fact, has argued that Hume accepted Malebranche's conception of the imagination as his starting point [Wright (1) p.214- 221; cf Chapter III section 4].

However, the sense of 'imagination' that Hume gives as including judgment is not in any way assimilable to the sense given to the term by any previous philosopher. Malebranche and Hobbes thought that the imagination is necessary for our preservation. But the idea that the imagination, not reason, is the faculty responsible for all our beliefs in matters of fact would have astounded them. What I now want to do is to examine how Hume reached this conclusion. That is, I want to show how

he makes the transition from the first sense of the imagination, to his special sense.

### section 3

#### the imagination and belief

So far, then, Hume has allotted to the imagination only the role of conjoining and separating ideas. However, his examination of the relation of cause and effect leads to ascribe to the imagination a wider role than hitherto suspected. The 'imagination', in fact, comes to include that faculty through which we form judgments. To be sure, Hume wants to keep the first sense of 'imagination'; because he wants to distinguish between reliable and unreliable uses of the faculty - between the claims of poets and religionists, and the claims of science. How does he arrive at the special sense? And can he really distinguish it from the 'fancy'? In this section, I attempt to answer the first question. Later I will discuss the second question. For what I hope to show in this chapter is that Hume's attempt to hold on to this distinction led to some of his greatest philosophy. Book I of the Treatise, I believe, cannot be properly understood without appreciating the attempt.

At one point Hume admits that the two senses he gives to the term may cause confusion. Most unfortunately, his explanation of his usage is somewhat convoluted:

'the word, imagination, is commonly us'd in two different senses; and tho' nothing be more contrary to true philosophy, than this inaccuracy, yet in the following reasonings I have often been oblig'd to fall into it. When I oppose the imagination to the memory, I mean the faculty, by which we form our fainter ideas. When I oppose it to reason, I mean the same faculty, excluding only our demonstrative and probable reasonings' [T117-118n; cf T371n].

The former sense here is that of the 'fancy'; the latter sense, that of the 'imagination' in its special Humean sense which includes all the 'faculties' of the mind other than memory;

crucially it includes judgment about matters of fact not present to the senses.

One sign of the breadth of the special sense that Hume gives to 'imagination' is that he sometimes writes as if 'the imagination' is interchangeable with 'the mind'. For example, he writes of how

'the imagination, when set into any train of thinking, is apt to continue...';

but in the same paragraph he says:

'the mind is once in the train of observing an uniformity among objects...'[T198].

Moreover, once he has offered his account, 'imagination' becomes interchangeable with the 'understanding'. Thus in Book II of the Treatise, he remarks at one point: 'the imagination or the understanding, call it which you please' [T440].

Now why does he study the relation of cause and effect? Hume believed that the great importance of the causal relation is that it enables man to reason beyond that which is present to his senses. How is this possible?

In accordance with the principle that all simple ideas are derived in their first appearance from simple impressions Hume suggests that in order to understand this relation we should look to its origin. What does he find? He finds contiguity and the 'PRIORITY of time in the cause before the effect' [T76]. But these relations of contiguity and succession do not give him all he wants. For he realises that,

'An object may be contiguous and prior to another, without being consider'd as its cause. There is a NECESSARY CONNEXION to be taken into consideration; and that

relation is of much greater importance, than any of the other two above-mention'd' [T77].

So Hume turns the 'object on all sides' to discover 'the nature of this necessary connexion' and find the impression [ibid]. Certainly, we have an idea of a necessary connexion - so perhaps we should give up the first principle? Not until, he says, we have given the matter some further consideration.

After deciding to leave the 'direct survey' of the matter, the question occurs to him: 'For what reason we pronounce it necessary, that every thing whose existence has a beginning, shou'd also have a cause?' [T78] This opinion is not founded on intuition. We cannot demonstrate the necessity of a cause for every event without showing that we cannot even conceive of the possibility of a cause and effect being separated. And yet, as all distinct ideas are separable, we can conceive of an object to be existent at one point and non-existent at another. So if the separation is possible in the imagination, then the 'actual separation' of these objects 'implies no contradiction or absurdity' [T80; cf T89; cf E I 29].

If the 'opinion' that every event must have a cause is not derived from 'knowledge' or 'scientific' reasoning', then, he reasons, it must be derived from experience. And he decides to approach the issue through examining this question:

'Why we conclude, that such particular causes must necessarily have such particular effects, and why we form an inference from one to another' [T82].

He soon finds 'a new relation betwixt cause and effect', and this is constant conjunction [T87]. It is not enough for objects to be contiguous and successive for us to pronounce the objects 'cause' and 'effect'. There must be several instances of these relations between the two objects. But how can we learn from many 'objects' what we cannot learn from one? It seems

that from 'the repetition of any past impressions...there never will arise any new original idea, such as that of a necessary connexion' [T88]. Nevertheless, he says that it would be foolish to despair too soon. We should 'continue the thread of our discourse' [T88]. So, having discovered that after noticing the 'constant conjunction' of objects 'we always draw an inference from one object to another', he asks about the nature of that inference.

Yet what about the impression of necessity, the reader might ask. Hume writes:

'Perhaps 'twill appear in the end, that the necessary connexion depends on the inference, instead of the inference's depending on the necessary connexion' [T88].

If it appears so, it is because Hume's examination of the inference that we make from cause to effect takes us to the true object of his interest: to reduce to a single faculty, that is the imagination, the powers of the mind hitherto accorded to reason [Fogelin p.56].

To see why he thought this we can turn to the argument that convinces Hume that we cannot consider our reasoning about matters of fact as arising from a special faculty. If the transition from cause to effect, he says, is founded on past experience and our memory of constant conjunction, then the next question is

'whether we are determin'd by reason to make the transition, or by a certain association and relation of perceptions' [T88-9].

Whether, that is, experience 'produces the idea by means of the understanding or of the imagination' [T88]. If the transition is made through reason, then it would have to proceed, Hume

assumes, upon a principle expressing the uniformity of nature:  
that is,

'that instances, of which we have had no experience, must resemble those, of which we have had experience, and that the course of nature continues always uniformly the same'  
[T89].

He spends little time arguing that such a principle cannot be proved through 'demonstrative arguments': we can easily conceive a change in the course of nature. It is indeed his argument that there can be no successful probable arguments that interests him the most.

It is 'unquestionable', he says, that probable arguments are 'founded on the presumption of a resemblance betwixt those objects, of which we have had experience, and those of which we have had none' [T90]. It is, therefore, impossible that 'this presumption can arise from probability'; for 'the same principle cannot both be the cause and the effect of another' [ibid]. The argument is set out very clearly in the Enquiry:

'we have said that all arguments concerning existence are founded on the relation of cause and effect; that our knowledge of that relation is derived entirely from experience; and that all our experimental conclusions proceed upon the supposition that the future will be conformable to the past'.

Therefore,

'To endeavour...the proof of this last supposition by probable arguments, or arguments regarding existence, must be evidently going in a circle, and taking that for granted, which is the very point in question' [E I 35-36].

Even if we allow 'that the production of one object by another...implies a power' it does not follow that the same power will be present on the appearance of the object in the

future [T91]. So, even after experience has informed us of objects' constant conjunction, this argument shows that reason cannot satisfy us why we should extend the experience to the instances which have not fallen under our observation.

It is, therefore, to the imagination that we must appeal if we want to explain why we infer a cause. We have seen that certain principles 'make us' pass from one object to another, even where there is no reason for that transition. And such is the case with an inference from cause to effect:

'When the mind, therefore, passes from the idea or impression of one object to the idea or belief of another, it is not determin'd by reason, but by certain principles, which associate together the ideas of these objects and unite them in the imagination' [T92].

Hume is thus giving to the imagination a much more central role than any other writer before. This he has been driven to on account of the hopelessness of appealing to reason:

'Had ideas no more union in the fancy than objects seem to have to the understanding, we cou'd never draw any inferences from causes to effects, nor repose belief in any matter of fact. The inference, therefore, depends solely on the union of ideas' [ibid].

However, a problem immediately becomes apparent for Hume's putative thesis. If the imagination can 'mingle, and unite, and separate, and confound, and vary our ideas in a hundred different ways', then where is the difference between a fiction and a belief [T96; E I 147]? For given that we are free to have many ideas associated with an impression, there cannot be a particular idea that is always found with a belief and never with a fiction. All Hume can point to is that

'as belief does nothing but vary the manner, in which we conceive any object, it can only bestow on our ideas an additional force and vivacity' [T96].

Unsurprisingly, Hume was dissatisfied with this conception. He returns to the matter in the Appendix of the Treatise. There he says that,

'an idea assented to feels different from a fictitious idea, that the fancy alone presents to us: And this different feeling I endeavour to explain by calling it a superior force, or vivacity, or solidity, or firmness, or steadiness' [T629].

But this is followed by a rather different thesis: belief, he says, is something that 'distinguishes the ideas of the judgment from the fictions of the imagination' in the way that:

'It gives them more force and influence; makes them appear of greater importance; infixes them in the mind; and renders them the governing principles of all our actions' [ibid].

The last clause in this sentence is not in fact just an isolated insight. In the final chapter of the present work I argue that a crucial part of Hume's examination of religion is his belief that religious believers are not really believers, because they hardly differ in their behaviour from non-believers. For example, compared, he says, with the interest that men show about what happens after their death on this earth, they show an extraordinary 'carelessness' and 'stupidity' with regard to a future state [T 113-114]. Of course, his scepticism about their belief could hardly be shown in any other way; and the main burden of his account of belief rests on the wholly unsatisfactory notion of a more vivacious idea.

In fact this account threatens to undermine his whole attempt to give a foundation to the sciences. For the door seems left open for superstition: 'When I am convinc'd of any principle, 'tis only an idea, which strikes more strongly upon me' [T103]. How, then, can we draw a distinction between

science and superstition? This can be put in another way: how can we draw a distinction between the two senses of imagination? For on the one hand Hume wants to say, that it must be the imagination that is responsible for all beliefs. On the other hand, he still wants to be able to speak of the imagination in the sense of the 'fancy'.

What has happened, in short, is this: Hume's investigation of induction has focused our attention on the imagination as the faculty which is responsible for belief. That is, Hume is giving a new sense to the term 'imagination'. But now it seems that that scepticism, seemingly so useful for the project of reducing a theory of human nature to a few principles, threatens to undercut that very theory. Can he distinguish between science and superstition; between science and poetry; between the claims of the scientist and the claims of one who has, as the saying goes, kangaroos in his top paddock? Can he, that is, argue his case for the 'imagination' and yet still sometimes speak of the 'fancy'? On the other hand, can he speak of the imagination and the fancy as one faculty and yet speak of 'the understanding or imagination' [T104] ? Is he trying to have his cake and eat it? I will turn to these questions later and I shall argue that Hume can consistently argue that we can reasonably accept some beliefs and not others. But I begin Part II of this chapter by discussing further the two senses of 'imagination' that Hume uses.

## Chapter I

### Belief

#### Part II

##### introduction

In Part I I tried to show how Hume believes that it is the imagination that is responsible for our beliefs in matters of fact. Hume, that is, is assigning to the imagination an unprecedented role. Nevertheless, he still wants to keep a sense of 'imagination' with which he can contrast judgment. Thus we saw that he has two senses of 'imagination', one of which can be characterised as the 'fancy'. Is this possible? Or is he in fact undercutting his own scientific pretensions? This is one of the major questions I address in Part II.

However, representing Hume's strategy towards the question of belief in terms of two senses of 'imagination' is not indeed the only thing I want to do. I also suggested in Part I that Hume is not only interested in the above problem, but he also wants to explain why what he sees as the true state of affairs has been hidden for so long. He wants to explain why men have come to represent man as defined by his capacity to reason. Cartesianism, he seems to suggest, is no arbitrary rival. What are the philosophical temptations? And what is its psychological appeal?

Hume's own researches conclude quite otherwise to that rival: man is a creature of the imagination. We construct the categories of the understanding and the fancy in order to mark off successful and unsuccessful general rules. Because this rule is successful we say it comes from the 'judgment'; because that rule is unsuccessful we say it comes from the fancy. Trouble only arises when philosophers appear, and misinterpret

such talk by hypostatizing wrongly these 'faculties'; and concluding that it is the 'understanding' that defines man. In reality, both types of rules come from a single faculty.

Now how do we conclude, that one billiard ball will hit another? Through observation. And so how should we study belief? Through observation. The false picture of man which look to reason for an explanation of belief will study man in isolation. In contrast, Hume employs observations about why we believe things, which involve references to our common social state. For instance, in section 6 of this chapter, I argue that if we are interested in Hume's explanation of belief, we should take note of his account of the motivation men have to reason well. Why do men try and discipline their fancies? The admiration that successful reasoners gain from their fellows is part of Hume's answer to the question of how men follow general rules of scientific reasoning.

I end Part II by discussing Hume's account of our idea necessity; the question we saw dropped earlier when Hume began to focus on his attempt to explain belief through the imagination. I begin, however, by discussing that thesis as it appears in the Enquiry; and then in the same section I go on to mention two defences of his thesis which serve, Hume thinks, to show the generality of his principles of human nature.

the imagination and the First Enquiry; passions and poets

In the Introduction to the present work I mentioned the fact that there has been little work done on the imagination in Hume's writings. There seems no doubt that one reason for this neglect is the influence of Norman Kemp-Smith who seeks to play down the importance of the faculty for an understanding of Hume's account of belief. And if the imagination is not thought to be central to that part of Hume's philosophy, it is hardly surprising that it is not thought to be central to his work on the passions, on politics, and on religion. What I now want to do is to examine and criticise the following conclusion of Kemp-Smith's, which appears in an appendix to The Philosophy of David Hume entitled 'Hume's teaching in regard to the Imagination':

'Thus we seem justified in concluding that Hume's ascription of primacy to the imagination has no greater importance in the philosophy of the Treatise than that of being merely a corollary to his earlier doctrine of belief' [Kemp-Smith p.463].

The evidence to which Kemp-Smith appeals in support of this statement is Hume's doctrine of belief as presented in the Enquiry. (That is to say that he thinks the Enquiry reveals Hume's real doctrine in the Treatise). Kemp-Smith says of the 'special sense' of 'imagination', which in the Treatise Hume sometimes refers to as the 'understanding', that it 'does not reappear' in the Enquiry [ibid p.461]. Indeed, Kemp-Smith remarks that 'such usage is there...quite explicitly disavowed' [ibid]. He quotes the following, which, he says, emphasises that belief is a 'state of mind to the achievement of which the imagination (in the common sense) is not equal' [ibid p.462]:

I say, then, that belief is nothing but a more vivid, lively, forcible, firm, steady conception of an object,

than what the imagination alone is ever able to attain...The imagination has the command over all its ideas, and can join and mix and vary them, in all the ways possible...But as it is impossible that this faculty of imagination can ever, of itself, reach belief, it is evident that belief consists not in the peculiar nature or order of ideas, but in the manner of their conception, and in their feeling to the mind...And in philosophy, we can go no further than assert, that belief is something felt by the mind, which distinguishes the ideas of judgment from the fictions of the imagination' [E I 49; first and last italics are Kemp-Smith's].

But E.J. Furlong rightly points out that Hume says that the imagination cannot 'of itself, reach belief' [Furlong p.67; italics mine]. This, Furlong says, suggests only that imagination is not a 'sufficient cause' of belief [ibid p.68]. This is why we do not believe in giants when reading fables. This is to say that the ideas of the 'imagination' in this passage are the ideas of the fancy.

Nevertheless, Furlong is not I think reliable about the imagination and the Enquiry. He seems to come to the right conclusion here with a wrong reason. Thus to support his claim that Hume's account of how belief is formed did not substantially change from the Treatise to the Enquiry, Furlong writes:

'Compare Enquiry [p.51], where we are told that association with an object of the senses or the memory gives rise to that "steadier and stronger conception" which we call belief. This, Hume considers, is "a general law, which takes place in all the operations of the mind". If this passage had occurred in the Treatise he might have worded the last phrase "all the operations of the imagination". So far as the nature of belief is concerned the difference between the Treatise and the Enquiry lies in the dropping of a word, not a change of theory' [Furlong p.67; E I 51].

But the word is certainly not dropped. Hume does employ 'imagination' in a special sense in the Enquiry.

Both Kemp-Smith and Furlong neglect to notice all those places in the Enquiry where Hume argues that our common beliefs are made possible through the imagination; and that such beliefs are to be distinguished from the products of the fancy. In the following statement of this doctrine, Hume takes care to distinguish the two senses by using the term 'fancy':

'Whenever any object is presented to the memory or senses, it immediately, by the force of custom, carries the imagination to conceive that object, which is usually conjoined to it; and this conception is attended with a feeling or sentiment, different from the loose reveries of the fancy' [E I 48].

Elsewhere he is content to emphasise that beliefs and fictions arise from the same faculty. So in Section VI, in discussing 'the influence' of probability, he writes:

'If we allow, that belief is nothing but a firmer and stronger conception of an object than what attends the mere fictions of the imagination, this operation may, perhaps, in some measure, be accounted for. The concurrence of these several views or glimpses imprints the idea more strongly on the imagination; gives it superior force and vigour; renders its influence on the passions more sensible...' [E I 57].

He is clearly using the term 'imagination' in the second sentence in a special sense. This, of course, is no verbal move, but the conclusion to his thesis that the imagination, and not some extra faculty such as the 'understanding', is responsible for belief.

The final instance I want to mention of Hume's use of the special sense of 'imagination' in the Enquiry is found in 'Of the reason of animals'. Any theory, he argues, 'by which we explain the operations of the understanding...will acquire additional authority, if we find, that the same theory is requisite to explain the same phenomena in all other animals'

[E I 104; cf T176]. So how do we explain the beliefs of animals? Hume's answer is as follows:

'It is custom alone, which engages animals, from every object, that strikes their senses, to infer its usual attendant, and carries their imagination, from the appearance of the one, to conceive the other, in that particular manner, which we denominate belief [E I 106].

The pub dog puts his nose in the salt and vinegar crisp bag not because he has reasoned from past instances that he will be rewarded with crisps, but on account of his past experience. Hume explains this in terms of the association of ideas in the imagination of the animal. He sees the crisp bag; he associates this with food; and sticks in his nose. (This indeed is one reason why one should be careful about going dressed as a crisp bag to a fancy dress party held in a pub).

Thus it seems that Kemp Smith is quite wrong to think that Hume rejected the imagination as the faculty of belief in the Enquiry. And that Hume did so reject it, is Kemp-Smith's argument about what is essential to the Treatise.

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Now I suggested in the Introduction to the present work that Hume thought that the imagination is not only at the heart of Hume's account of belief; but also at the heart of his account of the passions. I anticipate this subject of the passions and the imagination here because Hume anticipates it in the section entitled 'Of the influence of belief'. The reason he mentions it there is that he believes that his new thesis that our reasonings are dependent on the imagination will gain support from evidence that our actions are likewise thus dependent. So he writes that

'Men will scarce ever be persuaded, that effects of such consequence can flow from principles, which are seemingly

so inconsiderable, and that the far greatest part of our reasonings, with all our actions and passions, can be deriv'd from nothing but custom and habit' [T118].

For this reason, he says, he will 'anticipate a little' what would naturally be discussed in the consideration of the passions [ibid]. This may lead us to appreciate how Hume's major conclusions about human nature flow from a few principles of the imagination.

The topics here are the influence of passions upon belief, and the influence of belief upon the imagination.

As to the first of these, Hume remarks that a coward readily assents to every account of danger of which he hears. As, for example, when he hears his sister tell of a 'confrontation' she had with a Rottweiler whilst she was on her way to rent a video. But why should this be so? Hume writes:

'When any affecting object is presented, it gives the alarm, and excites immediately a degree of its proper passion' [T120].

Now a passion for Hume is an impression [T 1]; and this impression of fear, which readily arises in the coward, enlivens the idea of the Rottweiler. Though others consider the sister at best 'unreliable' in her dog reporting, and at worst, 'a downright fibber', the coward immediately believes her. As in Hume's system, belief is a more vivid and intense conception of any idea, we can see why he says that the result is belief. The

'emotion passes by an easy transition to the imagination; and diffusing itself over our idea of the affecting object, makes us form that idea with greater force and vivacity, and consequently assent to it' [T120].

Later I will have cause to examine in greater detail how Hume's conception of the imagination is at the centre of his account of the passions as well as that of the understanding. And this is to say that whenever Hume draws attention to how the different parts of his theory seem to corroborate each other, he is in effect drawing attention to the generality of certain principles of the imagination.

The second matter from 'Of the influence of belief' I wish to mention is the matter of the 'effects' of belief on the imagination. Hume notes that poets, 'tho' liars by profession, always endeavour to give an air of truth to their fictions' [T121]. They realise that if they do this, their works will be held to be more satisfying. Hume believes that his theory can explain this; which suggests, he cares to point out, that this is 'confirmation' of his 'system' [T122]. He writes:

The several incidents of the piece acquire a kind of relation by being united into one poem...and if any of these incidents be an object of belief, it bestows a force and vivacity on the others, which are related to it' [ibid].

What happens, he says, is this:

'The vividness of the first conception diffuses itself along the relations, and is convey'd, as by so many pipes or canals, to every idea that has any communication with the primary one' [ibid].

However, the union of ideas within the imagination is never complete when poets are speaking. Which is why belief is withheld.

In Section 5 I will examine further where Hume thinks the distinction between the two senses of 'imagination' lies. I will argue that Hume believes he can show that though we must have two senses in explicating 'the mind' there is but one faculty

in view. If any philosopher says that there is a 'real difference' between, on the one hand, the 'understanding', and on the other, the 'imagination/fancy', then Hume would attempt to show that our beliefs in dragonflies, as well as in dragons, 'arises' out of a conjunction of ideas in the imagination. The real difference lies in the trustworthiness of the beliefs that human beings believe. It is for this reason that we speak of the products of the 'understanding' or the 'judgment' and those of the 'imagination'. Or more accurately: this is all we can mean by the distinction. And who means more? Only philosophers are confused here; though, as we shall see, Hume believed that their picture of rational man had consequences for society on account of the way that it helped underpin the dogmas of religion.

## section 5

### general rules

What I now want to do is to see how Hume tries to forge a conception of belief which will allow him to distinguish between science and superstition. Or, more accurately, to distinguish between 'the trivial suggestions of the fancy' and 'the general and more establish'd properties of the imagination' [T267; cf T225]. I shall argue that he thinks that there is a division between the 'judgment' and the 'fancy', but it is not the one that has hitherto been accepted. Moreover, he thinks that his account of the imagination can explain the genesis of that erroneous view of man as a rational creature which he wants to combat and replace.

The human race, the species, to paraphrase Chesterton, to which most of Hume's readers belong, have a propensity to philosophise. Hume thinks that he can show why it is that they will come to believe certain things and find it absurd that anyone should contradict them. For no one is more aware than Hume of the power of philosophical conceptions ingrained through custom and education. For which reason he remarks, à propos his theory of belief, that he expects not to make many 'proselytes to my opinion' [T118]. This, he believes, is a result of 'prejudice', one species of 'unphilosophical probability'.

These sources of belief that affect philosophy are described in the section 'Of unphilosophical probability'. They are derived from the same principles as those described in the section 'Of the probability of causes'. Yet as he remarks, the former are not received by philosophers: 'they have not the good fortune to obtain the same sanction' [T143]. Here there is a significant parallel with what he says about education. Philosophers, he notes, reject education as on a par with

experience. But education is founded on the same principles of the imagination as reasoning from experience. And philosophers are themselves subject to the influence of education.

Thus 'philosophy' pretends that it is beyond the influence of these unphilosophical probabilities. It will say that its principles are founded in reason; whilst the vulgar's are products of the fancy. What I will now consider is Hume's attempt to show that this is an error. He thinks that the unphilosophical 'kinds of probability' are derived from the same principles as those which are 'allow'd to be reasonable foundations of belief and opinion' [T143].

The first kind of 'unphilosophical probability' he mentions is that an argument will be found 'more or less convincing, according as the fact is recent or remote' [ibid]. This, of course, cannot be justified by 'philosophy'. But it can be explained by reference to how a 'greater force and vivacity' in a recent impression 'naturally conveys a greater to the related idea' [ibid].

Secondly, an 'experiment, that is recent and fresh in the memory, affects us more than one that is in some measure obliterated' [ibid]. This is because a 'lively impression produces more assurance than a faint one' [T144].

Thirdly, however different in kind are proofs and probabilities, the 'former species of reasoning often degenerates insensibly into the latter' through nothing but the length of the argument [ibid]. It is certain, he says, that conviction will be stronger if an inference is drawn immediately from an object. For the vivacity drawn from the original impression will decay if the 'imagination is carry'd thro' a long chain of connected arguments' [ibid].

Two remarks seem appropriate at this point. Firstly, all these phenomena are presented within his theory of belief. They are, indeed, progeny of the imagination, disowned, but uncontroversially ubiquitous. Secondly, their embarrassing presence should introduce some humility into the learned who congratulate themselves on the purity of their reasoning when they contrast themselves with the vulgar. For these dispositions of the imagination are expressed in the patterns of belief found as much in the learned world as in any other part of society. For example, when Hume attacks the myths of the Whig and Tory writers we see his awareness of the first unphilosophical probability: recent history will tend to prejudice our interpretation of more distant events; for recent history is based on comparatively vivid impressions. Similarly, an experiment that is recent will affect us more than one distant: and so there is an impetus to fashion in the natural sciences.

But as well as these three 'species of probability' there is another one in the tendency we have to form 'general rules'. This is perhaps the most interesting of these dispositions not least because here we see how tendencies of the imagination can conflict with one another: conclusions which philosophers ascribe to the 'understanding' can conflict with those they ascribe to the 'fancy'. For Hume, though, there is but one faculty, the imagination, and this is the source of both sorts of conclusions.

But if the different conclusions have a common heredity, then why should we give our preference to the conclusions that the philosophers prefer? Can Hume disagree with the philosophers' categories and yet still support this preference? Or does his reduction undercut the claims for his own 'scientific' account?

What are these 'general rules'? Such general rules 'which we rashly form to ourselves' are the 'source' of what we properly call PREJUDICE' [T146]. And so, even when faced with an intelligent Irishman or a 'solid' Frenchman, we may still conclude, 'in spite of sense and reason', that the former is a 'dunce' and the latter a 'fop' [T146-7]. Why do we form such rules? It is a consequence of the same 'principles on which 'all judgments concerning causes and effects depend' [T147]. It is

'the nature of custom not only to operate with its full force, when objects are presented, that are exactly the same with those to which we have been accustom'd; but also to operate in an inferior degree, when we discover such as are similar' [ibid].

As an illustration, Hume presents one of his drinking examples. One 'who has become a drunkard by the use of red wines, will be carried almost with the same violence to white, if presented to him' [ibid].

Sometimes, though, the force of this disposition has 'an effect on the imagination in opposition to the judgment', so that a 'contrariety' of sentiments will be produced concerning the same object. A woman, for example, held high over the streets by Batman, will tremble even though her judgment is that Batman is utterly dependable. The reason is that, through custom, she associates falling with death; and the custom goes beyond the 'instances, from which it is deriv'd' [T148].

But the most striking example of the influence of general rules appears when we consider the assumptions that we make about conclusions of the mind. That is, the influence of general rules explains why philosophers make a distinction between the 'fancy' and the 'understanding' or 'judgment'. We can see in this something of the intended scope of Hume's theory of the imagination. Just as it will later explain why

philosophers are inclined to believe that efficacy is independent of the mind, here it explains the reason why philosophers have arrived at the fundamental categories of 'judgment' and the 'imagination'. More than this: it explains how the correct theory is itself possible: it is precisely because we have a natural tendency to form wider and wider explanatory principles, that a theory of the imagination becomes an attractive proposition.

So how might the influence of general rules explain how we arrive at such fundamental categories? The answer seems to be that we have experience not only of objects and events, but also experience of our reasoning about objects and events. So we come to formulate rules about such reasoning.

'By them we learn to distinguish the accidental circumstances from the efficacious causes; and when we find that an effect can be produc'd without the concurrence of any particular circumstance, we conclude that that circumstance makes not a part of the efficacious cause, however frequently conjoin'd with it' [T149].

Nevertheless, we are still sometimes influenced: there is then a 'contrariety in our thoughts' [ibid]. This causes us to ascribe the conclusions to different faculties:

'The general rule is attributed to our judgment; as being more extensive and constant. The exception to the imagination; as being more capricious and uncertain' [ibid].

Thus the influence of one general rule causes us to reject the influence of the other. The one that we reject we say comes from the fancy; and the one we accept we say comes from the 'judgment'. That is, we invent these categories.

The 'sceptics', he says, may take pleasure in this. This is unsurprising when we consider what has happened. He began to

explore general rules as a species of 'unphilosophical probability' starting with the example of prejudices about the qualities of the Irish and the French. How right, the reader says, is Hume to point out that men - perhaps especially the vulgar? - are not always reasonable! But, as with the discussion of education that suggested that education is built almost on the same foundation as reasoning from experience, so here too Hume attacks the claim that the conclusions of the 'judgment' have a different heredity from those of 'unphilosophical probability'. For it is pointed out that the canons of reasoning on which the wise pride themselves following are nothing but a consequence of the same propensity to follow general rules that result in prejudices. So the 'philosophical' rules are founded on an 'unphilosophical' propensity. Thus the seemingly incorruptible division of the mind into the faculty of judgment and imagination or fancy, is merely a consequence that certain general rules are better than others. Philosophers have alighted on this necessary distinction and decided that it represents a fundamental distinction that distinguishes man from the animals.

So in this section we have seen how Hume attempts to reduce the 'judgment' and the 'fancy' to the 'imagination'. He is showing that philosophers have hypostatized wrongly talk of the 'judgment' and the 'fancy'. Such talk is necessary for certain rules are more useful than others.

Naturally, this attack on the idea that reasoning is independent of the imagination, creates a problem for Hume: for he not only wants to explain the origin of belief, he also wants to introduce a normative standard of reasoning. Can a theory of belief as founded on the imagination embrace normative standards? This I will discuss in the next section.

section 6

the wise, and the fanciful

Earlier in the chapter we saw how an essential element in Hume's project of reducing the faculties of the mind to the imagination was his attack on the idea that reason has a role in the forming of judgments about matters of fact. He concludes at one instance that

'Reason can never shew us the connexion of one object with another, tho' aided by experience, and the observation of their constant conjunction in all past instances' [T92; cf T91; T139].

Yet Hume does not intend that we should give up our inductive procedures; this, of course, would wreck his scientific project. What he wants to show, I will now argue, is that though the generality of philosophers are wrong in thinking that they can offer an ultimate justification for a belief, this does not mean that we have no reason to prefer one belief to another; and indeed, I will argue that Hume can consistently offer 'rules by which to judge of causes and effects'.

This is to contradict W.H.Walsh who argues that Hume is inconsistent in talking of 'just and unjust inferences':

'Only a being which is in some degree rational can hope to apply rules and improve his performance in doing so; only a being with some degree of skill can be in this position. But according to Hume's official doctrine man is not such a being: his mind is determined to behave as it does, and his action and activities, if such they should be called, are the unavoidable effects of custom and habit' [Walsh p.106].

So, says Walsh, the 'science of Human Nature', is meant to explain what occurs. In theory it should have nothing to say

about what ought to be; 'in practice', though, Hume is as interested as the next man in distinguishing effective from ineffective thought' [ibid],

The question, then, is whether Hume has any right to say that one rule is better than another. If he does not, then how can he speak of the wise and the foolish? I shall argue that some rules are to be preferred on account of their success in giving unity to the ideas of the imagination. Men find these rules through treating themselves as objects of study: they find more success in this way of reasoning than that. The progress, the refinement, or the gradual disciplining of belief, is marked by greater success in reasoning. A person soon discovers that if he does not follow the rules that, as a simple matter of fact, have brought him success, and at the same time discipline certain urges - of the 'fancy' - then he will not succeed in whatever task or inquiry he sets himself.

An introduction to the reasons as to why Hume thinks that some rules are more equal than others can be found in the section 'Of unphilosophical probability'. There Hume writes:

'We shall afterwards take notice of some general rules, by which we ought to regulate our judgment concerning causes and effects; and these rules are form'd on the nature of our understanding, and on our experience of its operations in the judgments we form concerning objects' [T149].

What happens is that we notice that some of our propensities must be subordinated to others if we are to find unity between our ideas. And this is how we make progress in discovering truths about the world. For example, when we find that an 'effect can be produc'd without the concurrence of any particular circumstance', then we conclude that that circumstance makes no part of the cause, however often they have been found together, and however much we may be disposed to associate them [ibid]. The newspaper vendor may begin his

cries immediately before the sound of the school bell; but when we find, that when there is no cry the bell still rings, we conclude that the call of 'Evening News' does not cause the bell to ring. The principles implicit in this conclusion are more useful than the principles implicit in the reasoning of one who concludes that the call does cause the bell to ring. He will not go very far; especially, perhaps, in the field of campanology.

Some principles, then, are recognised as being more useful than others: these are dignified as coming from the faculty of 'judgment': the others belong to the 'imagination' or 'fancy'. Thus Hume does not want to deny the distinction; though his explanation of it was revolutionary. The useful principles are not useful because they come from the faculty of judgment: rather, because they are more useful, they are said to come from the faculty of judgment.

Reflective social creatures like ourselves need such a distinction between the 'judgment' and the 'imagination'. The problem arises when philosophers suggest that useful and useless rules arise from distinct faculties. The philosophic may want to set themselves above the animals; and this may be one way of doing it. Or those possessing judgment superior to the generality of mankind, may wish to define human nature through reference to the faculty of judgment alone.

The philosophical error involved is entirely natural. Given the way we have to talk of the 'imagination' and the 'judgment' or 'understanding', it is hardly surprising that these are taken for distinct faculties. Yet the error can be dangerous. If judgment is given an autonomous and defining role, the theologians will make use of this way of thinking and argue that reason is of 'divine origin' [cf T413]. As such, this philosophy may become part of a religious metaphysic; as when a religion ignores experience in its moral teaching; and so

function as an excuse for all manner of oppressive practices [vide Chapter VI below].

When Hume suggests that the rules that he lays out might have been supplied 'by the natural principles of our understanding' [T175], part of his meaning is that we need no philosopher to discover that we will not be able to adapt means to ends if we ignore, say, the priority of causes. We discover this; and so we have the categories of wise and foolish.

Because we tend to associate the shout with the bell, we need to enlarge our reasoning to take into account such a fallacious tendency of the imagination:

'A...reflexion on general rules keeps us from augmenting our belief upon every encrease of the force and vivacity of our ideas' [T632].

Similarly, as Lewis White Beck points out, Hume argues that general rules may correct the varying effects of sympathy in the moral life [Beck p.73]. Thus Hume says that if a person of our nature and full grown were suddenly transported into the world, he would not know how much value to put on things, on account of the variability of his feelings and a lack of general rules [T299]. Likewise, we need experience of the manner in which the imagination works in order to apply the general rules (formed from that experience) in judging matters of fact. We need experience, that is, of how principles describing certain conjunctions lead to success - to a greater unity between our substantive principles. When we have this experience, we can compare the principles implicit in the reasoning of the person who concludes that the shout causes the bell with the circumstances found in the 'Rules by which to judge of causes and effects'. We compare it, then,

'with the more general and authentic operations of the understanding, [and]...we find it to be destructive of all the most establish'd principles of reasonings' [T150].

If we ignored, for instance, the fact that the absence of a shout, as when the vendor is absent with a sore throat, makes no difference to the bells ringing, we would be undercutting tried and tested principles of scientific reasoning. So we reject the significance of the constant conjunction between the shout and the bell.

In his paper 'Hume's Theory of Mental Activity', Fred Wilson speaks of a 'feedback process' whereby the mind regulates itself through knowledge of its own propensities. Wilson writes:

'The mind, at least sometimes aiming at the truth, discovers the laws of its own operation, including the laws describing the process by which it arrives at beliefs successful and unsuccessful. Using these, and monitoring its own activities, it can regulate itself by this feedback process so as more efficiently to gain the truth so far as it is able' [Wilson p. 118].

Wilson notes that Hume marks out 'psychological types' that are appropriate to the active search for knowledge. In Book I he speaks of 'constancy' and 'sagacity' [T175]. And in Book III mentions how 'industry, perseverance, patience..application.. [and]..vigilance' give us advantages in the 'conduct of life' [T610-611].

However, just as we do not form our moral dispositions in isolation, nor do we form our general rules about judging matters of fact in isolation. And if we want a fuller picture of the active mind that Hume presents, we should, I think, consider the significance of the social dimension of human nature for explaining how the 'authentic' rules of the mind are arrived at. What we can see is that through simple inductive

methods we can discipline ourselves, not least due to the motivation we receive through identifying successful reasoning with gaining the esteem of others.

When Hume speaks of how man attributes some conclusions to the 'imagination' and some to the 'judgment', he evidently does not mean that each person arrives at such a distinction by himself. Man, for Hume, is nothing if not an imitative creature. This is one reason why Hume draws our attention to the way that our reasoning may be upset by group prejudices such as the thought that a particular Irishman cannot have wit. Yet this general rule, so destructive of a successful assessment of Irishmen, is countered by a prejudice in favour of weighing up the evidence according to previously successful canons of reasoning. Now just as we can take from others racial prejudice, so too can we be brought up to follow successful standards of reason. Indeed, the unphilosophical species of reason acts as a parody of the 'authentic' language of causation.

So from our earliest years we learn elements of the true canons of reasoning; this happens partly through imitating others. Naturally, as we progress, we will tend to imitate the even more successful - such persons that have the esteem not only of their children, but of society. To be sure, matters may be askew. Thus Hume writes of 12th century England in the following terms:

'The spirit of superstition was so prevalent, that it infallibly caught every careless reasoner..[and]..those who preserved themselves untainted by the general contagion, proceeded on no principles which they could pretend to justify; they were more indebted to their total want of instruction, than to their knowledge, if they still retained some share of understanding' [H I 33].

False prejudices, then, will not be able to overcome the basis of successful reasoning, as they are parasitic upon it. So Hume

can speak of the 'natural principles of our understanding' [T175]. Nevertheless, as intellectual ambition increases, superstition can prevail. Not least on account of the esteem that the priests engineer for themselves and their modes of thinking.

When Hume distinguishes between the principles of the imagination which are 'permanent, irresistible, and universal' and those which are 'changeable, weak and irregular', he notes how mankind recognises that the latter principles 'are observ'd only to take place in weak minds' [T225]. This observation will have its effect on our effort to discipline our dispositions, for the opinion of others about ourselves is of enormous concern to us [cf T316]. Who indeed wants to be thought of as having a weak mind? In the Enquiry Hume says that love can subsist under treachery and malice, but is immediately extinguished upon a perception of stupidity [E II 240].

We are now, I think, in a better position to assess Walsh's criticism.

This 'self-observation', Walsh might say, is all right as far as it goes, but it must not be pretended that it is consistent with the 'official doctrine' that we are determined by the association of ideas to react. The 'sheer weight of past experience' is not enough, Walsh says, for all Hume wants the imagination to do. Hume himself, he says, recognises that sometimes we may 'attain the knowledge of a particular cause merely by one experiment' [T104]. Hume writes:

'tho' we are here suppos'd to have had only one experiment of a particular effect, yet we have many millions to convince us of this principle; that like objects, placed in like circumstances, will always produce like effects' [T105].

This explanation, says Walsh, is 'hardly convincing'. What is needed here is an 'ability' not a habit; and whilst habits are acquired through conditioning, abilities are acquired through 'good fortune' and 'intelligent response'. But Hume's 'official doctrine', he continues, cannot cope with the need for an 'ability':

'learning from experience does not consist in surrendering oneself to determination by external causes as Hume seems to suggest. On the contrary, it involves picking and choosing among phenomena, setting some aside as 'distortions' or 'mere appearances' and pointing to others as 'significant' or 'real' [Walsh p. 109].

The first thing I want to say about these remarks is that Walsh ignores the import of the fact that on Hume's understanding of human action, 'picking and choosing' and 'setting aside' some phenomena are, like habitual actions, actions which are determined by external causes. The scientist is aware that some things may only be appearances, and that we may be 'taken in' by these appearances. Now would not Hume want to say that this is provided by the way that we can reflect on the success of our causal predictions? Through our failures, we may come to realise that we need to learn not just to react 'habitually' by throwing water when we see fire. We need to be able to distinguish between unwanted fires and gas fires. Walsh seems to forget that we have experience of mistakes. We are not, that is, only determined by the constant conjunction of particular objects under study, but we are also determined by other factors such as the observation of past attempts at reasoning. Moreover, we will imitate successful reasoners who have the esteem of society. We are aware not only that if we reason incorrectly we cannot adapt ends to means, but also that such failure evokes not the esteem, but the contempt of our peers. This latter point about the social context of knowledge is easily missed, for it is easy to think that in Book I of the Treatise, man is to be considered a solitary creature. Yet the

motivation is an essential part of the causal story that makes Walsh's criticisms redundant.

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To summarize the argument of this section: because we can find no ultimate reason for any belief, this does not mean that we should consider all beliefs as on an equal footing. Yet, says Walsh, is this not an unwarranted move from the descriptive to the normative? For if we are merely determined to follow one rule rather than another, then 'science on the one hand and superstition on the other hand will stand on the same footing': each will be, in effect, an operation of the imagination, where that term is taken to cover something essentially sensual rather than rational' [Walsh p.107]. In answer to this it was suggested that we naturally learn from the results of following different rules: we are self-disciplining creatures. And the finest fruits of this self-disciplining are philosophy and science.

From there the causal story was broadened. If we have given up the project of founding experimental beliefs upon reason, we can, without circularity, use experimental findings in order to explain how we can successfully extrapolate from resemblances using certain rules. And why should not such an explanatory enterprise employ findings from a study of man in his natural social state?

A greater awareness of the possibility of being misled by the fancy becomes more widespread as 'philosophy' gains a predominant position [cf E I 10]. From this point of view, the very certainty, with which we employ the favoured general rules, is to be explained not only through our experience of constant conjunctions, but also by our attitudes to successful reasoners. And these persons are not only buoyed up by the immediate advantage of their reasonings - they also consider that they are thus given a 'new lustre in the eyes of mankind, and are universally attended with esteem and approbation' [T620]. As we have imitative minds we are led to imitate their methods in difficult cases; and thus the socially significant

distinction between them and those who follow the wayward suggestions of their fancies - like the ignorant and the young - serves to motivate us in our efforts to discipline our imaginations.

Another suggestion of this section may serve as an introduction to the next. Philosophers err when they speak of the 'understanding' as a separate faculty from the 'imagination'. That the error is entirely natural is seen when we consider that life depends on making a strict division between tried and tested ways of associating resemblances and dispositions to associate resemblances in other circumstances. Because this is a necessary division there is nothing at all wrong in speaking of the 'understanding' and the 'imagination' as if they were separate faculties. *The question is that of the logical status of such a division.* Error only arises when an attempt is made to draw philosophical conclusions from such language. As for example when it is held that reason is autonomous and the defining mark of man. In the following section on necessity, important elements in this false conception of man will be examined. Once again we will see how Hume's explanation of philosophical error plays a central role in his study of human nature.

## section 7

### necessity

The chief purpose of this section is to consider how Hume explains our idea of necessity. But there is another theme. We have seen in the previous sections how Hume's reduction of the study of 'logic' to the study of the imagination goes hand in hand with an account of how philosophers misinterpret our talk of the 'understanding' and the 'fancy'. In the present section I begin to examine Hume's explanation of another, closely related, error. For Hume clearly values his picture of how the imagination allows us to reason beyond present impressions, on account of how that picture enables us to explain why philosophers should be led to think that necessity lies in objects.

It is precisely the propensities of the imagination which make reasoning about matters of fact possible, that lead us to think that certain ways of thinking are 'natural'. Such as, for example, the thought that efficacy lies in the objects. In general, it may be said that such explanations of error comprise one of the themes that unify his theory of the imagination through its diverse applications.

Now that we have seen how Hume believes it is the imagination that makes us infer particular effects from particular causes, we can return to the question 'dropt' earlier: viz., what is our idea of necessity when we say that two objects are necessarily connected together? But why is Hume so interested in this question? After all has he not already introduced a revolutionary explanation of belief, as founded on the imagination rather than reason? One answer is that he has not yet shown the impression of necessity as demanded by his first principle. However, as Barry Stroud explains, there is another reason:

'we come to believe, not just that a B will occur, but that it must. We have the idea, not just of an event of one sort always following the event of another sort in certain circumstances, but of there being a necessary connection between events of two sorts in certain circumstances' [Stroud p.78].

Hume repeats the argument that led him to re-examine belief and, eventually, to reduce the understanding and the fancy to the imagination: we cannot conceive a power or efficacy by which objects are united. This would amount to the 'absolute impossibility' of one object not following another. But this is possible in thought and we have no a priori reason to believe it impossible in fact. He then draws from this argument the following conclusion:

'that when we talk of any being...as endow'd with a power or force, proportion'd to any effect; when we speak of a necessary connexion betwixt objects, and suppose, that this connexion depends upon an efficacy or energy, with which any of these objects are endow'd; in all these expressions, so apply'd, we have really no distinct meaning, and make use only of common words, without any clear and determinate ideas' [T162].

What must be emphasised here is precisely that which Hume italicises: he is only suggesting that philosophical expressions that imply such theses as, for example, that bodies 'operate by their...accidents or qualities' have no meaning [T158]. This implies that the case is not the same with the ordinary use of expressions such as 'the door causes the noise', or 'the weight has a powerful effect'. So it is more probable, he says,

'that these expressions do here lose their true meaning by being wrong apply'd, than that they never had any meaning; 'twill be proper to bestow another consideration on this subject, to see if possibly we can discover the nature and origin of these ideas, we annex to them' [T182].

With this distinction in hand we can now consider how Hume's view about the origin of the idea of necessity is based on an understanding of the function of ordinary causal statements. We give, he thinks, a special status to certain constant conjunctions when we say that that event must occur. When we postulate between two objects this particular relation, we are in fact informing others of our feelings of expectation; and at the same time informing them of our experience of certain events.

What makes this possible are propensities of the imagination. This can be seen if we ask how we make the transition from feelings of expectation to talk of objects in the world. The beginning of Hume's answer is seen in the following:

'Tis a common observation, that the mind has a great propensity to spread itself on external objects, and to conjoin with them any internal impressions, which they occasion, and which always make their appearance at the same time that these objects discover themselves to the senses' [T167].

What happens is this: the objects that we find always following each other determine the mind to expect that B will follow A. This gives us the 'internal impression', or 'impression of reflexion'. But this is not the only impression around: there is also, of course, the impression of the A and the B. We soon come to associate the internal impression with the impressions of A and B. And so we naturally behave as if necessity is independent of the mind and residing in the objects themselves:

'Thus as certain sounds and smells are always found to attend certain visible objects, we naturally imagine a conjunction, even in place, betwixt the objects and qualities, tho' the qualities...really exist no where' [T167].

Thus Hume is postulating a propensity of the imagination in order to explain our causal thinking. And this propensity is no ad hoc principle, but a natural consequence of his doctrine of the association of ideas.

So we do not gain the idea of necessity from an impression of any particular object in the world; rather, the idea is arrived at through the mind's being determined by past objects. In other words: we do not believe that Y will follow X because we can see a necessary connexion between them: but because we believe that Y will follow X we say that there is a necessary connexion .

'Necessity, then, is the effect of this observation, and is nothing but an internal impression of the mind, or a determination to carry our thoughts from one object to another' [T165].

The object cannot be the 'model' of the idea of necessity, because a series of resembling instances cannot produce a new quality in the object. However, 'the observation of this resemblance produces a new impression in the mind, which is its real model' [T165].

But how can we make sense of this account? If the 'determination' is the same as the power or efficacy, then it seems that if we speak about a connection between objects, as in everyday language, then we will be speaking without meaning. For, of course, we speak as if necessity is a quality in the world: not as if it is, in some sense, a property of our minds. Perhaps, then, we ought to see the theory as showing up confusion in our ordinary talk?

This can be denied if we find Hume showing some natural way that the truth of causal statements can be judged. Of course, they are not going to be true on his official theory of truth:

'Truth or falsehood consists in an agreement or disagreement either to the real relation of ideas, or to real existence and matter of fact. Whatever, therefore, is not susceptible of this agreement or disagreement, is incapable of being true or false, and can never be an object of our reason' [T458; cf T448].

For Hume has shown to his satisfaction that there is no quality in the world that could correspond to the idea we have of efficacy or power.

The core of his alternative account is simple: we are led to assume a connection between objects; and so we reduce our noticed resemblances to scientific principles. In other words, attributions of necessity are to be considered as regulative. Philosophers and the vulgar philosophising err if they treat them as constitutive - if they think that they represent something in the object. Thus whilst necessity cannot function as an idea which legislates a priori, it allows us to see that some principles of resemblance override others. Unless we suppose that some resemblances are more important than others, we would not be able to proceed in the task of reducing resemblances to the fewest possible principles. The cat seeks the shade; the child avoids the candle; we assume that there is a necessary principle uniting these events when we progress towards explaining why the philosopher springs from the hot radiator.

A similar distinction was seen in the previous chapter: talk of the 'imagination' (or 'fancy') and the 'understanding' is necessary: but we are mistaken if we think that such talk is grounded in real and distinguishable faculties. We also saw the pressures that lead us to hypostatize them - to deny that is, that philosophical and unphilosophical probabilities have the same heredity. And so with causation: we can only reason about objects because of a particular propensity of the imagination that leads us to create a particular 'place' for efficacy -

that is, 'between' objects. So no wonder, then, that people are led into error when they philosophise about causation.

Such assumptions of necessity as we make when, for instance, we are studying human nature, are misinterpreted if they are understood in a 'realist way'; which is indeed the constant temptation. That is, if the principle that 'every effect must have a cause'; or 'men always seek society' are considered to involve reference to some mysterious 'power'.

Usually of course we do not stop to consider what is involved in talking about necessity. We feel certainty in saying that the flame will be followed by heat - although reason cannot justify this certainty. Instead, as we saw in the previous chapter, justification comes from our having followed the rules correctly when gathering our evidence.

Perhaps the sun disappears for eight days: philosophers, Hume says, 'ought to search for the cause whence it might be derived' [E I 128]. Here we would be assuming that there is a principle (or principles) which would draw together different parts of our knowledge. And unless we find one which the more we employ it, the more it explains, we will not think of it as possessing a necessary connection, but think of it as a necessary sequence.

Thus we do not gather the idea of necessity from an impression of any particular object in the world; rather, the idea is gained through the minds being determined by past objects. So we do not believe that Y will follow X because we see a necessary connexion between them: but because we believe that Y will follow X we say that there is a necessary connexion. Thus statements about connections between objects are not true because they correspond with some quality in the world: we have no idea of such a quality. They are true because some objects, rather than others, 'discover themselves to the

senses' at the same time as we have the feeling of expectation. Of course, they may not be true: but then they are false, not because of the absence of some quality, but because the succession is not regular on future occasions. In such cases we have paid insufficient attention to the circumstances - such circumstances as are set out in the section 'Rules by which to judge of causes and effects'.

I have argued, then, that Hume can explain how standards are possible, even though the impression of necessity arises from feelings of expectation. A particular propensity of the imagination that associates our feeling of expectation with external objects allows us to inform others of a similar constitution that such and such objects are to be found together. Furthermore, we can be *sophisticated about our* feelings of expectation and subsume some regularities under others. Thus do we reduce our principles of resemblance to a manageable form.

## Chapter II

### Scepticism

#### introduction

If there has been little work done on Hume and the imagination in recent years, there has been a good deal of interest shown in the relation of 'Hume's scepticism' to the science of man. Indeed, Terence Penelhum has been led to remark that the question of whether Hume is a sceptic, and if he is, what sort of sceptic he is, 'is probably the most vexed problem of the subtle subsience of Humeneutics' [Penelhum p.253]. Can a study of what Hume says about the imagination help?

Even before tackling Part IV of the Treatise, entitled, 'Of the sceptical and other systems of philosophy', the reader has already reason to think that it might. For, as we saw in the previous chapter, in attempting to find in the imagination a new and startlingly economic explanation of belief, Hume has the ghoul of scepticism at his elbow. The problem is that he has to find some way of separating off the claim that the moon is made of green cheese, from, for example, the conclusions of a scientific study of the effect of the moon on poets. If he cannot do this, then we have no reason not to believe the poets' claims. This problem, I argued, is approached by Hume in terms of the two senses of 'imagination'; that is to say, that he thinks he can show that we can make good the claim that the imagination is responsible for both sorts of belief, and at the same time explain why men make the distinction and choose to talk of the 'fancy' and the 'understanding'. He makes a distinction

'in the imagination betwixt the principles which are permanent, irresistable, and universal; such as the customary transition from causes to effects, and from

effects to causes: and the principles, which are changeable, weak, and irregular' [T225].

However, we shall see in this chapter that when Hume turns to the question of the existence of body, scepticism returns anew - and it never leaves him. Until this point he is confident; afterwards, he has a new understanding of his project and a new understanding of scepticism.

It is well known that at times Hume succumbs to scepticism; but it is not understood that in so succumbing Hume is following a consequence of his theory of the imagination. Which is to say of course that that theory is potentially self-destructive. Wondering why he should go on to study the passions, he says in the Conclusion to Book I of the Treatise that he can no longer find any reason to believe in his theory:

'After the most accurate and exact of my reasonings, I can give no reason why I shou'd assent to it; and feel nothing but a strong propensity to consider objects strongly in that view, under which they appear to me' [T265].

Yet he does carry on. He is curious. He enjoys philosophy. He gives the same answer to the question 'why carry on?', that God, in Joseph Heller's God Knows, gives to David's question 'Why me?' - 'Why not?' He discovers that he will submit to the attractions of pen and paper; just as he discovered that he will believe that the billiard ball will move when hit by another. He discovers, therefore, that he is sceptical about his scepticism:

'I may, nay I must yield to the current of nature, in submitting to my senses and understanding; and in this blind submission I shew most perfectly my sceptical disposition and principles' [T269].

So on the one hand, his work on the imagination tells him there is no theoretical answer to the sceptical doubt; on the other

hand, the nature of the imagination gives him a practical answer. And this practical answer overrides the (permanent) opposition between principles of the imagination:

'Here then I find myself absolutely and necessarily determin'd to live, and talk, and act like other people in the common affairs of life' [ibid].

He discovers that nature is too strong for excessive scepticism: he discovers, in fact, that he is taken to a more moderate scepticism.

Now I argued in the previous chapter that Hume's explanation of belief can better be understood if we read it in conjunction with portions of Book II of the Treatise; for his full explanation of our reasonings about matters of fact involves an attempt to explain why men are motivated to judge as they do. In the present chapter I likewise argue that extended references to Book II are necessary for understanding the nature of the moderate scepticism at which Hume arrives. For example, I shall argue that the reasons Hume offers - in the Conclusion to the first Book of the Treatise and in Part XII of the Enquiry - for welcoming a moderate scepticism are informed by certain principles of the imagination that are outlined in Part III of Book II of the Treatise.

In the previous chapter, I also began to discuss Hume's explanation of why men err in their analysis of what is involved in making judgments about matters of fact. In this chapter I discuss further his presentation of the genesis of certain philosophical tenets that he sees as defining a false conception of man. For he is not content to 'insinuate the praises' of his own 'system' by decrying those of others [T xiii]. Decry he certainly does, but he also wants to explain the intellectual and psychological appeal of tenets upheld by philosophy in ancient and modern times.

## section 2

### reason and the imagination

The hound of scepticism does not appear immediately. In 'Of scepticism with regard to reason', Hume's purpose is to advance his theory of belief by showing that only on this theory can we explain why a total suspension of belief is not possible. He discovers that the division between dogmatists and Pyrrhonians has been misrepresented by both parties. There are no real Pyrrhonians, as one cannot doubt with the completeness that they pretend to; and there is no sect of dogmatists or 'rational' creatures; that is only a misleading way of describing certain animals - some of whom are more successful than others at reasoning.

Whatever their differences, philosophers describe man as a creature of reason [T413]. And in 'Of scepticism with regard to reason' Hume turns again to this fundamental supposition. Even the sceptics, he says, are at one with the dogmatists' belief that the question of the sovereignty of reason is central. The latter reject the sceptics' arguments by saying that if such arguments are strong, then this is proof that reason has authority; if weak, then they can never be sufficient to invalidate all the 'conclusions of our understanding'. The sceptic has a similar conception of reason: he believes that he has arguments to show that it has no authority.

So what authority do the wise have? Surely, the sceptic says, we ought to assess the probability of any judgment not only by taking into account 'the nature of the object'; but also by assessing the 'nature of the understanding' [T182]. This indeed is reflected in our giving weight to those who have a good record in judging; and by giving less weight to the pronouncements of the inconstant. Yet even philosophers can be so judged:

'In the man of the best sense and longest experience, this authority is never entire; since even such-a-one must be conscious of many errors in the past, and must still dread the like for the future' [ibid].

And this estimation must also be assessed: perhaps we have made an error in the estimation we make of the truth and fidelity of our faculties? We may reassure ourselves: but this conclusion would also be founded on probability, and so the validity of our 'first evidence' is further weakened:

'and when I proceed still farther, to turn the scrutiny against every successive estimation I make of my faculties, all the rules of logic require a continual diminution, and at last a total extinction of belief and evidence' [T183].

But this does not happen: there seems to be a discontinuity between the 'rules of logic' and belief.

And this in fact is why Hume is interested in the 'debate'. He wants

'to make the reader sensible of the truth of my hypothesis, that all our reasonings concerning causes and effects are deriv'd from nothing but custom; and that belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than the cogitative part of our natures' [T183].

He can attempt to make the reader sensible of this by arguing that only on his theory can it be explained why belief is not destroyed by the sceptics' arguments. For if we understand that belief depends on the imagination we can explain why belief does not disappear:

'Where the mind reaches not its objects with easiness and facility, the same principles have not the same effect as in a more natural conception of the ideas' [T185].

Thus although reason dictates that one ought to assess probabilities ad infinitum, the mind pursues its own course. The 'attention is on the stretch': the mind falls back on its common judgments [ibid]. Hume returns to this issue in the Conclusion to Book I:

'We save ourselves from this total scepticism only by means of that singular and seemingly trivial property of the fancy, by which we enter with difficulty into remote views of things, and are not able to accompany them with so sensible an impression, as we do those, which are more easy and natural' [T268].

The effort that the mind expends in following a long train of reasoning, detracts from the force of conviction: the effort of thought disturbs the operation of our sentiments on which the belief depends [T185].

Hume, then, tries to make the reader agree with his theory of belief, by noting how it can explain aspects of our experience that are, he thinks, inexplicable upon any other hypothesis. Philosophical arguments cannot destroy all belief for any length of time. Therefore, it seems, the dogmatical and sceptical conception of the place of reason in common life is utterly misguided. In so far as the wise reach correct decisions, this is not because their beliefs are the conclusions of an autonomous faculty of reason. Only, Hume thinks, on his theory can we make sense of the survival of belief. For

'if belief...were a simple act of thought, without any peculiar manner of conception, or the addition of a force and vivacity, it must infallibly destroy itself, and in every case terminate in a total suspense of judgment' [T184].

Now by arguing that belief is dependent on the imagination, Hume can detach himself from the issue of the sovereignty of reason and suggest that the dogmatists and sceptics have

misunderstood the relation between belief and reason. Any 'authority' that the dogmatists have is not due to rational insight: it is, as we saw in the previous chapter, merely because they are more successful than others in extrapolating principles denoting resemblances between objects from the myriad of ideas stored in their memory and from the impressions of their senses. This indeed is to strike at the heart of the philosophers' conception of themselves as quintessentially rational beings. The sceptics, however, unwittingly provide evidence for the theory that belief is founded on the imagination. And viewing matters from this perspective reveals that the sceptics too have been bewitched by this false picture - for they cannot deprive us of judgment through using reason:

'Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel'  
[T183].

Thus the sceptics think that the claims of the dogmatists have no authority because reason has no authority; and, on account of the crucial premise, they must present their arguments as inescapably leading to the diminution and vanishment of belief. But it just does not happen. One consequence is plain: we have a sect pretending that they do not believe in the certainty of anything. A fantastic sect has been created: fantastic because they cannot put into practice what they claim to believe. In the Dialogues concerning Natural Religion, Philo does not demur at Cleanthes' description of the Pyrrhonians as a 'sect of liars' [D137]. On the other hand, the 'dogmatists', are equally confused when they offer their justification of 'reason'. So there is a certain harmony in their ill-considered debate:

'The sceptical and dogmatical reasons are of the same kind, tho' contrary in their operation and tendency'  
[T187].

Hume's purpose, then, in examining the dispute between dogmatists and sceptics is far from being merely eirenic. Both mistake the relation of reason and belief. That the dogmatists make this mistake is not on the face of it surprising; but that the sceptics do, shows the power of the false picture of rational man. Hume wanted to sweep this away. So before the publication of the Treatise, he wrote in a letter that

'Those who are accustomed to reflect on such abstract subjects, are commonly full of prejudices; and those who are unprejudiced are unacquainted with metaphysical reasonings. My principles are so remote from all vulgar sentiments on the subject, that were they to take place, they would produce almost a total alteration in philosophy: and as you know, revolutions of this kind are not easily brought about' [L I 26].

In later chapters the import of his revolutionary approach will be considered in relation to other issues, in morality, in politics, and in religion. And there too we will see how he believes that the issues have been misunderstood on account of the dominance of a picture of man as a rational creature.

### section 3

#### Of scepticism with regard to the senses

At the beginning of 'Of scepticism with regard to the senses', Hume says that the sceptic cannot doubt the existence of body. Though we may well ask 'What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body', but that there is body 'is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings' [T187]. Yet notwithstanding this early conviction, Hume ends the section saying that he is 'at present of a quite contrary sentiment' and is more inclined to 'repose no faith at all in my senses, or rather imagination, than to place in it such an implicit confidence' [T217]. What happened?

In brief, what happened is this. The 'implicit faith' with which Hume begins the section is a necessity which functions as a virtue. It is a necessity in that he thinks we cannot doubt the existence of body, any more than, as seen in the previous section, we can stop reasoning. It is a virtue in that it allows him to employ an experimental method and ask about what causes us to believe. However, that inquiry convinces him, firstly, that the beliefs of the vulgar are false: we cannot be directly acquainted with public objects. And secondly, that we owe the opinion about the external world to the imagination. We owe, therefore, the opinion to 'trivial qualities of the fancy' such as our tendency to associate resembling perceptions [ibid]. Doubting that this can lead to a 'rational system' is doubting that he can make a contrast between 'the imagination' and the 'fancy'. But as he has already shown to his satisfaction the inadequacy of reason, the consequence is that he is doubting we have reason to believe in the external world. It seems, then, that his science of the imagination is not only self-destructive - it destroys any reason we have to believe in the external world.

Or it would do were it not for another trivial property of the fancy - the fact that we find it difficult to enter into the remote views of things.

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Hume asks whether it is the senses, or reason, or the imagination 'that produces the opinion of a continu'd or of a distinct existence' [T188]. It is, of course, the imagination that he thinks produces the opinion, and it is this that attracts his greatest interest. I will be proportionately brief with the other 'faculties'.

The senses cannot give us a 'notion' of a continued existence of body: they cannot continue to operate, even after they have 'ceas'd all manner of operation' [ibid]. Nor can the senses offer their impressions 'as the images of something distinct, or independent, and external': for all they offer is a single perception [T189].

Hume also treats the suggestion that reason could establish the belief in a cursory manner. Philosophy teaches us that all that 'appears to the mind, is nothing but a perception' [T193]. But the vulgar 'confound perceptions and objects', attributing 'a distinct continu'd existence to the very things they see' [ibid]. The vulgar are therefore being unreasonable. Thus their belief must arise from some other faculty than the understanding [T193]. And if such a belief does not come from the senses, then it follows, he thinks, that it must be owed to the imagination.

Now not all impressions are dignified with the property of a continued and distinct existence. The pain from a dog bite is an obvious example of an impression not so dignified. So the qualities of impressions that make us attribute to them such an existence must arise, he reasons, from 'a concurrence of some

of their qualities with the qualities of the imagination' [T194]. We should look, therefore, for those circumstances that lead us to attribute a continued and distinct existence to impressions [T194].

Hume quickly alights on two characteristics observable in the impressions to which we attribute a continued and distinct existence. The first is that unlike, say, impressions of fear, impressions of mountains and trees always appear in the same order after the shutting of the eyes. They can be said to have a constancy in this respect. But, of course, trees and even mountains, change their shape. Even then, however, they show a coherence with other impressions. We are accustomed to find trees changing: we compare with past tree impressions and find a coherency with our new impressions.

Hume speaks of the mind's finding coherence as a 'kind of reasoning from causation' [T195]. We saw, when we examined his account of causation, that the mind is programmed to postulate a connection between objects; and that it is in this way that it reduces a myriad of impressions to a few principles. Now it seems that arriving at a conclusion about the world 'as something real and durable' can proceed upon the same lines [T197].

The connections can be seen in the following example. As I sit at the desk I hear on a sudden a clattering noise of the telex. This gives rise to many new reflexions. First, I have never observed that this clattering could proceed from anything other than the telex. I therefore conclude that the present phenomenon is a contradiction to all experience unless the telex machine is still in the adjoining room. More than this, when I turn to the telex and find my bookmaker's account printed therein, I cannot explain this phenomenon unless I spread out in my mind the continued existence of telegraph wires and bookmakers, previously espied and stored in my memory. And so

it seems that I am naturally led to 'regard the world as something real and durable' [ibid].

Yet such an attempt of the mind to reduce past and present impressions to a few coherent principles is not, he thinks, completely analogous to reasoning from causes to effects. The reason is this: if we become accustomed to seeing the second billiard move when hit by the first, we will draw a like conclusion when presented with the experiment. But the case of perceptions and objects is different. The whole point of supposing that objects have a continued existence is to bestow on them a greater regularity than observed in our perceptions. This cannot be explained through custom - for we would then be suggesting that a habit is 'acquir'd through what was never present to the mind' [T198]. There must therefore also occur the 'cooperation of some other principles' for the mind to extend its conclusions beyond the effects of custom and repetition [ibid]. To which end Hume turns to examine the manner in which the constancy of certain impressions affects the mind.

What, then, of the constancy of certain impressions? Will this help explain how we can arrive at so 'extraordinary an opinion' as the belief in the distinct and continued existence of body? At this stage, still confident for his account of the imagination, Hume thinks it will. He has, that is, already discovered principles to which he can now turn. Thus in Part II of Book I Hume had noted that of the three relations of association, that of resemblance is 'the most fertile source of error' [T61]. And now he repeats his 'general rule' that 'explains' why this is so. It is, he says, a principle 'of great moment' that resemblance not only causes an association of ideas, but that

'whatever ideas place the mind in the same disposition or in similar ones, are very apt to be confounded' [T203].

And he finds it very easy to apply this maxim in the present case. On the one hand, there is the disposition of the mind that views any object that preserves a perfect identity: no new image or idea is produced. On the other hand, there is the experience of watching a succession of related objects: the same disposition is found. In the latter case, the passage between the 'related ideas' is so 'smooth and easy' and it seems so like 'the continuation of the same action', that the cause of the action is attributed to the same object: succession is confounded with identity [T204]. Reason tells us that the first impression of any object is annihilated on the shutting of the eyes: but we naturally consider .. the sea at T1 to be the same perception as the sea at T2. The contradiction is overcome by, 'supposing that these interrupted perceptions are united by a real existence' [T199]. So the existence of one relation, that of resemblance between perceptions, leads us to add another resemblance between objects; and so the postulation of the external world appears.

As I say, this is contrary to reason: the perceptions that occur when we watch a succession of related objects are not the same, however difficult it is for us to notice this. The mind, therefore, attempts to dispel the contradiction through a fiction of the continued existence of bodies. On this 'hypothesis', the perceptions are at once distinct and yet of the same thing.

However, our tendency to confuse resembling perceptions is not the only prior principle of the imagination which Hume employs in the discussion. We saw when discussing his account of belief that while the association of ideas makes reasoning possible, it can also lead to error. For instance he thinks that readers will reject his denial that necessity lies in the objects. Why? Because we habitually conjoin the internal impression of expectation and the external impression of the appearance of the objects.

'Nor is this all. We not only turn our thought from one to the other upon account of their relation, but likewise endeavour to give them a new relation, viz. that of a conjunction in place, that we may render the transition more easy and more natural' [T237; cf T167; cf T469].

And, of course, the place where necessity is supposed to 'lie' is between the cause and the effect. We are not conscious in our everyday life of this act of the mind:

'Tis natural for men, in their common and careless way of thinking, to imagine they perceive a connexion betwixt such objects as they have constantly found united together' [T223].

Nevertheless, it is in this way that 'fictions' are created. Later, more examples of these fictions will be discussed; for instance, the idea that there are 'occult qualities'. Such notions are contrary to reason; they are the work of the imagination.

Who believes this false doctrine about body? The unphilosophical part of mankind, that is, all of us at one time or another [T205]. There is, however, another theory, a theory which he denominates a 'palliative remedy' - the doctrine of the simultaneous existence of perceptions and objects. This though, is worse.

Hume says of the theory of double existence, or the 'philosophical system', that it is

'the monstrous offspring of two principles, which are contrary to each other, which are both at once embrac'd by the mind, and which are unable mutually to destroy each other' [T215].

What are the two principles? The first is the vulgar system, the impetus to which has already been discussed. The second is

the thought that resembling perceptions have no more a continued than an independent existence. If the former is a natural error, due to the effect that resemblance has upon us; the latter opinion is available after only a 'little reflection' [T214; cf E II 152].

All sects bar the sceptics, hold to this system. But it is absurd. As regards reason, the idea that we can draw a conclusion about the cause of our perceptions is perfectly hopeless. For all that is ever present to the mind are perceptions - never body [T67-8; cf Chapter I, section 1]. So we never have any experience of a conjunction between these two categories. And as regards the imagination: why should the imagination proceed to a belief in 'another existence' merely because it is faced with resembling perceptions? [T213].

Now what Hume has been doing in this section is 'reviewing' 'systems' about external existence in the hope that these systems will reveal further truths about the nature of the mind. This can be put in another way: he has been examining the creation of opinion about the external world with the idea of developing further his science of the imagination. In section 1 of Chapter I, it was mentioned that Hume examines the creations of poets with the same aim. There is of course a major difference. Studying poetry revealed the influence of the association of ideas within the imagination: that there are no winged horses is a premise of the study. Studying the causes of our belief in the external world likewise reveals principles of the imagination. But then we reflect that these are trivial principles, and that the belief in the external world is possible only because we falsely believe that objects and perceptions are one and the same thing. Hume, then, began in a cool scientific fashion; he ends by thinking that the imagination is inadequate to the task. And if the imagination

is inadequate, and reason is inadequate, then what reason do we have to believe in body? Science leads to scepticism.

'What then can we look for from this confusion of groundless and extraordinary opinions but error and falshood? And how can we justify to ourselves any belief we repose in them?' [T218].

So after uncovering what he sees as contradictory principles of the imagination, though he does not pretend to rid himself of a belief in the external world, he reports that he is at least 'inclin'd to repose no faith at all in my senses, or rather imagination' [T217]. And this is an expression of a scepticism that only 'carelessness and inattention' can remedy [T218]. It is not only the sciences that are founded on the imagination; paradoxically, as Manfred Kuehn has suggested, so is scepticism [Kuehn p.40]. In section 5 I will discuss further this issue of the relation between Hume's scepticism and his explanatory ambitions.

## section 4

### still more errors

In the previous section we saw the tangled webs we weave - we saw more, that is, of how men are led into error, on account of the way the imagination works. Such error occurs when philosophers attempt to present man as a rational creature in the traditional sense, distinguished from the animals through his reason. In this section I want to discuss further Hume's charting of this picture.

We can start with his explanation of particular concepts of 'antient philosophy' by noting his appeal to a projective quality of the imagination. In Chapter VI we will see that the same propensity enters into his explanation of the development of religion. This latter point is not merely still more evidence of the central role that Hume accords to this propensity. For we shall see that Hume believes that religion plays a powerful role in strengthening the hold that the false conception of rational man has upon us.

Hume begins 'Of the antient philosophy' by making it clear that he is not interested in arguing that 'substances and substantial forms, and accidents, and occult qualities' are fictions: he can introduce them as such [T219]. Rather, he is interested in showing that however 'unreasonable and capricious' such fictions are, they have 'a very intimate connexion with the principles of human nature' [T220]. More precisely, they have a connection with the principles of the imagination.

It is important to note that the fiction of, say, substance, however unnecessary in itself, arises from necessary principles of the imagination. This is why it is at once

'capricious' and yet at the same time intimately linked with the principles of human nature. What happens is this. When we perceive 'several distinct successive qualities of objects' we perceive no more of a change than if we had 'contemplated the same unchangeable object' [T220]. The interrupted progress of thought

'readily deceives the mind, and makes us ascribe an identity to the changeable succession of connected qualities' [ibid].

When a philosopher considers the issue, a contradiction becomes apparent. If the object is examined at two distinct periods, the hitherto insensible variations become sensible 'and seem entirely to destroy the identity' [ibid]. Thus there is a 'kind of contrariety' according to point of view from which we survey the object. In order to reconcile the contradiction,

'the imagination is apt to feign something unknown and invisible, which it supposes to continue the same under all these variations; and this unintelligible something it calls a substance, or original and first matter' [ibid].

Here, then, is a case of a creation of a fiction through our thinking that the impression of identity has its origin, or correlate, in the object.

Note that the explanation of the projective disposition begins with an account of the resemblances: an ascription of identity is possible because the mind does not discriminate between successive points of time. It is only when we begin to inquire that we realise how 'thought...readily deceives the mind' [ibid]. But such discrimination provokes a contradiction: and this seems to be solved with the feigning of an unintelligible something called substance.

Similarly, as we saw in the previous chapter, Hume explains the prejudice against his doctrine of causation through the inability to discriminate between the 'internal' impression of expectation and the 'external' impression of the objects themselves. The consequence is that we are led in our reflections to 'imagine a conjunction, even in place, betwixt the objects and the qualities' [T167].

Another idea that Hume seeks to explain in 'Of the antient philosophy', is that of 'occult qualities'. When the vulgar reflect on objects they have always found together, they naturally 'imagine they perceive a connexion' between them [T223]. Philosophers, however, proceed to 'search for the qualities, in which this agency consists' [ibid]. They are fated not to find the impression of necessity in the objects - but this contradiction they seem to resolve through the 'invention of the words faculty and occult quality' [T224]. Once again a contradiction hidden by a fiction of the vulgar, is brought out and seemingly resolved by another fiction. And so the projective propensity explains the errors of the vulgar as well as those of philosophers.

Hume's systematic employment of a few principles of the imagination is also found in his discussion of the 'Peripatetics'' error in believing that nature abounds with 'sympathies, antipathies, and horrors of a vacuum' [T224]. Generally, such errors are a consequence of being 'guided by every trivial propensity of the imagination' [ibid]. Particularly, Hume speaks of

'a very remarkable inclination in human nature, to bestow on external objects the same emotions, which it observes in itself' [T224].

So here is another instance of the disposition to project. But this time instead of our postulating a quality in the world as

a consequence of our feelings - as with causation - man sometimes goes so far as to confuse persons with objects and give to objects attitudes. Such an absurdity, he says, is indeed 'suppress'd by a little reflection' - it only takes place 'in children, poets and the antient philosophers' [ibid]. This particular propensity can be suppressed. But the drive to find an ultimate cause is so powerful that there is a 'prodigious diversity' of proffered accounts [T158]. The world seems to Hume inhabited by a variety of ghosts of postulated entities and properties.

Throughout the present work I have been trying to show how Hume thinks that he can show how men construct a false conception of themselves. The fiction of rational man, it appears, is constructed out of various other fictions, such as the idea that we have the 'capacity' to know 'powers'. Another component is found in the claim 'of some philosophers' that we are intimately conscious of what we call our SELF' [T251]:

'From this I knew I was a substance whose whole essence or nature is simply to think, and which does not require any place, or depend on any material thing, in order to exist. Accordingly, this 'I' - that is, the soul by which I am what I am - is entirely distinct from the body, and would not fail to be whatever it is, even if the body did not exist' [Descartes (2) p.127].

Hume thinks quite otherwise. Once again he sees the confident assertions of philosophers about 'selves' as the consequence of a natural mistake. Why is it a mistake? Though others, he says ironically, may 'perceive something simple and continu'd',

'For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I can never catch myself at any time without a perception' [T252].

There is indeed no place for a permanent 'self' in Hume's philosophy of mind; for as he says earlier in the Treatise:

'what we call a mind, is nothing but a heap or collection of different perceptions, united together by certain relations, and suppos'd, tho' falsely, to be endow'd with a perfect simplicity and identity' [T207].

And in 'Of personal identity', he says that mankind are 'nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions' [T252].

What leads men to make the mistake? Why do we have so great a propension to ascribe an identity to these successive perceptions? Generally, it is the same mistake that is made when discussing the identity of vegetables or animal bodies; and indeed the same that we saw above in discussing 'substance': viz., we confuse a succession of related objects, with identity:

'This resemblance is the cause of the confusion and mistake, and makes us substitute the notion of identity, instead of that of related objects' [T254].

We 'run into the notions of a soul, and self, and substance, to disguise the variation' [ibid].

The question of personal identity, then, is unpacked in terms of the imagination. How do we generate the fiction? Given that we cannot 'observe some real bond' between perceptions, the fiction must arise 'because of the union of their ideas in the imagination, when we reflect upon them' [T260].

In the Appendix to the Treatise, Hume withdraws this account. He confesses he is bewildered, and cannot explain how we arrive at a notion of identity [T633-636]. On the above account, what this confession implies is that the principles of the

imagination, which he thought could explain the creation of the traditional picture of rational man, are inadequate to that task.

## section 5

### excessive and moderate scepticism

Hume, I suggested in the introduction to this chapter, arrives at moderate scepticism by way of excessive scepticism. He finds that he cannot doubt as the Pyrrhonians claimed they could. What happens? He continues to philosophise: he is driven by nature to philosophise, and if he can find no reason to philosophise, he can find no reason not to philosophise. What could be more pleasurable than a festival, asks Bayle, with bitter irony, in suggesting that Catholics are ruled by their passions [Bayle (2) p.276 ]. What can be more pleasurable, for some, than philosophy, says Hume, without irony, in seeking to show how he is ruled by his passions. But the sceptical crisis to which his study of the imagination drove him is not indeed without value; though, from now on, that value can be defended only on the basis that that is how it appears to him. For he discovers that the moderate scepticism consequent upon excessive scepticism, and thus consequent to his study of the imagination, is entirely suitable to the narrow capacities of man.

I now want to discuss these matters in greater detail, beginning with the contradiction that Hume seems to have discovered between the senses and reason. I note that, as Manfred Kuehn argues in his paper, 'Hume's Antinomies', this contradiction should 'allow of being explained in terms of a contradiction of the principles of the imagination' [Kuehn p.33].

Philosophy tells us that unless certain ideas were enlivened beyond others, we could not assent to any argument, nor believe in the existence of external objects when absent from the senses. However, this 'scientific' conclusion seems to lead us to scepticism. The operation of the mind that leads us to

believe in the existence of body is founded on the same principle as that which enables us to reason from cause to effect. But if we examine the former conclusion by the rules of experimental reasoning, the rules, that is, pertaining to the latter habit, we find no reason to support it. As he says: 'tho' these two operations be equally natural and necessary in the human mind, yet in some circumstances they are directly contrary' [T266]. One operation of the imagination contradicts the other.

Hume refers us to 'Of the modern philosophy' in order to illustrate his point. If secondary qualities, the great 'discovery' of 'modern philosophy', cannot have an independent existence, then how can primary qualities have such an existence? The idea of motion depends on an idea of a body moving: it must thus depend on extension or solidity; it is a compound idea, and so must at last 'resolve itself' into parts that 'are perfectly simple and indivisible' [T228]. Either these parts are coloured or solid or they are non-entities. Colour is excluded from real existence - so we are left with solidity.

But what idea can we have of solid bodies that is neither that of coloured bodies nor that of extension or motion? It cannot be dependent on these latter ideas, for they are dependent upon it: that would be to reason in a circle. So they must be coloured. This, though, is excluded by modern philosophy. The conclusion is that we have no satisfactory idea of solidity. Hume writes:

'Thus there is a direct and total opposition betwixt our reason and our senses; or more properly speaking, betwixt those conclusions we form from cause and effect, and those that persuade us of the continu'd and independent existence of body. When we reason from cause and effect, we conclude, that neither colour, sound, taste, nor smell have a continu'd and independent existence. When we

exclude these sensible qualities there remains nothing in the universe which has such an existence' [T231].

As well as this argument, there is the argument already discussed in section 4 above drawn from 'Of scepticism with regard to the senses'. Both arguments reappear in the Enquiry where there is not the slightest attempt to weaken the force of the scepticism. The chief difference is that in the later book Hume does not present the problem in terms of the operations of the imagination, and the enlivening of ideas. Instead Hume rests content with speaking of a 'powerful instinct' that makes men suppose that the image of the objects which they have are copies of those objects [E I 151]. But such an opinion is 'soon destroyed by the slightest philosophy, which teaches us, that nothing can ever be present to the mind but an image or perception' [E I 152]. Yet how then can one prove that the perceptions of the mind must be caused by external objects? His summary is blunt: if the opinion of external existence

'rested on natural instinct, [it] is contrary to reason, and if referred to reason, is contrary to natural instinct, and at the same time carries no rational evidence with it, to convince an impartial enquirer' [E I 155].

In neither book, as Kuehn remarks, is a philosophical way to avoid the 'manifest contradiction' even hinted at [Kuehn p.35; T266]. In the Treatise, carelessness and inattention are described as the only remedy [T218]. In the Enquiry he says that

'This is a topic...in which the profounder and more philosophical sceptics will always triumph' [E I 153].

And in the Treatise, he says that 'We have, therefore, no choice left but betwixt a false reason and none at all' [T268]. Naturally, no guidance can be given about this 'choice' - much less a definite answer. Yet in one sense, the 'solution' still

lies in the imagination, though it is not indeed a theoretical solution:

'For my part, I know not what ought to be done in the present case. I can only observe what is commonly done; which is, that this difficulty is seldom or never thought of; and even where it has once been present to the mind, is quickly forgot, and leaves but a small impression behind it' [T268].

They do not have an influence; but we cannot establish that they should not have such an influence. For this would be to appeal to the very principle that seems to undermine all our reasonings.

Thus whilst scepticism may haunt science, it is, in one sense, itself founded on scientific investigations. Indeed, it seems that the colonial aspirations of the theorist of the imagination know no bounds: all conclusions, and now, in a manner, all doubts, seem to return, by one road or another, to the faculty of the imagination.

I now want to discuss another way in which scepticism is founded on science or a study of the imagination.

The causes of the immoderate thought, that moderate scepticism attempts to counter, have their fullest Humean explanation if we take on board certain doctrines in Book II of the Treatise. For instance, I will argue that Hume's thoughts on man's social nature is relevant to understanding his work on scepticism; and what is also relevant are certain general principles of the imagination that can help explain the causes of immoderation, including immoderation in philosophy.

Here, Malebranche's Search After Truth is relevant. For in that work Malebranche discusses the causes of immoderate thought and impediments to the progress of knowledge. I shall

argue that Malebranche was a crucial influence on Hume's understanding of the value of scepticism. Needless to say, however large is Hume's debt to Malebranche as regards psychology, his epistemological conclusions are more than a little different from those of that zealous defender of truth.

The chief point here is that a study of the sources of dogmatism and immoderate thought provides reasons for thinking that a moderate sceptical attitude is both useful and natural. In particular, it can counter two tendencies of man which can wreck, or at least impede, the sciences.

Firstly, we have a great desire for new objects. This, of course, is also the origin of 'true philosophy'. Unless, though, that propensity is moderated through a recognition of our limits, and the self-knowledge that we always need to be aware of those limits, we may be led into dangerous nonsense. Whilst philosophy:

'contents itself with assigning new causes and principles to the phenomena, which appear in the visible world...[superstition]...opens a world of its own, and presents us with scenes, and beings, and objects, which are altogether new' [T271; emphasis mine].

Here it seems likely that Hume was prompted by Malebranche's work on learning and novelty. Malebranche had argued that because man was made for a good that 'contains all other goods within itself' - that is, God - we are never content with the goods we have [Malebranche p.269]. Certainly a curiosity about truth and the good is to be praised, says Malebranche; better that 'than to remain in a state of false satisfaction by being content with the illusions and false goods with which we normally feed ourselves' [ibid p.278]. But what happens is that we become tired of ordinary opinions and quickly confuse novelty with truth. Men, he says,

'attach the ideas of novelty and truth so closely that the one can never be represented to them without the other; and the more novel always appears to them as truer and better than the more ordinary and common' [Malebranche p.283].

The influence of Malebranche's pathology is also discernible in the Enquiry:

'The imagination of man is naturally sublime, delighted with whatever is remote and extraordinary, and running, without control, to the most distant parts of space and time in order to avoid the objects, which custom has rendered too familiar to it' [E I 162].

Now this appeal to the attractions of novelty has also a theoretical foundation in Hume's own work on the imagination. In Part III of Book II he argues that when the

'soul applies itself to the performance of any action, or to the conception of any object, to which it is not accustom'd, there is a certain unpliableness in the faculties' [T422].

This is the source of wonder and surprise, and of all the emotions that arise from novelty. As it enlivens the mind it is agreeable in itself; moreover, the pleasure that it evokes is transferred onto the passion that it attends. This is a consequence of a principle to which I alluded in the Introduction: 'that every emotion which precedes or attends a passion, is easily converted into it' [T423]. I discuss this in the following chapter, and we shall see how it enters into many aspects of the Science of Man. As regards novelty, the consequences of the principle are plain:

'Hence every thing, that is new, is most affecting, and gives us either more pleasure or pain, than what, strictly speaking, naturally belongs to it' [T423].

Men rush to welcome a new theory, a new notion, even a new phrase. It is hardly surprising, then, that they should welcome the new world that superstition reveals.

Here, then, is an instance of how a scientific study of the imagination can provide reasons for thinking that scepticism is useful and natural for the reflective person who wishes to guard against error. For a moderate scepticism may discipline us to withstand such inevitable pressures:

'While we cannot give a satisfactory reason, why we believe, after a thousand experiments, that a stone will fall or fire burn; can we ever satisfy ourselves concerning any determination, which we may form, with regard to the origin of worlds, and the situation of nature, from, and to eternity?' [E I 162].

There is another non-rational factor, or rather set of factors, which can disturb the process of enquiry almost as much as the superstition. This set of factors gives us the second main reason why a moderate scepticism should be seen as useful and natural.

In the model of the imagination that is only fully revealed in Book II of the Treatise, Hume says that 'opposition' can affect a passion in two ways. (And belief, for Hume, is a kind of passion). Where the opposition is perceived as insurmountable, belief can be destroyed. An example of this tendency is found in the Conclusion to Book I:

'All the world conspires to oppose and contradict me; tho' such is my weakness, that I feel all my opinions loosen and fall of themselves, when unsupported by the approbation of others' [T264-5].

Yet where it is perceived that the opposition is not insurmountable, the passion may become more violent. For the

'efforts, which the mind makes to surmount the obstacle, excite the spirits and inliven the passion' [T421].

Moreover, in some dispositions the mind actually seeks opposition,

'and throws itself with alacrity into any scene of thought or action, where its courage meets with matter to nourish and employ it' [T435].

Amongst the learned, the effects of these principles are predictable:

'Disputes are multiplied, as if everything was uncertain; and these disputes are managed with the greatest warmth, as if every thing was certain' [T xiv].

On the one hand, men are 'apt to be dogmatic' and throw themselves precipitately into principles, to which they are inclined' [E I 161]. On the other hand, the opposition which they find increases this dogmatism in accordance with the principle mentioned above: opposition makes the scholars uneasy,

'and they think, that they can never remove themselves far enough from it, by the violence of their affirmations and obstinacy of their belief' [E I 161].

Clearly, this is not a state of affairs that is very helpful to the discovery of truth. Far from these scholars forwarding the reason which they profess to hold so dear, they in fact bring learning into disrepute. The 'rabble without doors' gather that 'all is not well within' [T xiv]. Hume concurred with their judgment. He also thought that because of the arrogance and the dogmatism of these scholars, it was not surprising that there is a 'common prejudice against metaphysical reasonings of all kinds' [ibid].

Moderate scepticism, however, can discipline the scornful scholars:

'could such dogmatical reasoners become sensible of the strange infirmities of human understanding, even in its most perfect state...such a reflection would naturally inspire them with more modesty and reserve, and diminish their fond opinion of themselves, and their prejudice against antagonists' [E I 161].

Moderate scepticism, then, can counteract, firstly, the propensity we have to try and escape the drabness of life through superstitious belief; and, secondly, the propensity to dogmatism that can make learning unproductive and unpleasant.

small world

The fact that Hume enjoys philosophising is an essential part of his attitude to scepticism. For why should he give up the innocent activities he enjoys? What is distinctly unenjoyable, the sceptical crisis, is relieved by his amusements. In a famous sentence, he says that he dines, he plays a game of backgammon, he converses with his friends, and when he returns to his speculations, they seem so 'cold, and strain'd, and ridiculous' that he finds it impossible to continue with them [T269]. Yet though Hume is well known (and well loved) for thinking that, in life, philosophy is not enough, he also thought that, for some, general amusements are not enough. In the dramatic way of the Conclusion to Book I of the Treatise, he explains how once again he feels attracted to study. This time, though, he has learnt his lesson:

'Where I strive against my inclination, I shall have good reason for my resistance; and will no more be led a wandering into such dreary solitudes, and rough passages, as I have hitherto met with' [T270].

This time it is not into the 'subtlties and sophistries' of scepticism into which he will plunge. It is the matter of deciding on the passions, morality, art, and politics. He wants to instruct mankind and make a name for himself in these things: he wants, that is, to continue with the science of man.

From now on, his philosophy will take into account his social and moral nature. Certainly, he will not pretend that excessive scepticism can procure any benefit for his fellows.

'For here is the chief and most confounding objection to excessive scepticism, that no good can ever result from it; while it remains in its full force and vigour' [E I 160; cf T270].

Hume wants to employ his philosophical talents for the good of all. On the one hand, this orientation towards society will save him from falling into the trap of excessive scepticism; on the other hand, he has something to contribute to his society. Such a contribution is partly a moral duty: it is precisely on account of the superstitious bigotry of so many of the learned that superstition has such a hold on many of the unlearned [cf L I 48].

Now moderate scepticism can help.

Firstly, moderate scepticism changes the subject matter of reason, from the 'intangling brambles' of metaphysics, to human life. And only with such a change can scholars expect the conversible world to take an interest in their work.

Secondly, a philosophical attitude that combats the unpleasant dogmatism may thus decrease the impolite behaviour that so often accompanies dogmatism. Who wants a philosopher in their salon who not only hates his opponent's beliefs, but hates his opponents as well? Hume hardly needs to make the connection between these two hatreds, but he does [E I 161; L I 360]. Certainly, boorishness, arrogance and rancour are not going to gain any respect from the conversible world. Moreover, if the dogmatism is moderated, then even

'The illiterate may reflect on the disposition of the learned, who, amidst all the advantages of study and reflection, are commonly still diffident in their determinations' [E I 161].

And even if the philosopher lives 'remote from business',

'the genius of philosophy, if carefully cultivated by several must gradually diffuse itself throughout the whole of society, and bestow a similar correctness on every art or calling' [E I 10].

Thirdly, a moderate scepticism may improve philosophical prose. For their clannish and dogmatic dispositions lead philosophers to believe that nothing is important other than their own subject. The consequence is drawn in the essay 'Of Essay Writing': because philosophy became 'shut up in cells she not only became chimerical in her conclusions', but 'unintelligible in her style and manner of delivery' [G IV 368; cf G I 243]. Her purveyors had no taste for life or manners' and were without that liberty and facility of thought or expression which can only be acquired by conversation [ibid].

Now Hume's desire to point out that inquirers should listen to the arguments of others is a product of his own dialogue with many thinkers; many of whom argued from premises which he held in abhorrence. Perhaps the best sign of his willingness to listen is found in the fact that many of his notions about what it is that tends to hold up advances in knowledge come from a Catholic priest.

I argued in the previous section that Hume's highlighting of the desire for novelty as a cause of error, is foreshadowed in Malebranche's writings. What I will now argue is that Hume's view of dogmatism as the other chief impediment to the advancement of knowledge also owes much to Malebranche.

The general problem for Hume cannot be described as the 'passion of dogmatism'. Rather, certain dispositions lead to, and express, dogmatic attitudes that are wholly inappropriate for the advancement of knowledge. He speaks of the 'pride' of the learned; their 'haughtiness'; their prejudice against antagonists; their lack of modesty; the 'obstinacy of their belief'; their lack of 'diffidence', 'reserve', 'caution' and patience [E I 161-2].

For Malebranche seems to have been the first writer before Hume to attempt to give an extended 'psychological' analysis of

the causes of error. Certainly, in arguing for moderate scepticism, Cicero had explained that men are all too likely to follow the doctrines of their masters. People:

'in the first place are held in close bondage placed upon them before they were able to judge what doctrine was the best, and secondly they form judgments about matters as to which they know nothing at the most incompetent period of their life...[and].... cling as to a rock to whatever theory they are carried to by stress of weather' [Cicero *Academica* II iii].

Nor, Cicero adds, is it just the effect of early learning that leads men to ignore evidence. Men will 'defend tooth and nail the system for which they have come to feel an affection' rather than lay aside 'obstinacy' and seek out the 'most consistent doctrine' [ibid].

Montaigne also attempts to cure man of his dogmatism and his 'passionate sectarianism' [Montaigne (1) p.70]. But he does not attempt to study their causes in a systematic way.

Malebranche, as we shall now see, thought that learning is held back on account of certain dispositions. And though he does not address himself to the question of the opinion of the polite world, he makes little secret of how he despises many of his fellow scholars:

'how can we justify the passion of those who turn their head into a library of dictionaries? They lose track of their duties and affairs for the sake of a few useless words' [Malebranche p.401].

Sometimes he admits to feelings of righteous anger:

'I cannot remain calm at the thought that certain universities...have become cliques that boast of studying and defending the views of certain men' [ibid p.383].

To be more systematic: in order to understand why Malebranche considers that the learned are under particular temptations which lead them into error, I will examine three books in Search After Truth: 'The Imagination', 'The Natural Inclinations', and 'The Passions'. Search After Truth of course, is not only concerned with the errors of the learned, but they - diligent, and not so diligent, travellers in dark woods - go further in their errors than the rest of men [ibid p.137].

In speaking of the 'Imagination', Malebranche describes how scholars can be so taken with another's opinion, that they forget to worry whether that opinion is true. At bottom, the cause of this is self-love:

'They draw their glory from the praises they give to these obscure authors because they thereby persuade others that they understand them perfectly, and this is a source of pride to them' [ibid p.143; cf ibid p.147].

Secondly, a person with a 'strong imagination' may be led to dogmatism, as once he has 'imagined a system with a certain probability', one 'cannot disabuse him of it'. These people

'jealously retain and preserve everything that can serve in any way to confirm the system; and...they can hardly perceive any objections brought against it' [ ibid p.152].

The third cause of ignoring the evidence, that Malebranche offers in Book II, is the effect that those with strong imaginations have on others. He speaks of the power some authors have of 'persuading without arguments' [ibid p.173]. The prize, Hume was to say, is gained by eloquence and not reason' [T xiv].

In Book II, 'The Natural Inclinations', Malebranche extends his examination of the forces behind dogmatism. The first of

the three natural inclinations, that he says we have, is the inclination towards good in general. This appeared in the discussion on novelty in the previous section. The second natural inclination is that of self-love. One chief expression of this is a love of grandeur [ibid p.228]. And it is not only virtue and riches that seem to raise us above others; learning seems to have this effect as well. However, the 'desire to appear learned', writes Malebranche, not only makes men 'more ignorant, but seems to subvert their reason'. In conversation these 'counterfeit scholars' are apt to suddenly 'fly so high that almost everyone loses them from sight, and often they themselves do not know where they are' [ibid p.299]. They have little interest in truth, but only in their opinions:

'they never speak with more ardour and conviction than when they have nothing to say';

and the 'stronger and more judicious' opposing arguments are, 'the more it irritates their aversion and pride' [ibid p.300].

The third 'natural inclination' increases the sorry effects of all the above factors. This inclination is our 'friendship for other men' [ibid p.330]. This inclination is given us by God so that our self-love will not 'weaken too much...[that love]...which we have for things external to us' [ibid]. Most unfortunately, it can have bad effects on learning. If a person who has done us a favour, or has shown some affection for us, or is one we believe to be 'virtuous or of significant station', if such a person 'advances some proposition we immediately allow ourselves to be persuaded without using our reason' [ibid p.334]. Our defender of truth remarks:

'Thus do we make sport with the truth, making it serve our own interests and embracing each other's false opinions' [ibid p.335].

In Book V. 'The Passions', Malebranche offers further considerations on the prejudices and dogmatism of the learned. The passion of wonder, he says, may cause error in others: the facial expression of wonder in the listener encourages the speaker to become quite satisfied with his thesis. The esteem in which he is held causes him to 'assume a dominant and decisive bearing'. Such people 'listen to others only by jeering, they think only in relation to themselves' [ibid p.378].

Thus their self-love, strengthened by the gazes of their admirers, prevents them from impartially examining the evidence for any proposition - so absorbed are they in the fact that they themselves believe it. Malebranche remarks: 'Pride, ignorance, and blindness will always go hand in hand' [ibid].

Now from Hume's point of view, the theological assumptions with which Malebranche describes these knowledge thwarting dispositions is quite out of place. Moreover, the method of appealing to the 'imagination', the 'natural inclinations' and the 'passions', is uneconomic. He agrees that the dogmatist inhabits a small world: but the construction of that world can be explained through the imagination and the passions alone. He agrees that that world wholly consists of those who share his beliefs and the loathsome fools who do not. However, the partiality of the learned; their haughtiness and impatience; their tendency to respond to opposition with immoderate claims (which may well be couched in unintelligible jargon) as well as invective (which will probably not be unintelligible); all such dispositions are to be explained through appealing to certain principles of the imagination that have a far wider application than as merely pertains to the life of learning. Certain of the effects of these principles were mentioned in the previous section - like the effect of opposition on belief. Later we will be able to consider the principles in greater detail.

If his explanation of the problem is completely secular, so is his answer to that problem. Learning, he says, is held back not by man's sinful nature, but by his undisciplined imagination. Indeed, far from it being the case that knowledge can be forwarded through our contemplation of ourselves as fallen creatures who must pray for grace to overcome debilitating faults, the very expression of that thesis reflects our worst tendencies. Instead of God, Hume offers us scepticism. So by the attempt to show how paltry the achievements of reason are, he hopes to introduce 'diffidence', to 'abate the pride', and 'diminish the fond opinion' of themselves that dogmatists have [E I 161]. The propensities to dogmatism stand out far more clearly against the background of doubt and uncertainty, than they do against the background of theology. And when we have this self-knowledge, Hume thinks, we may seek to detach ourselves from unhelpful influences such as the 'authority' of Christian ministers - like Fr. Malebranche.

## section 7

### sceptical principles

In this final section I will discuss two things. Firstly, the relation between the scepticism recommended in the Treatise, and that of the Enquiry. And secondly, how the present interpretation differs from those of other commentators.

So far I have been assuming that the scepticism recommended in both books is essentially the same. But according to Terence Penelhum, Hume underwent a change of mind between these two books. In both books, he says, Hume argued that 'the beliefs of common life and the constructions of divinity are devoid of rational justification' [Penelhum p.260]. But, says Penelhum, Hume disagrees with the Pyrrhonians whom he took to believe that we should try and withhold assent from such beliefs. For not only is it 'psychologically impossible' for us not to assent to the beliefs of common life, but, far from producing unperturbedness, such an attempt results in madness. What we should do, interprets Penelhum, is to 'indulge our propensity to philosophical thought to the minimum' [ibid].

It is in the nature of the recommendation, Penelhum says, that Hume differs in the two books. In the Treatise Hume's only restriction, as regards philosophising, is a restriction of time. The restriction

'amounts to a recommendation to indulge in philosophical speculation only on those occasions where we are minded to do so' [ibid].

And as to the distemper that philosophy can arouse, Penelhum comments:

'Its hazards are to be dealt with by making sure that we

also participate actively in those social pursuits that will distract us from the rarified doubts and wonders that beset us in our studies' [ibid].

Whereas in the Enquiry, says Penelhum, the restriction offered is not one of time, but one of subject matter: we should 'not attempt to get above ourselves by treating of God, freedom, and immortality' [ibid p.261].

Against this I would argue that Hume does restrict the subject matter of the prescribed philosophy in the Treatise. He wishes that 'the founders of systems' could have 'a share of the gross earthy mixture' that characterises the minds of many 'honest gentlemen' in England [T272]. These gentlemen - and here we see his restriction -

'have carried their thoughts very little beyond those objects, which are every day expos'd to their senses' [ibid].

They are 'always employ'd in their domestic affairs, or amusing themselves in common recreations' [ibid]; that is, their thoughts do not go beyond common life. And it is common life that provides the boundary in the Enquiry [cf E I 161]. To be sure, the restriction in the Treatise is not so directly expressed; but it is a restriction, nevertheless.

There are, though, differences between his attitude in the two books. We saw above that in the Treatise Hume arrives at his moderate scepticism after finding that he cannot doubt for long the beliefs of common life, and he cannot give up the practice of philosophising when he feels so inclined. Hume discovers that he likes to philosophise; and he discovers that his attitude to philosophising will never be the same again after his crisis. There is, that is, a path from Pyrrhonism to a more moderate scepticism.

In the Enquiry the emphasis is different: there is no dramatic picture of a man struggling against the forces of nature and then discovering himself to yield. There, the limitations of human thought are described in a cool and detached manner. Of the principles of Pyrrhonism he says:

'as soon as they leave the shade, and by the presence of the real objects, which actuate our passions and sentiments, are put in opposition to the more powerful principles of our nature, they vanish like smoke, and leave the most determined sceptic in the same condition as other mortals' [E I 159].

Nor is there in the Enquiry any description of Hume anxiously searching for reasons to recommend a scepticism that he has found himself holding after a Pyrrhonian crisis. But the upshot is just the same:

'There is, indeed, a more mitigated scepticism or academical philosophy, which may be both durable and useful, and which may, in part, be the result of this Pyrrhonism, or excessive scepticism, when its undistinguished doubts are, in some measure, corrected by common sense and reflection' [E I 161].

But whatever the difference of approach, both books suggest that a moderate scepticism will be consequent to an excessive scepticism.

An interest in such a progression is what the reader of the earlier part of Book I Part IV of the Treatise might well expect. As I suggested earlier in sections 3 and 4 above, Hume evidently valued the way his study of the imagination could explain the evolving of philosophical ideas. The last species of thought examined in such a manner is scepticism. The reason it is last is that scepticism is consequent to the study of the imagination; and though it threatens to undermine the study, the practical response that arises makes possible a continued faith in conclusions about such progressions. Without that

response, there would be no reflection on the path to moderate scepticism; for without that response,

'All discourse, all action would immediately cease; and men remain in a total lethargy, till the necessities of nature, unsatisfied, put an end to their miserable existence' [E I 160].

The possibility of reflection on scepticism is not the only result of the progression. Now, fully convinced of our narrow capacity for understanding, we will be sceptical about our previous as well as present as well as future conclusions. And this involves being sceptical about scepticism itself. Sometimes we should give way to our inclination to be positive:

'Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to' [T 270].

For Hume, if not for us, this includes his writings earlier in the Treatise. Thus in the final paragraph of Book I of the Treatise he says that we should yield to the propensity to be 'positive and certain in particular points, according to the light, in which we survey them in any particular instant' [T273]. We should, that is, be sceptical of our sceptical doubts, and not pretend that we can either deny our inclination to do philosophy or that we can always doubt. Thus Hume discovers in the Treatise, and states in the Enquiry, that nature is too strong for Pyrrhonian principles.

I will now turn to the question of other interpretations. As well as Penelhum, I shall briefly discuss Barry Stroud's and Sir Peter Strawson's accounts.

In Penelhum's version, Hume's scepticism

'is the main thrust of the epistemological part of the philosophical propaedeutic to his psychological account of the sources of our cognitive commitments. Its purpose is

to show us that it is not because we have good epistemological reasons to do so that we make these commitments, since ordinary men do not have such reasons, and philosophers have been unable to invent any' [Penelhum p.255].

This seems to me quite wrong. 'Hume's scepticism' is not a very exact way of speaking; but the scepticism that first arises in 'Of scepticism with regard to the senses' cannot be said to have a 'purpose'. Indeed, that such 'conclusions' have no 'purpose' is, we saw above, the main objection with which others present the sceptic. Far from being a preliminary to higher learning, it is the consequence of his investigation of the principles of the imagination; and it threatens 'to turn into ridicule all our past pains and industry, and to discourage us from future enquiries' [T266]. These latter words of Hume may serve to remind us of his ambitions. It is perhaps only when we put ourselves in his shoes, and consider his ambition to found the sciences on a few simple principles that we can appreciate something of the shock that he discovered in finding that these principles seem contradictory.

Another influential writer on Hume is Barry Stroud. In Hume, Stroud's view of the relation between Hume's scepticism and his 'naturalism', is that the 'powerful negative arguments have an important positive point': the purpose of the sceptical arguments about belief in matters of fact, is to show that 'reason, as traditionally understood, has no role in human life' [Stroud p.14]. If man was the rational creature that he is traditionally supposed to be, then Hume's arguments would show 'that no rational man could ever believe anything' [ibid]. But we do believe, and therefore the role of reason in human life has been radically misunderstood.

Now what seems to me to be completely lacking in this interpretation is, firstly, a recognition of the seriousness with which Hume takes his sceptical views; and secondly, the

recognition that scepticism is a product of Hume's scientific or naturalistic endeavours.

One reason for Stroud's downplaying of Hume's scepticism is the need he perceives to counteract the opinion of Hume as

'the arch sceptic whose primary aim and achievement was to reduce the theories of his empiricist predecessors to the absurdity that was implicitly contained in them all along' [ibid p.1].

Hume's 'theory or vision of man' is much more, says Stroud, than 'the clever negativism of a man at the end of his intellectual rope' [ibid]. This is certainly true: but what seems apparent from the above is that if we attend to the scientific element in his thought - above all as it is expressed in his conclusions about the imagination - we find that we cannot characterize the results in terms of the 'unbounded optimism of the enlightenment' as Stroud does [ibid]. For to repeat what was said above: the threat of excessive scepticism is permanent. It is

'a malady, which can never be radically cur'd, but must return upon us every moment, however we may chace it away, and sometimes may seem entirely free from it' [T218].

In Skepticism and Naturalism: some varieties Strawson argues that 'we might speak of two Hume's: Hume the skeptic and Hume the naturalist' [Strawson (2) p.12]. Thus Strawson considers that when Hume remarks, for example, that 'Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breath', Hume is taking 'refuge from his skepticism' [T183; Strawson (2) p.12]. According to Strawson, 'Hume the naturalist' would have us neglect sceptical arguments 'except, perhaps, in so far as they supply a harmless amusement, a mild diversion to the intellect' [ibid p.13].

This, though, is to miss the fact that after the sceptical crisis, Hume argues that

'if we are philosophers, it ought only to be on sceptical principles' [T270].

His experimental work, Hume now understands, should be carried out on sceptical principles. It is precisely because he is now sceptical that he finds no reason not to follow his inclinations and continue to write the philosophy which he enjoys. This is no refuge from scepticism: it is the only effect scepticism can have on him given his passions. Moreover, the same point applies in common life:

'If we believe, that fire warms, or water refreshes, 'tis only because it costs us too much pains to think otherwise' [ibid].

It also costs him pains, because he happens to be constituted so as to care for others, to think that the desire for novelty, and the temptation of dogmatism, are at once creating misery through superstition, and ruining progress in the sciences. He has arrived at, and recommends, a moderate scepticism.

The idea that there are two Humes seems wrong: one is surely enough. The two Hume idea leads us to miss the point that Hume now sees his 'naturalism', notwithstanding the confidence of other inquirers, in the light of sceptical principles: ultimately, he cannot justify his conclusions. And, furthermore, to miss the point that he now sees his sceptical principles, notwithstanding what other sceptics have claimed, in the light of the fact that he cannot doubt for long and finds himself drawn to philosophising on experimental principles. No 'refuge' is needed because, as has been mentioned, Hume finds himself sceptical about scepticism.

## Chapter III

### The Passions

#### introduction

In this chapter I shall discuss how Hume thinks that the imagination is central to the most economic account of the production of the passions. This does not mean, though, that Book II of the Treatise, 'Of the Passions' and A Dissertation on the Passions are my only concern. For the role he ascribes to the imagination in the production of the passions is best understood in the context of particular issues.

So for example, when I discuss *sympathy in sections 2 and 3*, I consider three matters. Firstly, the more technical side of his discussion. The process that he denominates 'sympathy' occurs when there is a conversion in the imagination of an idea to an affection. Secondly, I make a very brief comparison between the way that Hume grounds his doctrine of sympathy on experimental principles; and the way that Cicero and Shaftesbury place the social nature of man at the centre of their philosophies without adhering to experimental principles. I illustrate the gains that Hume thought an experimental philosophy bring through noting how he believes such principles enable him to refute those such as Mandeville who deny the natural sociability of man.

Thirdly, I argue that the way that the phenomenon of sympathy is presented in a very different way in the Second Enquiry, is a reflection of a general change in outlook, but not a change in principles. I suggest that Hume's conception of the responsibilities of a philosopher - above all in relation to religion - made him attempt to overcome the general distaste for his work that the reading public had shown; and this by leaving out of the Enquiry many of his beliefs; pre-eminently,

his beliefs about the role of the imagination. I consider, in the course of the argument, certain unjustifiable attacks on Hume's personal integrity.

It is well known that Hume wants to reject the picture of man whose actions are governed by reason. But little attention has been given to his attempt to explain variations in actions; variations which under the rejected picture are explained by talk of strong or weak reason. He tackles the problem of variations by means of his account of the interaction between the imagination and the passions. It is here that I most fully discuss what I call the Principle of the Conversion of Passion, which was mentioned in section 5 of the previous chapter. I illustrate it through reference to arguments that Hume employs in fields as diverse as commerce, marriage, and art.

## section 1

### preliminaries and analogies

The relation Hume perceives between the imagination and the passions has been virtually ignored by commentators. For example, in what has long been the standard book on Hume and the passions, Páll Árdal's Passion and Value in Hume's Treatise, the imagination does not warrant so much as an entry in the index. An important exception to this neglect is John Wright's book, The Sceptical Realism of David Hume. Wright makes, I believe, some invaluable points. He suggests that if we want to find what really distinguished Hume's philosophical outlook from his predecessors and contemporaries, we should note what Hume says in the Abstract:

'if any thing can intitle the author to so glorious a name as that of an inventor, 'tis the use he makes of the principle of the association of ideas, which enters into most of his philosophy' [A 661-2].

Hume, Wright points out, goes on to note that it is 'by means of thought only that any thing operates upon our passions' [A 662]. And Wright writes:

'Reason is the slave of the passions; but Hume clearly also believes that the passions are themselves the servant of the imagination' [Wright (1) p.209].

In a moment I want to illustrate the significance of this belief of Hume's through considering his theory of sympathy. It is a phenomenon of considerable importance in Hume's writings. The way in which we 'receive by communication' the 'inclinations and sentiments' of others, Hume says, is the most 'remarkable' quality of human nature [T316]. It is remarkable in itself: we will see how Hume believes that his discussion of sympathy and the imagination confirms his conclusions about

belief. It is also remarkable 'in its consequences' [ibid] : so in Chapter IV we shall see that our propensity to sympathise with others is at the centre of his explanation of morality; and in Chapter V, when we turn to his political writings, we find that it is the indisciplined sympathetic propensities of the imagination that threaten, and always will threaten, to corrupt political judgment. Again, in Chapter VI, where Hume's account of the development of religion is examined, I argue that he places man's cantonising tendency near the heart of that account.

But what has the 'imagination' to do with the passions? The answer is that it controls the relations that lead to a passion. Consider, for instance, his discussion of pride.

The causes of pride, Hume says, can be regarded from two aspects. On one side there are the qualities that operate. These, Hume finds, produce the sensation of pleasure or pain independently of *whether anyone is proud of them. So our beauty gives us pleasure, 'by its very appearance' [T285].* On the other side, there are the subjects where we find the qualities. These, Hume finds, are 'related to self' [T286]. It is the beauty of my person that produces pride in me.

Now together with these *suppositions about the causes of pride*, Hume presents two established properties. Firstly, the object of pride is self; and nor can we ever lose sight of that object when actuated by pride. Secondly, he discovers in the passion of pride its own 'sensation' - pride is a pleasant sensation, and humility a painful sensation.

With the above in hand Hume reports how the 'true system breaks in upon me with an irresistible evidence' [T286]. There is a double relation: on the one hand there is a relation of ideas within the imagination: the cause of the passion is related to the object of the passion. For example, the beauty

of the house I own is related to my self, the object of the passion of pride. On the other hand there is a relation of impressions. The sensation of pleasure that the beauty of the house provokes is related to the sensation of the passion.

It is from this 'double relation of ideas and impressions' that the passion is derived:

'The one idea is easily converted into its cor-relative; and the one impression into that, which resembles and corresponds to it' [T286-287].

Here we see breaking in upon us nothing less than the central role Hume gives to the imagination in the production of the passions.

As with judgment, the notion of a conversion is crucial to his account. One idea is converted into another: and one impression is converted into another. Hume reminds the reader of how such a conversion is supposed to take place within the imagination when he reports how a consideration of 'the nature of relation' convinces him of the correctness of his account [T288]. Here the reference is to a 'natural relation' :

'that quality, by which two ideas are connected together in the imagination, and the one naturally introduces the other' [T13].

Now the imagination controls the passions in a manner analogous to the way that it controls belief. Thus after introducing the doctrine of the double relation of impressions and ideas, Hume suggests that the 'great analogy' between it and his account of judgment is 'no despicable proof of both hypotheses' [T290]. In each case the imagination is at the centre of the process: in judgment there is a present impression and a related idea: the present impression gives vivacity to a related idea. In the production of the passions

we find that there is also a conversion within the imagination. This time, though, there is a double conversion.

Just as Hume finds a 'great analogy' between the production of pride, and judgments in matters of fact; so does he find a great analogy between judgment and sympathy. He was evidently proud that he had reduced seemingly disparate things to the work of one faculty.

The conversion that occurs in the imagination which makes sympathy possible is from an idea of an affection to the affection itself. Hume thinks that what happens is this: 'the idea, or rather impression of ourselves is always intimately present with us' [T317; cf T320; cf T346]. The vivacity of this conception will be transfused into any related idea. Now, in the same way as the laws of association control belief, so they control this conversion. This means that we are more likely to come to have a passion if we have an idea of a passion in a person resembling us; or contiguous to us; or in a relation of cause and effect as when the person is a blood relation. To be sure, we will not always, as it were, 'adopt' the passion we observe. For example, Hume notes that anger in another 'throws a sudden damp' on the observer. Nevertheless, the stronger the relation is, the easier is the transition within the imagination. Later, I will try to show how Hume employs such principles in his essays and in the History of England.

## Section 2

### sympathy and experimental principles

One way which we can appreciate the originality of Hume's work on sympathy is by contrasting it with comparable writings of predecessors who we know he read and valued. What is particularly striking in such comparisons is how he attempts to explain sympathy on experimental principles.

In De Officiis, a work which Hume, speaking metaphorically of course, said that he 'had in his eye' during the writing of Book III, Cicero speaks of the 'brotherhood of the entire human race'; this is created by thought and speech, communication and discussion [ L I 33; De Officiis I xvi 50]. But Cicero also recognises how men are united through affections. So honour (honestum) 'kindles a fellow feeling for those whose character it adorns' [ibid I xvi 55]. Like Hume, Cicero distinguishes between gradations of fellow-feeling. There is the tie of 'our common humanity'; but there is a 'closer alliance between those who belong to the same nation or tribe and speak the same language: still closer is the tie between members of the same state'. Yet 'closer still is the union of kinsmen' [ibid I xvi 53].

Hume was to agree in the gradations, and yet make it clear, (in the Treatise at least), that such affection depends on a process of communication. So in Book II of that work he explains that it is on account of the ease with which we enter into the affections of our relatives that we love them the most [T353]. And in Book III, further gradations are shown:

'An Englishman in Italy is a friend: A European in China; and perhaps a man wou'd belov'd as such, were we to meet him in the moon' [T482].

Another predecessor who sought to outline man's social nature was Shaftesbury. In the 1742-8 editions of 'Essays, Moral, Political and Literary', Hume draws our attention to this in a most direct way. He says in 'Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature' that :

'it has been prov'd beyond Question by several great Moralists of the present Age that the social Passions are by far the most powerful of any, and that even all the other Passions receive from them their chief Force and Influence. Whoever desires to see this Question treated with the greatest force of Argument and Eloquence, may consult my Lord SHAFTESBURY'S Enquiry concerning Virtue' [G I 154n]

And indeed, in response to the writings of Hobbes on the one side, and the Calvinists on the other, Shaftesbury affirmed the social affections as the defining mark of human nature. Yet as we shall see, there is in Shaftesbury no parallel of Hume's attempt to show that affections are controlled by the imagination. So whilst Hume recognises that it was Shaftesbury who first explicitly attempted to found ethics on the 'particular fabric and constitution of the human species' [EII 169-170], from his own point of view, Shaftesbury's method is inadequate.

Shaftesbury says that his philosophy is based on observation, in particular, self-observation, or the 'habit' of turning 'the eye inwards'. He denounces the 'moon-blind wits who allow us to 'know nothing beside what we can prove by strict and formal demonstration' [Shaftesbury (1) I p.286-287]. Against such philosophy, he calls for self-knowledge proceeding from observation: a plain home-spun philosophy, of looking into ourselves, may do us wondrous service' [ibid I p.31;c.f.I p.234]

Shaftesbury conceives of his own philosophy as essentially practical and orientated towards self-understanding. Just as

Hutcheson attempted to fill his Glasgow students with a love of virtue, so did Shaftesbury attempt to inspire his readers. Philosophy is the 'study of happiness' [Shaftesbury (1) II p.150]; and happiness can only be attained if we release the great potential given by our social affections. Shaftesbury has a Stoical conception of philosophy as the art of life. If philosophy is the study of happiness, and man is a creature who is naturally inclined to be happy, it follows, he thinks, that 'every one, in some manner or other, either skilfully or unskilfully' philosophises [ibid]. And he contrasts this outlook with philosophers that have 'dealt in ideas and treated formally of the passions in a way of Natural Philosophy'[Ibid I p.189]. Such philosophers show, he says, no more self-command than others; and less, of course, than those who follow the 'self-conversant practice' that he himself recommends [Ibid I p.190].

For what Shaftesbury is interested in are the ends of man. He abhors that philosophy which neglects those ends to concentrate on man as a 'mechanical' creature. This is brought out in a conceit which begins with a visit to a watchmaker. If the visitor should inquire about the metal from which the watches were made, and inquire about the sound,

'without examining what the real use was of such an instrument, or by what movements its end was best attained, and its perfection acquired; 'tis plain that such an examiner as this would come short of any understanding in the real nature of the instrument' [Ibid I p.190].

So a philosopher who took to the study of the 'effects each passion wrought upon the body; what change of aspect or feature they produced' might be qualified to 'give advice to an anatomist', but not to mankind:

'since according to this survey he considered not the real operation or energy of his subject, nor contemplated the

man as real man, and as a human agent, but as a watch or common machine' [Ibid I p.191].

Shaftesbury, then, bids us to examine our own passions; but scorns any reduction of man to an object of scientific study. The ends that he finds set for man are happiness through virtue.

But for Hume answers are not to be found in self-observation. If I attempt to find, he says, answers to questions in moral philosophy through engineering an experiment, the

'reflection and premeditation would so disturb the operation of my natural principles, as must render it impossible to form any just conclusions from the phenomenon' [T xix].

Instead, a 'cautious observation of human life' is needed: knowledge of ourselves, that is, is gained through observing others [ibid].

Moreover, Hume rejects the teleological thinking that informs Shaftesbury's work. What is the end of man, he asks in a letter to Hutcheson. Is he created for happiness or for virtue; for himself or for his maker? *Such questions, he says, are endless '& quite wide of my purpose'* [L I 33]. They would not have seemed endless to the Christian Hutcheson.

We can see the explanatory force that Hume finds in his account of sympathy if we consider how he thinks that it enables him to overcome the debate between those who consider man as motivated by selfish desires alone, and those, like Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, who consider him as essentially benevolent.

Mandeville had argued that society is not made possible through altruism, but through man's need for survival and comfort. Those who hold that man is naturally virtuous are, in a manner, victims of the politicians who invented the language of virtue in order to better control the passions of the people. Thus he writes in . The Fable of the Bees that politicians made use of flattery in order to distil from man's pride a desire of being considered virtuous. They began to instruct men in the

'Notions of Honour and Shame; representing the one as the worst of all Evils and the other as the highest good to which mortals could aspire' [Mandeville p.29].

Hume believes that a study of morality based on experimental principles will lead us to reject such a thesis as well as those of Hobbes and the Epicureans. Moreover, such an account can firmly ground the existence of altruism in a way that fine rhetoric in defence of virtue cannot.

If we consider how he explains the love between relatives we can see what distinguishes his work from the attacks of various other writers on the selfish theorists.

Earlier it was noted how the association of ideas controls the transition of vivacity in the imagination, and thus the production of the passions. Now the love of a relation is generally stronger than that of an acquaintance, and Hume explains this not by positing a distinct passion but by considering the factors that tend to excite the passion of love.

There is the tie of blood. This 'produces the strongest tie the mind is capable of in the love of parents to their children' and a lesser degree of the same affection for more distant relatives [T352]. The relation here is that of cause

and effect. Other relations, it may be inferred, will also be relevant. Relatives are more likely to be contiguous to a person than others; a family resemblance will also facilitate the production of the passion. These relations make the transition between the idea of, say, laughter in the relative, and the idea of oneself, far easier than in the case of a stranger.

In general, such communication is responsible for the love that Shaftesbury and Hutcheson considered as explained by a natural affection between men. But Hume denies, in the Treatise, the existence of such an affection [T481]. If we prefer the company of men to that of stones and computers, this is because of particular effects of company. The experimental method displays man as an object of a certain sort: a

'rational and thinking Being like ourselves, who communicates to us all the actions of his mind; makes us privy to his inmost sentiments and affections; and lets us see, in the very instant of their production, all the emotions, which are caus'd by any object' [T353].

Such are the effects of company. The consequence is that we come to love those with whom we can readily sympathise in this manner. And such sympathy is facilitated by the relations mentioned. It is also facilitated through 'acquaintance': for custom 'facilitates the entrance, and strengthens the conception of any object' [ibid].

If we place the tendency that the relations have together with the phenomenon of acquaintance, we can see why relatives are objects that will tend to produce the passion of love to a greater degree than other objects:

'For as the company of strangers is agreeable to us for a short time, by invivening our thought; so the company of our relations and acquaintance must be peculiarly

agreeable, because it has this effect to a greater degree, and is of a more durable influence' [T353].

If this is the cause, love is the effect.

So in contrast to those who just affirm the existence of affections, Hume attempts to explain their production by appealing to the faculty of the imagination and particular circumstances. Circumstances, that is, which excite a passion of love [T351]. And as regards those who want to reduce affections to self-love, the message of the Treatise is plain: here is an explanation of affections conducted on experimental principles.

Thus the thesis of Mandeville is 'not consistent with experience' [T578]. Politicians, that is, are not the cause of our sense of morals. If men did not have such sentiments as I have been noting Hume explaining, they 'cou'd never be excited by politicians'; indeed, such words as 'laudable' and 'praiseworthy' 'blameable' and 'odious', Hume remarks, would be no 'more intelligible, than if they were a language perfectly unknown to us' [T579; cf T500].

In the Second Enquiry, the detailed account of sympathy that rests on his conception of the imagination is absent. Why is this so? I will argue that we should not conclude that Hume decided that his reasonings on sympathy and the imagination were wrong,<sup>1</sup> But that he was led to question the propriety of such speculations. As this matter is of a great importance for understanding the relation between Hume's earlier and later work, it seems to deserve a section of its own.

### section 3

#### Hume the moralist

At the end of Book III of the Treatise, Hume remarks that even the most 'cold and unentertaining' speculations about human nature, will, if they are accurate, become 'subservient to practical morality' [T621]. What does he mean? This question cannot be properly answered before we examine his moral theory in full. Nevertheless, we have already seen, in his refutation of Mandeville's thesis, something of how Hume's often very technical work has implications for moral practice. Hume believes that he has discovered principles that have experimental confirmation. Moreover, these principles of the imagination receive additional support from their utility in explaining seemingly quite different phenomena, such as belief and the production of passions. The observations of Shaftesbury, for all their worth, do not have the same experimental foundation.

But as I remarked above, there is a difference between the Treatise and the Second Enquiry with regard to the doctrine of sympathy. What that difference is, and why there is a difference is the subject of the present section. We shall see that these questions cannot be answered in isolation.

Ernest Mossner's article 'Philosophy and Biography' contains a number of more or less shameful remarks from James Boswell, John Stuart Mill, J.H.Randall and V.Kruse. Boswell said of Hume that 'vanity, as a fascinating mistress, seized upon his fondness, and never quitted her dominion'; Mill thought Hume 'enslaved by a taste for literature...which without regard for truth or utility, seeks only to excite emotion' [Mossner (2) p.8]. V.Kruse argues that this love of fame led Hume to suppress 'his most radical ideas in order to be better appreciated by the public' [ibid p.9]. J.H.Randall

says that his real motives included not only a love of literary fame, but also a desire for money [ibid].

One is led to gasp at the extent of the biographical knowledge that the latter two writers seemingly possess. Kruse refers us to the characters of Kant and Spinoza as helpful contrasts. Randall contrasts Hume with Spinoza and Berkeley. But whatever their knowledge of these other philosophers, there is little evidence that their conclusions about Hume are grounded on the firmest of evidence.

The case for the prosecution in the question of 'unworthy motives' includes the claim that the Enquiries represent an attempt to seduce the public into admiration. In defence of Hume, it will be argued that his overriding, in the Second Enquiry, of his earlier views on sympathy and the imagination is quite consistent with his views on the role of the philosopher presented in the Treatise.

Moreover, the presentation of the social affections in the Enquiry, is, whilst different, still consistent with the content of the Treatise. In the previous section we saw how Hume claims an experimental foundation for his theory of sympathy. In the Enquiry too, he suggests that we should 'reject every system of ethics...which is not founded on fact and observation' [E II 175]. The great difference, though, is that in the Enquiry Hume decides to present more accessible general principles than are found in the Treatise. This, I shall argue, is partly to facilitate the expression of the more robust moral instruction found in the Enquiry. The slightest acquaintance with the two books is enough for one to appreciate that though the repudiation of Christian ethics is implicit in the Treatise, there is nothing comparable to the revolutionary tone of the later book.

This can be seen if we place together the final pages of the two books. In the earlier one Hume brings out what has been implicit throughout: that one's 'inward satisfaction' entirely depends on one's observance of the 'social virtues'; 'and that a mind will never be able to bear its own survey, that has been wanting in its part to mankind and society' [T620]. But he quickly pulls himself up from 'such reflexions', insisting that though the 'anatomist' of human nature is fitted to give advice to the 'painter', he ought never to emulate him [ibid]. 'Such reflexions require a work a-part, very different from the genius of the present' [ibid]. In other words, the task of the student of human nature must not be confused with that of the moralist and preacher - though the advice that the former can give means that 'however cold and unentertaining' it may be, such philosophy becomes 'subservient to practical morality' [T621].

Hume seems to have been fond of the anatomist and painter analogy. He uses it in a letter to Hutcheson in 1739 when responding to Hutcheson's remarks on a draft of Book III. What affected Hume the most, he says, is Hutcheson's observing 'that there wants a certain warmth in the Cause of Virtue, which, you think, all good Men wou'd relish, & cou'd not displease amidst abstract Enquirys' [L I 33]. Hume suggests that an 'Anatomist...can give very good Advice to a Painter', but just as the former cannot make the figure graceful, nor can the 'Metaphysician and the Moralist' be 'united in the same work' [ibid]. A 'warm Sentiment of Morals' would be 'esteem'd contrary to good Taste'. Nevertheless, he hopes to make a 'new Tryal' to see if it be 'possible to make the Moralist and Metaphysician agree a little better' [ibid].

It seems probable that this 'new Tryal' resulted at least in the addition of the passage from the closing pages of the Treatise that we have just seen; Hume uses the conceit, that is, as if Hutcheson was unfamiliar with it. Nevertheless, this

effect another 'new Tryal', we can see that Hume's practical stance is there far more clearly delineated. It is the practical orientation of his work, I shall argue, that should lead us to reject, with vehemence, the smug moralising of some of his critics.

Hutcheson's desire to see more 'Warmth in the Cause of Virtue' is in keeping with what we know of his character and work. Just as his great teacher Shaftesbury would throughout his writings eloquently praise the virtuous life, so would Hutcheson attempt to inspire his students at Glasgow. His biographer W.R.Scott writes:

'He did not confine himself to the mere teaching of Philosophy, but aimed at making his students moral men, in other words his work included more of the art than the Science of Ethics' [Scott p.64].

Yet however much Hutcheson was a friend of the Moderates, and however tried he was by the Glasgow Presbytery, his own ethics were far removed from Hume's attempt at secularization. In 1745 Hutcheson opposed Hume's candidature for the chair of Ethics and Pneumatical Philosophy at Edinburgh [Mossner (1) p.157]. Perhaps this episode was one reason for Hume's being less prudent in the Second Enquiry; certainly, by 1752 he had given up the hope of finding a University job. For in the Second Enquiry the secular character of Hume's thought is far more pronounced than in the Treatise. Here Hume is warm in the cause of virtue; but he is not really interested in panegyrics, anymore than in the Treatise. What is most significant though is that he is definitely not warm in the cause of Christian virtue.

When one considers, he says near the end of that work, the obviousness of the classification of virtue that he has given, it seems a 'reasonable presumption', if such a simple theory strikes us as novel, that 'systems and hypotheses have

perverted our natural understanding' [E II 268-269]. Any doubt that he is speaking of Christianity is removed a few pages later. His speculative conclusions, he notes, have practical implications: what could be more advantageous to society than the 'philosophical truths' he delivers [ibid 279] ? A philosophy that represents 'virtue in all her genuine and most engaging charms, and make her approach her with ease, familiarity, and affection ? [ibid]'. And the enemy is plainly seen:

'The dismal dress falls off, with which many divines, and some philosophers, have covered her; and nothing appears but gentleness, humanity, beneficence, affability...She talks not of useless austerities and rigours, suffering and self-denial...And if any austere pretenders approach her, enemies to joy and pleasure, she either rejects them as hypocrites and deceivers; or, if she admit them in her train, they are ranked, however, among the least favoured of her votaries' [E II 279-280].

Thus the 'enemy' are the 'austere pretenders'. And philosophy can serve the 'Cause of Virtue' not through panegyrics - though rhetoric has its place - but by disabusing men of the false systems of 'virtue' that lead to hypocrisy and misery. As morality, one can add, is not a conclusion of reason, philosophy cannot demonstrate that men ought to be virtuous, but it can show how their natural desires can be better served.

Now if philosophy can serve society by teaching these opinions, then one committed to such a task will want to make them as plain as possible. So special attention must be paid to one's prose style.

Even when writing to Hutcheson before the publication of Book III, Hume was already blaming himself for a want of perspicuity in the manuscript that Hutcheson had seen [L I 32]. And at the end of his life he wrote to his brother: 'Of all the vices of language, the least excusable is the want of

perspicuity': words were instituted by men for conveying their meanings; the employment of words without meaning or with ambiguity is a 'palpable abuse, which departs from the very original purpose and intention of language' [L II 293]. Thus if the intention of a work is, for example, nothing less than a contribution to the intellectual demolition of Christianity, considered here as the great malady of society, then it does not seem an exaggeration to say that there is a moral requirement that the philosopher should write in as plain a style as possible. It is in this context, I suggest, that we should understand Hume's well known life long attempt to cultivate his style, rather, that is, than see it as the polish of an upwardly mobile writer.

As well as the matter of style, there is also the matter of his development of the essay form. This, as Nicholas Phillipson has argued, represents the influence of Addison and Steele [Phillipson (1) p.141]. To Phillipson's remarks, about how the influence of those essays in the Spectator was designed to help men in the pursuit of virtue in an increasingly complex and commercial society, we can add a conclusion from this study of Hume's work on the imagination. This is that Hume's belief in the inevitability of civilised man asking general questions about life has its theoretical foundation in his study of the imagination. As we saw in the previous chapter, when discussing scepticism, he believes it is a defining characteristic of that faculty that we should restlessly search for 'new causes and principles' [T271]. In 'Of Essay Writing', Hume says that we cannot live on 'idle remarks' alone: we would be

stunn'd and worn out with endless chat  
Of Will did this, and Nan did that' [G IV 367].

His remedy is to offer himself as 'a kind of resident or ambassador from the dominions of learning to those of conversation' [ibid 368].

However, in so marking out certain moral implications of Hume's desire to reach as wide an audience as possible, I am not forgetting his remark in My Own Life that a 'love of literary fame' was his 'ruling passion' [M.O.L.239]. This is not, I think, self-condemning.

Hume says about the love of fame that we take pleasure in the praise of those we esteem; and are 'mortify'd' at their disapprobation [T321]. We are, moreover, 'in a great measure, indifferent about the opinions of the rest of mankind' [ibid]. The satisfaction received from the praise of others is due not to vanity, but to the innocent pleasure of having acted well. But how do we distinguish between being pleased with our having done the right thing and vanity? In Hume's case this is even more difficult than usual: in so far as he saw it a moral duty that he should attempt to make people question superstition, praise for him was bound up with the success of the task. However, those who condemn Hume as one who sought fame for the sake of vanity seem assured that they can here make the above distinction between satisfaction with worthy deeds, and vanity. In fact Hume's own words on vanity and virtue seem apposite:

'vanity is so closely allied to virtue, and to love the fame of laudable actions approaches so near the love of laudable actions for their own sake, that these passions are more capable of mixture, than any other kinds of affection; and it is almost impossible to have the latter without some degree of the former' [G I 156;cf E II 266].

Thus in the Treatise Hume calls vanity 'a social passion, and a bond of union among men' [T491]. This indeed is an example of the sort of moral enlightenment that he thought was needed: vanity in moderation is valuable: the Christian denial of its place is artificial and inevitably leads to hypocrisy.

The 'laudable action' is the contribution he attempted to make to the happiness of society through his philosophy. That

this included a systematic attack on many aspects of religion is well known. But it also included the attempt to show that virtue is in the interest of men in this world. It is ironic that Mill who despised many elements of Christian ethics, and who was deeply conscious of the responsibilities of the learned, should be so unpleasant about Hume. For Hume was attempting to fulfil his civic duty partly through achieving an elegance of style that made his work more readable and more effective.

Closely connected with his very evident attempt to improve his prose, is the question of a substantial change Hume made in the Second Enquiry. His doctrine of sympathy, and the model of the imagination that it is based on in the Treatise, are absent from that work. With the above discussion in hand we can better understand that the change does not imply that Hume came to see his earlier work on sympathy as false or confused or incoherent.

This latter point is particularly important for the present work. For later on, attempts will be made to elucidate aspects of Hume's economics, politics, history, and religion through appealing to a theory of the imagination that was never again explicitly stated after the Treatise.

But to return to sympathy and the Second Enquiry: it will be suggested that Hume did not find his thoughts on the imagination quite so attractive under the pressure of writing an accessible secular alternative to Christian ethics; one which tries to show the reader that it is in his interest to be virtuous.

In discussing in the Treatise why sympathy should be seen as the origin of our approbation of the natural and artificial virtues, Hume draws attention to the requirements of his methodology. Having concluded that it is because of sympathy

that certain qualities that tend to the good of society are those of which we naturally approve; and that qualities that tend to the detriment of society are those of which we naturally disapprove; he suggests that we should not look 'for any other cause of approbation or blame'. This is because it is

'an inviolable maxim in philosophy, that where any particular cause is sufficient for an effect, we ought to rest satisfied with it, and ought not to multiply causes without necessity' [T578].

But in the Enquiry the other pressures that we have noted - such as the need for an accessible treatise - seems to have led Hume to rest content with making plain the fact that we are interested in the happiness of others. He is content with less general principles in order to argue his case against an Augustinian vision of man as an irreducibly corrupt being whose natural desires must be kept in check by an austere regimen. Needless to say, Hume's own thesis also contradicts 'the theory, which accounts for every moral sentiment by the principle of self-love' [E II 219]. Yet this is not to say that he rejected his earlier work on sympathy as either false or incoherent. He is determined that man's social affections should not be explained away: this means emphasising how his account is based on experience; and arguing against ambitious theory - even if this might be taken to imply a rejection of his own earlier theorising. This can be seen from the following footnote in the Enquiry:

'It is needless to push our researches so far as to ask, why we have humanity or a fellow-feeling with others. It is sufficient, that this is experienced to be a principle in human nature. We must stop somewhere in our examination of causes' [E II 219-220n].

He continues in a manner that displays both his determination to be rid of systems not founded on fact and observation; and

the possibility that there is more to say than the nature and purpose of the Second Enquiry will allow:

'It is not probable, that these principles can be resolved into principles more simple and universal, whatever attempts may have been made to that purpose. But if it were possible, it belongs not to the present subject; and we may here safely consider these principles as original: happy if we can render all the consequences sufficiently plain and perspicuous' [ E II 220n].

With the Second Enquiry, I am arguing, Hume embarked upon an enterprise of a nature which demanded that his earlier hope of explaining human nature through the imagination had to be set aside. And maybe, under the pressure of his plan for a simple and elegant disquisition, perhaps he did doubt the details (as well as the propriety) of his earlier account. This does not mean that he ever doubted that the feelings work (somehow) in the way he had earlier described.

So the language of the 'chymistry' of impressions and ideas found in the Treatise, and in A Dissertation on the Passions, published after the Second Enquiry, is banished. Yet he is at greater pains to show the limitations of the Second Enquiry, than the limitations of enquiry. So for example, when he is discussing the effects on the passions that the fortune of others have, he remarks:

'I only point out these phenomena, as a subject of speculation to such as are curious with regard to moral enquiries. It is sufficient for the present purpose to observe in general, that power and riches commonly cause respect...' [E II 248n].

Now in later chapters we will see how Hume's doctrine of sympathy informs the explanation he gives of particular events - for example, events discussed in the History of England. Naturally enough there is no theoretical account of sympathy offered in the History. There too such an account would clash with the 'purpose' of the work. But if we consider his earlier

work we can make more sense of the History than otherwise. This is one way of appreciating something of the unity of Hume's work given through his theory of the imagination.

#### section 4

#### Wright; Phillipson; slavery

In this section I want to briefly discuss Hume's understanding of the imagination and the passions in the light of two books. The first is John Wright's The Sceptical Realism of David Hume, which was mentioned in the first chapter, and in section 1 of the present chapter. The discussion here will include remarks on the general relation of the book to the present work. The other book I will discuss is Nicholas Phillipson's Hume. Certain points I make about Phillipson's book lead me to consider a question about the influence of Malebranche on Hume's work.

Wright argues that Hume was working with a Malebranchean model of the imagination; and that Hume thought that there are brain states correlative with mental states [Wright (1) p.189]. Nor, he says, should this be thought surprising. He points out that when contemporaries of Hume opened up their copies of Chambers' Cyclopaedia, a standard scientific reference book of the day, and looked up 'Imagination', they would have read the following:

'A Power or Faculty of the Soul, by which it conceives, and forms Ideas of Things, by means of certain Traces and Impressions that had been before made in the Fibres of the Brain by sensation' [ibid].

This, Wright notes, is followed by a reference to Chambers' source: Book II of Search After Truth. Wright says:

'There is every reason to think that the discussion of impressions and ideas in the opening pages of the Treatise would have been understood in the context of the basic theory laid down by Chambers' [ibid].

Hume, Wright believes, accepted the 'basic outlines' of the Malebranchean conception that Chambers presents; though 'he certainly did attempt to modify its details' [ibid]. Wright writes:

'Hume works within the context of an established psychophysiological theory and attempts to modify it in terms of experience. But like any good theory, it 'interacts' with the data, and provides a perspective in which they are observed' [ibid p.191].

However, Wright says that he can only 'hint at the significance of this interaction and the role it plays in Hume's social and economic doctrines' [ibid]. For Wright's greatest energies are spent examining Hume's epistemology in the light of the psychophysiological writings of Malebranche.

More generally, how does the present work differ? I concentrate on the question of how Hume actually employs his conception of the imagination as a way of solving philosophical problems. To be sure, Wright himself suggests that it is desirable that we should understand the general role of the imagination in Hume's Science of Man. More particularly, he closes his book with some noteworthy remarks on Hume's doctrine of sympathy. He points out that it is very close to Malebranche's doctrine; but it differs in that Hume thought sympathy controlled by the association of ideas in the imagination.

So, then, I present a rather different sort of thesis than that found in Wright's book. On the one hand, I consider those places where the imagination is explicitly at the centre of his work. Thus, for example, in the later discussion of Hume's politics I look at Book III of the Treatise. Secondly, I also consider those places where Hume uses his earlier discoveries about the imagination. So as regards politics, I consider his essays and letters. I believe that this makes it possible to

see clearly certain essential themes in Hume's work. Such as, for example, religion; and his desire to explain the creation and sustaining of error.

Malebranche seems also to be at the centre of the story of Hume's development as told by Nicholas Phillipson in Hume. Phillipson contradicts at a number of points the account of Hume's development which I offer in the present work.

Phillipson says that Hume wanted to divest 'modern philosophy of its theological trappings'; he says that Hume had Malebranche 'in mind' when he did this [Phillipson (2) p.43]. Whatever that last phrase means, for there is no evidence offered about Hume's intentions, the next statement is certainly confused. He says that 'Hume began the Treatise

'by complaining about the constant wranglings of philosophers about the principles of human nature and announcing that he would offer a new account which was based on experimental foundations' [ibid].

Actually, Hume begins the Treatise by complaining about the constant wranglings of philosophers. No mention is made of their arguing about human nature. What he thinks is new is the relation he perceives between a study of human nature and the sciences. Thus he writes of how

'In pretending therefore to explain the principles of human nature, we in effect propose a compleat system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new' [T xvi].

He does not, however, consider his use of the 'experimental method' for the science of man as new: he lists a number of British philosophers, who using this method, 'put the science of man on a new footing' [T xvii; cf A 646].

After this introduction, Phillipson says that Hume

'wanted to discover whether reason really did have the power to regulate the passions as Malebranche had claimed. This distinction seemed to lie at the heart of all Christian theology; if it stood the test of experiment, there would be a secure foundation for Christian theology. If not, Christianity would be exposed as a myth...And myth is what Hume proved [Christianity] to be' [Phillipson (2) p.44]

I want to make two points about this paragraph.

The first is that Hume has certainly not 'proved' Christianity to be a myth. Nor has he 'shown' Christianity to be a myth [ibid p.46]. No argument is presented for this conclusion. And as for Hume's view on the matter, it must be said that however Phillipson's words are understood, such language is foreign to Hume's sceptical outlook. This can be seen, for example, if we consider what Hume has Philo say in the midst of Philo's most confident period of argument. In discussing the 'problem of evil' he says that he is 'sceptic enough to allow, that the bad appearances, notwithstanding all my reasonings, may be compatible with such attributes' as Cleanthes supposes [D 211]. And as for miracles, Hume thinks that he has an argument which only serves to 'silence the most arrogant bigotry and superstition' [E I 110]. So even if we ignore the unHumean language of 'proof' in this instance - a 'proof' for Hume leaves no room for doubt [E I 56] - a Humean point of view would have us reject Phillipson's claims.

The second point concerns Phillipson's suggestion that Hume's well known view that reason is under the dominion of the passions is in direct contrast to Malebranche; and, moreover, was a direct response to him. I will now suggest that far from Malebranche being remarkable for suggesting that reason, in Phillipson's phrase, has the 'power to regulate the passions', Malebranche's study of fallen man is remarkable for arguing the opposite view.

I will discuss this matter in some detail because, here I believe, we make contact with a central element in the origin of Hume's philosophy. If, however, we think, like Phillipson, of Malebranche as a figure who represents a view of man as a being who can regulate his passions, we will wholly misunderstand Malebranche's contribution.

The genealogy, so to speak, of Hume's claim that reason is the slave of the passions has been alluded to in recent years by Peter Jones and Alasdair MacIntyre. In his book Hume's Sentiments, Jones speaks of how Hume was able to stay consistent with Cicero's idea that 'self-realisation' and 'progress' are to be achieved through the 'right use of reason' through 'redefining' the notion of reason 'in his own terms'. And in making this move, Jones says, 'Hume merely followed another of his heroes, Bayle. [Jones p.5]. MacIntyre accepts Jones' history, and states the latter's view about Hume's famous remark in the following way:

'Hume...was almost certainly following Bayle, who in his remarks about Cicero's views in his dictionary article on Ovid...describes Cicero as referring to "l'esclavage de la raison" to the passions in a sentence which became in the 1739 English translation: reason had become "the slave of the passions," a striking anticipation of Hume's own view' [MacIntyre (2) p.289].

But Bayle, like Hume, read Malebranche. (Indeed, the excellent Baylean, Elisabeth Labrousse, refers to Bayle as a 'Malebranchist' [Labrousse p.49]). And not only does Malebranche use the notion, but his thesis about the slavery of reason is presented in the context of his belief that it is through thought that the passions act upon us; and that this happens through the imagination. Unlike Hume, Bayle has no such thesis. It follows, then, that the connection on this issue between Malebranche and Hume is much stronger than it is between Bayle and Hume. Needless to say, I am not attempting to devalue the general importance of Bayle for understanding the

development of Hume's work. (Indeed, in Chapter VI, I argue that Bayle's Miscellaneous Reflections on the Comet is a book which deserves far closer study than it has received by writers on Hume).

However, I shall now briefly discuss what Malebranche's writings on the passions and the imagination reveal. The passions, Malebranche believes, have been given to us by God for our preservation. For example, a man is in trouble: let us say he is being attacked by a Rottweiler. What happens is this:

'since all men...are in communion through their eyes and ears, when someone is in a state of agitation, he necessarily disturbs everyone who sees or hears him, and he naturally makes an impression on their imagination that disturbs them and interests them in his preservation' [Malebranche p.348-9].

The resulting passions in the bystanders, it is to be hoped, will lead them to rescue the wretched man. Thus the cause of the passions is the impression of the pain that occurs within the imagination. However, the rule of the passions is also apparent in how we judge. If, for example, we are particularly disposed to the passion of fear, that passion may fix our attention on the beneficial exercise that the man is undoubtedly having in thus jumping around. Malebranche writes:

'The passions, then, act on the imagination, and the imagination thus corrupted combats reason by continually representing things to it not as they are in themselves, so that the mind might issue a true judgment, but as they are in relation to the present passion, so that the mind might be led into a favourable judgment of it' [ibid p.402-3].

The passions thus rule our judgment. And in letting them so rule, we sin. We should only allow them to rule our body:

'which, to preserve & keep long a life much like that of the Beasts we must suffer ourselves to be ruled by our passions and desires' [Malebranche (Taylor) Vol. II p.11]

But sinners that we are, we allow our judgment to suffer. Thus, for example, I outlined in section 6 of the previous chapter Malebranche's views on how scholars are corrupted by their passions for this or that writer; this or that teacher; this or that University. In general,

'the Passions have such a vast & comprehensive Dominion, that it is impossible to conceive anything in reference to which it may be said that men are exempt from their Empire' [ibid Vol.II p.7].

Both Malebranche and Bayle were Augustinians. It is to the authority of St. Augustine that Malebranche appeals in the following:

'We know that before his sin man was not the slave but the absolute master of his passions and that with his will he could easily arrest the agitation of the spirits causing them' [Malebranche p.339].

What happened says Augustine, is that through God's justice, 'he who had in his pride pleased himself was...handed over to himself',

'But the result of this was not that he was in every way under his own control, but that he was at odds with himself, and lived a life of harsh and miserable slavery' [Augustine p.575; cf p.578].

Thus the axis of flesh versus spirit with a little rotation becomes in the 17th century that of passions versus reason. I will note in a moment Hume's own outlook on the matter, his rejection of the hypothesis of Grace that for Malebranche is the only answer to the dominion of the passions. But I want to mention Calvin, if only for the sake of bringing out how a

person with an 18th century Scottish upbringing would feel at home in the (dark) world of Malebranche.

Like Malebranche, Calvin believed that because Adam sinned, 'man's natural gifts were corrupted by sin, and his supernatural ones withdrawn' [Calvin p.91; Malebranche p.360]. What is left, says Calvin, is a 'residue of intelligence and judgment' which places us above the beasts [Calvin p.92]. But what controls us are our unworthy desires. So though there is some appetite for truth 'in the human mind', this 'fades out before it reaches the goal and then falls away into vanity' [ibid]. The human mind is unfitted to search for the truth [p.93]. This is because we are under a 'bondage': we are 'enslaved' [ibid p.98].

Now both Calvin and Malebranche believed that it was the duty of man to seek self-knowledge. For Calvin, this is simply expressed in terms of our reaching a fuller consciousness of our sinful nature; and our weakness, so that we turn to God for help [ibid p.22]. But for Malebranche, this is not enough. We also ought to study ourselves so that we come to know the ways in which we are commonly led into error. It is not enough, that is, to say with Calvin, that 'the whole man is in himself nothing but lust' [ibid p.91]; and that 'even babies bring their condemnation with them from their mother's womb [ibid p.90]. Malebranche believed that we need to 'make the Mind sensible of its slavery & Dependence on all Sensible things' [Malebranche (Taylor) p.2]. And this means, for example, studying the passions using all the insights that science allows. Certainly, we must never allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the prestige of science; such knowledge alone will never make us happier or wiser [ibid].

So then, Hume's Calvinist training, in conjunction with his interest in the methods of natural science which he gathered in Edinburgh, makes his interest in Malebranche understandable.

But of course it must be emphasised that for Hume there is no merit in postulating a pre-lapsarian state of man with which to contrast passion ruled man. He believed that reason is the slave of the passions; and it ought to be the slave [T415]. Obviously, if it is impossible that it cannot be the slave, then an 'ought' makes no sense. What I think he is expressing by this word here is that the rule of the passions ought to be honestly recognised. For if we think we can listen to the dictates of 'reason' we will be deceiving ourselves. This, needless to say, is his view of the Churches' teaching. It will just be passion in disguise. Malebranche, in contrast, believed that we are ruled by the passions; but that we are not so corrupted that we cannot, for example, understand that reason directs us to be virtuous. Nevertheless, given our corruption, we have been given by God passions so as to lead us, if not to virtue, at least to safety. Thus as we saw with the Rottweiler example above, Malebranche believes that men are not led to act through reason, but through the passions. Charles McCracken explains:

'Reason can show that one being, because more perfect, merits greater love than another; but reason does not thereby move our wills [McCracken p.286].

So Malebranche, I am arguing, showed Hume the possibility of a world where reason is powerless. To be sure, Hume thought that even this way of speaking is misleading. 'Reason' has no 'power' because 'reason' is not the sort of 'principle' which can oppose anything: 'we speak not strictly and philosophically when we talk of the combat of passion and of reason' [T415]. A little more precisely then: Malebranche showed Hume a world ruled by the passions and the imagination. And in effect this is to suggest that our calling Malebranche a 'rationalist' can be dangerous if one ignores the greater part of his writings which also attempt to show how we are ruled by the passions through the imagination. But Phillipson, as I noted above, says

that Malebranche believed that reason has the 'power to regulate our passions' [Phillipson (2) p.43]. I have argued that this is wrong. And I have also suggested that it is primarily to Malebranche, and not to Bayle, as Jones and MacIntyre believe, that we ought to look if we want to understand the origins of Hume's thoughts on reason and the passions. Later I will say more about the relation between the imagination and the passions in Hume's thought.

the principle of the conversion of passion

Hume's inversion of the roles previously accorded to reason and the passions is one of the best known events in the history of philosophy. In contrast, his general account in the Treatise of how the passions interact with the imagination, which, he thinks, can explain variations in action previously given by talk of strong or weak reason, has been almost completely ignored. Yet in this study of the imagination and the passions, Hume arrived at certain principles that were to inform his work for the rest of his life.

The manner in which I shall try to display these principles is as follows: by setting out their foundation in his model of the imagination; and then by illustrating how they are displayed in his later work. Thus, for example, it will be argued that with a clearer grasp of what he says about the imagination and the passions, we can appreciate the internal connection between his thoughts on subjects as different as commerce and divorce.

This will also function as useful preparation for later discussions on his writings about politics and religion. So in Chapters V and VI, Hume's views about, for example, the effects of opposition on the passions will be referred to without a foundational account of the reasoning behind such views being there presented.

One consequence of Hume's rejection of the idea that the passions can be controlled by reason is the following: his thesis that the 'combat of passion and reason' is to be reinterpreted in terms of calm and violent passions with which reason and passions have been 'confounded' [T417]. It is in

this way that we can account for the variations in human life previously thought to be the result of strong or weak reason. Hume's way of describing his radical thesis is similar to that attributed to Berkeley by Saul Kripke: 'Rather than repudiating common sense [he]...asserts that the conflict comes from a philosophical misinterpretation of common language' [Kripke p.65]. So Hume writes:

'What we commonly understand by passion is a violent and sensible emotion of mind, when any good or evil is presented, or any object, which, by the original formation of our faculties, is fitted to excite an appetite. By reason we mean affections of the very same kind with the former; but such as operate more calmly, and cause no disorder in the temper: Which tranquillity leads us into a mistake concerning them, and causes us to regard them as conclusions only of our intellectual faculties' [T437].

But if philosophers have so erred, and reason does not increase or decrease the intensity of the passions, then how are we to explain their variations? This question has been ignored by commentators; yet it is, I believe, of the last importance for understanding the science of man. Hume thinks that the answer lies in the particular temper of the person, and in the situation of the object of the passion [T419].

As regards the first of these factors, he notes that what 'we call strength of mind' does not imply a 'strong' reason: it 'implies the prevalence of the calm passions above the violent' [T418]. Such a person, that is, will be more disposed to act in accordance with certain instincts such as 'benevolence and resentment, the love of life, and kindness to children; or the general appetite to good, and aversion to evil' [T417]. He will be less disposed to be 'ruled' by violent emotions such as resentment 'independent of all considerations of pleasure and advantage' [T418].

Before turning to the matter of the situation of the object, another distinction should be noted. The passions do not influence the will in proportion to their violence. Emotion may attend a 'momentary gust of passion'; but this is no guide to volition [T419]. Indeed, once a passion has become a 'settled principle of action' custom ensures that everything yields to it without 'any sensible agitation' [ibid]. For which reason we must 'distinguish betwixt a calm and a weak passion; betwixt a violent and a strong one' [ibid].

We can now note how the situation of the object bears on the production of the passions. From an observation of the effect of circumstances on people, Hume arrives at principles that predict whether a particular passion will be calm or violent. These are given a theoretical foundation in his model of the imagination. And it is in this way that he explains the transition between calm and violent passions (that may be weak or strong) without having to posit a weak or strong faculty of reason. A simple example of such a circumstance effecting the variation in passions is this:

'The same good, when near, will cause a violent passion, which, when remote, produces only a calm one' [ibid].

The general principle that is at the heart of his theoretical account of the effect of such circumstances can be called The Principle of the Conversion of Passion. This is the principle 'that every emotion which precedes or attends a passion, is easily converted into it' [T423; cf T419; cf T424]. Hume illustrates this principle with the following example:

'When a person is once heartily in love, the little faults and caprice of his mistress, the jealousies and quarrels to which that commerce is so subject...are yet found to give additional force to his prevailing passion' [T420].

This, Hume suggests illustrates the way that one passion may be converted into another. The man's jealousy is 'converted into the predominant passion, and encreases its violence, beyond the pitch it wou'd have arrived at had it met with no opposition' [T421].

He gives a description of the physiological process that he thinks occurs:

'When two passions are already produc'd by their separate causes, and are both present in the mind, they readily mingle and unite'

And what happens is that the

'predominant passion swallows up the inferior, and converts it into itself. The spirits, when once excited, easily receive a change in their direction; and 'tis natural to imagine this change will come from the prevailing affection' [T420].

Now Hume reasons that since indirect passions, such as love and jealousy, can be 'naturally transfus'd into each other', so too can direct passions be changed. This would explain why it is that if the situation of the object causes any other passion, other than desire or aversion, then the desire or aversion will 'acquire new force and violence' [T421]. Thus those calm passions - vulgarly called reason - may be changed so as to become violent passions. This is how we are to view what had previously been thought to be a battle between reason and the passions.

Now one way that an object commonly produces two passions, is when it produces contrary passions. Each passion finds opposition. But as one passion will be stronger, the opposition is represented by the weaker passion. This weaker passion, according to the principle, will be overcome and converted into the stronger passion.

It is worth noting that this effect of increased force to a passion that occurs as a consequence of a passion overpowering another will occur whether the 'opposition' it finds ultimately stems from 'internal motives or external obstacles' [ibid]. In the jealousy example, the former obstacle is illustrated: the anger that the man feels is an obstacle to his passion of love, yet it serves to increase that passion:

'The efforts, which the mind makes to surmount the obstacle, excite the spirits and inliven the passion' [ibid].

In the essay 'Of Polygamy and Divorces', we can see some examples of external obstacles. In the 1742-8 editions of the Essays, he remarks that 'whoever dreams of raptures and extasies beyond the honey-month is a fool'. It seems that what increases the 'amorous passion' to rapture are precisely the obstacles of 'coldness', 'disdain', and, in general, the 'difficulties' of the courting period [G I 238n].

In fact the Principle of the Conversion of Passion informs two of the three main arguments Hume offers against divorce in the essay. To understand the first argument we should note that it is not only opposition that will tend to lead to a conversion of the passion, so will uncertainty:

'The agitation of the thought; the quick turns it makes from one view to another; the variety of passions, which succeed each other, according to the different views: All these produce an agitation in the mind, and transfuse themselves into the predominant passion' [T421].

Now we can see the use Hume makes of this: the marriage certificate had better be cased in iron: 'The least possibility of a separate interest must be the source of endless quarrels and suspicions' [G I 239]. The union, therefore, ought to be 'entire and total' [ibid].

As regards the second argument we should note that it is an implication of his model that despair or security decreases the passions. Such situations deprive the mind of a necessary condition of desire.

'The mind, when left to itself, immediately languishes; and in order to preserve its ardour, must be every moment supported by a new flow of passion' [T421-422].

Uncertainty, by giving different views of objects - views which excite different passions - preserves the ardour of the mind: security diminishes passions because it removes that uncertainty which increases them through the succession and consequent conversion. So where a situation appears inevitable, rebellion ceases [T422].

This picture informs his second argument against divorce. Thus he says that divorce ought to be forbidden 'for the heart of man naturally submits to necessity, and soon loses an inclination, when there appears the impossibility of gratifying it' [G I 238]. If divorce is out of the question, one despairs. And so one will attempt to find what satisfaction one can within the marriage.

In referring to these arguments, my point is not, of course, that such arguments can be reduced to a general principle from the Treatise. It is rather that such arguments display suppositions about motivation that have a theoretical foundation in the Treatise. That which diversifies human life is usually held to be the 'struggle of passion and reason' [T438]. But Hume holds that it is due to the conversion of calm into violent and violent into calm passions.

If romance and marriage are not considered important issues, then what about work and money? An understanding of the Principle of the Conversion of Passion makes it clear that

Hume's writings on this topic have a foundation in his theory of the imagination.

For example, there is his belief that it is wrong to think that economic activity can be explained by man's love of goods alone. With this belief, Hume was directly contradicting both apologists and critics of commercial society who saw avidity as the breath of economic life. Mandeville is an example of the former, with his infamous belief that the happiness of society depended on the greed of men for goods that would set them above their neighbours. And as for the critics of commercial society, Tories, Christian moralists, and writers in the civic humanism tradition sought to show that the desire for gain was inconsistent with virtue. Hume, however, held that it is the desire for industry that leads to avidity and not the other way round. Employment is pleasurable in itself, whatever desirable consequences it may lead to. There is an analogy here with Hume's thoughts on gaming. The pleasure of which, Hume says, does not arise alone from 'interest'; but nor does it arise from the game itself, since 'the same persons have no satisfaction, when they play for nothing' [T452]. Rather, it

'proceeds from both these causes united, tho' separately they have no effect. 'Tis here, as in certain chymical preparations, where the mixture of two clear and transparent liquids produces a third, which is opaque and colour'd' [ibid].

Avidity, then, is explained in the same manner. Human life is more a 'dull pastime' than a 'serious occupation': but nature has deceived us into thinking that it is of 'some importance' [G I 231; 228]. And one way she has accomplished this is by producing out of the desire for the employment of the faculties (that 'foundation of most our passions') and the desire for gain, a strong passion of avidity [G I 325]. There is, that is, a conversion of a passion: from a desire for gain to a passionate avidity.

Far from work being entered into only for its pleasurable consequences, a man engaged in some serious pursuit feels no longer that 'insatiable thirst after pleasure'. Hume continues:

'But if the employment you give him be lucrative, especially if the profit be attached to every particular exertion of industry, he has gain so often in his eye, that he acquires, by degrees, a passion for it, and knows no such pleasure as that of seeing the daily encrease of his fortune' [ibid].

As we saw above, for this conversion to be possible, there must be some opposition to the desire. This is the flip-side of the desire for employment of the faculties: the opposition that is overcome by exertion is nothing other than natural indolence [cf T452; cf D 209]. And as for the specific day to day illustration mentioned above, here one can fill in the details by noting that it is due to the association of ideas and custom that the passion will be even stronger if the person is rewarded with gain every time he exerts himself. Such an observation is borne out, he says, by the observation that we are more likely to find the frugal, not to mention the miserly, within the merchant class [ibid].

The analogy that Hume finds between work and gaming has already been noted. There is also an analogy with the origin of the passion for philosophy that is found in some people.

The 'most pleasant and agreeable' exercise of the mind is the fixing of the attention and the exertion of one's genius: 'What is easy and obvious is never valu'd' [T449]. But the opposition that the mind finds is not enough. There has to be another passion. This is the desire to contribute to society truth that is 'useful and important' [T450]. The passion for their subject that some philosophers show thus proceeds from a conversion of their desire to serve society into the predominant passion of a love of exerting their genius.

There is another way that the Principle of the Conversion of Passion enters into Hume's account of the transition between calm and violent passions;

'nothing', he says, 'has a greater effect both to encrease and diminish our passions, to convert pleasure into pain, and pain into pleasure, than custom and repetition' [T422].

In what follows I attempt to show how his discussion of custom in Book II provides a theoretical foundation for an essential part of his aesthetic theory. Like the examples above, this is intended to serve as a minor illustration of how his science of man is dependent on a theory of the imagination.

As is well known, in the essay 'Of the Standard of Taste' Hume argues that merely because we cannot find aesthetic evaluations on the understanding alone, we should not thereby think that there is an 'impossibility of attaining a standard of taste' [G I 268]. Rules of art may be founded on experience: though 'we must not imagine that, on every occasion, the feelings of men will be conformable to these rules' [ibid 270]. What is needed is a 'perfect serenity of mind, a recollection of thought, a due attention to the object' [ibid 271] - circumstances which it is by no means easy to attain. But as a matter of experience we find that some persons have a greater delicacy than others. And it is clear that nothing tends to improve their talent more than practice.

Practice is improving because it delivers experience to a person and so

'his feeling becomes more exact and nice: He not only perceives the beauties and defects of each part, but marks the distinguishing species of each quality, and assigns it suitable praise or blame' [ibid 275].

Moreover, on the first perusal of any piece

'There is a flutter or hurry of thought which...confounds the genuine sentiment of beauty' [ibid].

Now if we turn to the Treatise we can see that these observations are grounded in a theory independent of aesthetics. And here again we see the employment of the Principle of the Conversion of Passion.

Upon the first performance of any action or the first conception of any object, he says, 'there is a certain unpliableness in the faculties, and a difficulty in the spirit's moving in their new direction' [T422-3]. This difficulty is the 'source of wonder, surprize and all of the emotions, which arise from novelty' [T423]. It is agreeable in itself for it enlivens the mind. Now on account of the Principle discussed above, this new emotion of wonder will increase the force of its attendant passion. Therefore,

'every thing, that is new, is most affecting, and gives us more pleasure or pain, than what, strictly speaking, naturally belongs to it. When it often returns upon us, the novelty wears off; the passions subside; the hurry of the spirits is over; and we survey the objects with greater tranquility' [T423].

On the one hand, then, novelty may increase the pleasure to be gained from an object; on the other hand, it may increase the pain. So here is a general reason for thinking that a critic ought to be experienced: such a critic will be able to take into account the attractions of novelty and not confuse that novelty with the quality of the work itself. Moreover, an experienced critic will have knowledge of the genre of which the work is an example. So however original the work is, not all will be novelty. Here too is a reason for thinking that a critic ought to consider the object more than once.

The third and final way that the 'circumstances and situations' of objects can change, resulting in a change in the nature of the passion, is by the 'exciting of the imagination'. If our ideas of 'good and evil acquire a new vivacity', the passions become 'more violent' and 'keep pace with the imagination in all its variations' [T424]. Hume says that he will not pretend to determine whether this proceeds from the principle mentioned above, 'that any attendant emotion is easily converted into the predominant' [T424]. Instead he gives examples of this influence of the imagination. I have already discussed the phenomenon of sympathy, one of these examples.

## Chapter IV

### Morality

#### section 1

##### preliminaries

One of the burdens of the present work is to explain the connexions between Hume's understanding of religion and his writings on various topics. There are few places where this need seems more urgent than as regards Hume's writings on morality. Indeed, it may well be that our knowledge of Hume's opinions on religion and morality has suffered from his success at arguing that moral philosophy should be set on an entirely secular footing.

The chief topic of the present chapter is Hume's thoughts on why men and women speak of right and wrong. But here and elsewhere I also attempt to reveal other doctrines which I believe, allow us to appreciate the depth of Hume's interest in the relation between morality and religion. So I outlined in the previous chapter Hume's strident secularism. Later, in Chapter VI, I will try to piece together his views on the content of *Christian ethics*. There I will *argue that he* believed that much of the attraction of Christianity can be explained if we consider Christian ethics as inverting natural moral precepts. It is precisely its unattractiveness which makes it so attractive. In that thesis Hume makes use of his principle which explains the effect of opposition on the passions, the principle which I outlined in the final section of the previous chapter.

As with his examination of the 'understanding', Hume begins Book III by claiming that nothing is ever present to the mind

but perceptions; and that perceptions are of two kinds, impressions and ideas. He quickly decides that morality is not 'discern'd' through a comparison of ideas; and nor does it 'consist' in a matter of fact [T457; T468]. Thus if virtue and vice are not discoverable by reason, he says, then it must be by means of some 'impression or sentiment they occasion' which enables us to mark the difference between them [T470].

What are these impressions that mark off virtue and vice? Hume does not waste time: virtue conveys pleasure, and vice conveys pain. So to 'have the sense of virtue, is nothing but to feel a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character' [T471].

Yet however straightforward Hume's alternative to rationalism and common sense thought might seem from these words, there are in fact great difficulties in determining the precise nature of his moral theory. I want to discuss three interpretations.

The first interpretation I discuss is the 'moral realism' offered by David Fate Norton. This has attracted a considerable amount of praise [e.g. MacIntyre (2) p.293]. Norton suggests that Hume should be seen as part of an 'antiseptical moral tradition', whose members include Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. Hume's 'moral realism' Norton says, has been hidden by the 'hyperbole' of the comparison with secondary properties that Hume offers near the end of the first section of Book III [Norton (1) p.43; p.110]. To be sure, Norton's thesis is not indeed that Hume is a moral realist in any Platonic sense. Hume's work in this area, thinks Norton, is primarily directed towards defending the 'Cause of Virtue' at a time of a 'Crise Morale', that, broadly speaking, began around the time of the publication of Hobbes' works. [Norton (1) p.45; p.21]. Hume undertakes, says Norton, the 'joint tasks of refuting moral

scepticism and putting morals on a solid, objective foundation' [ibid p.43].

The second approach I consider is one that focuses on the 'productive', or what M. H. Abrams called a 'projective' quality of the imagination that the association of ideas and impressions makes possible [Abrams p.63]. Interpretations focusing on this theme have been offered by John Mackie, Barry Stroud, and Robert Fogelin [Mackie (1) pp.71-75; cf Mackie (2) p.35; Stroud pp.180-185; Fogelin pp.142-145]. I noted in Chapter I that Hume believes that our way of marking off some constant conjunctions for special consideration has its origins in the association of ideas and impressions within the imagination. It is this fact that at once makes possible our causal reasoning and at the same time leads philosophers to misrepresent the nature of man. We can now proceed to discuss the same pattern as it appears in his analysis of our moral distinctions.<sup>1</sup>

The most explicit statement of the view appears in Appendix I of the Enquiry:

'Thus the distinct boundaries and offices of reason and of taste are easily ascertained. The former conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood: the latter gives the sentiment of beauty and deformity, vice and virtue. The one discovers the objects as they really stand in nature, without addition or diminution: the other has a productive faculty, and gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment, raises in a manner a new creation' [E II 294].

We talk of the vice found in an action, but we are wrong if we think that vice is a property specifiable in the action independent of an observer.

Now the question is: how does this disposition of the imagination enter into the rest of his moral theory? The

outline of the answer to be offered is as follows: when we say that 'wilful murder is vicious', we are not discerning the viciousness of murder in the situation, rather we are expressing our feelings about the action. This is possible because we share our basic sentiments with others. As we share sentiments, the expression can impart information on something we have found. So we add to the richness of the perceptions of others. We stain and gild the world. Others know that if they contemplated the facts of the matter, which do not of course include any non-natural facts, they would suffer the same feelings of pain.

The third interpretation is the naive subjectivist interpretation. This can be found in, for example, Philippa Foot's article, 'Hume on Moral Judgement'. Foot's view is that Hume thinks that when a man says that an action is vicious, he is talking about his own feelings [Foot p.77; cf C.D.Broad pp.85-86]. She quotes from the Treatise:

'...The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You can never find it, till you turn your reflexion into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action. Here is a matter of fact; but 'tis the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not in the object' [T468-9].

I will argue that this interpretation is quite as wrong as the theory itself.

It is the second of these interpretations that I will attempt to develop. I shall also argue that whilst Norton is quite correct to reject the naive subjectivist interpretation mentioned above, there is quite a problem in discerning the difference between Norton's own position on Hume and the most plausible variant of the 'productive' interpretation. It is concluded, however, that there is a real difference between the latter interpretation and that which Norton offers; and that

certain unsatisfactory aspects and implications of Norton's thesis should make us conclude that an eirenic position is not enough.

One reason for thinking that a 'productive', or what is often represented as a 'projective' interpretation, ought to be favoured is that it seems to confirm the view of Hume offered in the previous chapters. Book III of the Treatise begins with a claim that emphasises the continuity Hume finds between morality and the preceding part of his *Science of Man*. He expresses the hope that his treatise on morality 'will corroborate whatever has been said concerning the understanding and the passions' [T455]. In the light of the preceding chapters we might therefore expect Hume to present man as determined by the passions which are themselves guided by the imagination. And this, I will argue, is what we indeed find.

## section 2

### 'moral realism'

I begin with a discussion of Norton's thesis. After this I will criticise the 'naive subjectivist' interpretation. Finally, I will argue that both these interpretations hide a continuity found in Hume's philosophy given through the employment of the faculty of the imagination. The imagination, he says, associates 'internal impressions' with impressions of the senses. This 'productive' idea, I argue, is as central to his moral theory as it is to his analysis of necessity.

Norton believes that, hitherto, Hume's 'moral realism' has been 'hidden' [Norton (1) p.110]. I will now argue that this is confused. What plausibility Norton's picture of Hume has (leaving aside his description of that picture as one of a 'realist') proceeds from a contrast Norton arranges with a picture of Hume as a naive subjectivist (such as given by the interpretation we saw above from Philippa Foot).

When Norton calls Hume a 'moral realist', he emphasises that he does not mean to suggest that Hume believes that 'virtue and vice are qualities of action per se' [ibid p.116n]; that virtue and vice are not '*objects in the ordinary sense* (physical objects), or that they are transcendently existing qualities of some kind' [ibid p.111n]. Instead he presents Hume as believing that values are 'objective correlates of sentiments' [ibid p.111]. There seem to be two aspects of Norton's use of this notion worth noting.

Firstly, Norton means by 'objective correlates' merely the qualities, such as kindness, to be found in the person who acts. He quotes from a letter to Hutcheson:

'Actions are not virtuous nor vicious; but only so far as they are proofs of certain Qualitys or durable principles in the Mind' [L I 34; *ibid* p.113].

And from the Treatise:

'if any action be either virtuous or vicious, 'tis only as a sign of some quality or character' [T575].

Moreover, Norton says, Hume expresses in the Treatise 'precisely the same view' 'at least half a dozen different ways' [Norton (1) p.113].

Now this gloss on 'objective correlates' is not going to provide any sense of realism, as Kenneth Winkler says about Norton on Hutcheson, that would bother any subjectivist (other than, one should in fact add, the naive subjectivist) [Winkler p.180]. Any theorist other than the naive subjectivist will want to insist that when two people disagree about a moral issue, they are speaking about the action or principles involved, rather than their own attitudes. R.M.Hare has said that it is a very common mistake to think that naive subjectivism, or what he calls 'old-fashioned subjectivism', exhausts the varieties of subjectivism [Hare p.76-77]. The consequence of this mistake for Norton's thesis suggests, to borrow a pun, that this is not splitting hairs. In short, it is uncontroversial to report

'that Hume takes virtue and vice to have a reference to items beyond the psychological states of those who utter them. Virtue and vice also refer to the real qualities of agents and their actions' [Norton (1) p.115-116].

For this is implicitly recognised in, for example, Kemp-Smith's non-cognitivist interpretation. To emphasise, as Kemp-Smith does throughout The Philosophy of David Hume, that Hume's moral theory assimilates the moral sense to taste, means that he recognises Hume's view that there must be external causes of

our sentiments. The same point may be made about Mackie's and Stroud's and Fogelin's accounts of what they call Hume's 'projectivism': the point of such accounts is to explain how from an input of beliefs about real events in the world, arise moral attitudes. [Mackie (1) p.74; Stroud (1) p.184; Fogelin p.143].

To ignore the causal element is to destroy the projectivist theory and, a fortiori, the interpretation. Surprisingly, Norton does not discuss either of these interpretations.

Thus in order to attempt to grasp a real alternative to the above projectivist interpretations, we must turn to the second element in Norton's understanding of Hume's 'moral realism'. This is a more ambitious thesis. But it is never made clear; and Norton falls back on the claim that Hume's 'ontology of morals is elusive' [ibid p.116n].

One of Norton's articulations of a 'realist' position comes through a comparison with a biological theory called 'Emergentism'. It is in this way that he seeks to present Hume as thinking that there are irreducible moral qualities which cannot be accounted for by a description of the observer's psychological state and the conditions in which he finds himself [ibid p.116n]. And, using the example of an emergentist theory, Norton unpacks Hume's model as describing how 'moral qualities will arise that are unique and discontinuous in the sense that they are not merely epiphenomena which can be reductively accounted for by these conditions' [ibid].

In effect, then, Norton has Hume saying that the most economic explanation of our moral behaviour must posit a 'distinguishable class of things' that cannot be reduced to natural facts [Norton (2) p.3]. However, when Norton tries to describe the details of this, he becomes unstuck. He admits

that he sees no real hope of pinning Hume down on just how 'natural entities' are transformed into 'moral entities'. Hume, he says,

'did not develop the complex ontological terminology to describe this matter accurately and unambiguously' [Norton (1) p.117n].

Nevertheless, says Norton, 'Hume's language gives some credence' to this idea that he believed in 'moral qualities that are unique and discontinuous' [ibid p.117n; 116n]. He quotes from Hume's essay 'The Sceptic':

'Now, it is evident, that this [moral or aesthetic] sentiment must depend on the particular fabric or structure of the mind, which enables such particular forms to operate in such a particular manner, and produces a sympathy or conformity between the mind and its objects. Vary the structure of the mind or inward organs, the sentiment no longer follows, though the form remains the same' [ibid p.117n].

Hume's interest in this essay is to disabuse those who think that we can discern through the intellectual or 'cogitative' part of our natures moral or aesthetic qualities. Rather, these distinctions depend on the 'sensitive' part of our natures. It is for this reason that he wants to argue that if our constitution was different, we might not, for example, have a notion of cruelty. And even if we did, there might be a different range of actions which would be considered 'cruel'. Thus there is a clear analogy with taste. Hume compares the principles of what he calls 'mental tastes', such as moral principles, with the principles of cooking and perfumery. The only relevant difference here is that human beings vary more in their taste as regards the latter two activities [G I 217]. Other species, that are less social than human beings, might not vary more about food. For example, we can quite easily imagine a Unicorn philosopher writing a parallel essay in an attempt to convince other Unicorns that the 'sweetness' of the

particular sort of grass that unicorns favour is not, in one sense, a quality of the grass; and in the process referring to how his species have a greater unicornity in their likes and dislikes about eating than they have in morals. However, there would be no reason to think that such an essay is in any sense an expression of a 'realist' 'moral ontology': this would be to lose sight of the point of the contrast with matters of fact, and what the comparison with gustatory propensities implies.

So it seems that the sense of 'moral realism' and 'objective correlates' that Norton attributes to Hume is either imaginary, as when he 'alludes' to what is 'elusive' or not 'developed' in Hume's theory; or else it is taken for granted by all those commentators who see Hume as attempting to explain the nature of our moral and aesthetic commitments, not through reason, but through impressions of pain and pleasure.

### section 3

#### objectivity and 'a productive faculty'

I suggested above that what leads Norton to argue in the above manner is his dissatisfaction with the 'naive subjectivism' interpretation. He seems justified in rejecting that interpretation. For Hume wanted to justify thoughts such as these: the correctness of any moral judgment does not depend on either the opinion of the individual or the opinion of society; there is such a thing as moral improvement, and not just a change of attitudes. Foot would have Hume reject such thoughts.

That he held that moral distinctions do not depend on the individual is clear from the following:

'The distinction of moral good and evil is founded on the pleasure or pain, which results from the view of any sentiment or character; and as that pleasure or pain cannot be unknown to the person who feels it, it follows, that there is just so much vice or virtue in any character, as every one places in it, and that 'tis impossible that we can ever be mistaken' [T546-7; emphasis mine].

Thus, for example, it is certain, Hume says, 'that there is a moral obligation to submit to government, because every one thinks so' [ibid].

There is another belief of Hume's which makes impossible any crude subjectivist interpretation. This is his belief in the possibility of moral improvement. It was argued in the previous chapter that a powerful impetus behind Hume's introduction of experimental reasoning into moral subjects was his desire to set out the immorality of much of Christian ethics. But can Hume consistently favour one set of attitudes over another without having recourse to the rejected view that

morality is a characteristic of actions in their own right? Or else the rejected view that it is discernible through reason?

An answer to this will soon become apparent if we consider a crucial element in the story of the genesis of a moral attitude. This is the manner in which we sympathise with a person or those whom his actions affect. It is this process that makes possible the common point of view that allows shared moral sentiments [T591]. (The great problem of Christianity, Hume thinks, is that it subverts this natural habit by introducing considerations extraneous to the question of the happiness of others). Herein lies the importance for Hume of conversation and social life. If virtue is discernible by reason, then social intercourse could hardly be a necessary condition of moral progress. If, however, moral distinctions are arrived at through placing oneself in another's shoes, then it becomes natural to suppose that commerce with others refines our discernment through a greater awareness of points of view. On the one hand we thus gain more experience of human beings, and those things that will give them pleasure and pain [cf G IV 368]; on the other hand, the capacity of detaching ourselves from our own point of view that is necessary for all talk [T603], must inevitably increase our capacity to do this when other people's happiness is at stake [cf chapter VI].

This talk of sensitivity gives us a notion of how we may be fallible. We realise, for example, that in the past, perhaps through the force of the education, or the influence of our peers, we have not taken the interests of women into sufficient consideration. We may have been blind to the experience we have had; and also not have sufficiently searched out enough experience. So we can 'go beyond saying of our moral sensibility that it might change, to saying that it might improve' [Blackburn (2) p.175].

The naive subjectivist cannot justify this element in morality. And nor, a fortiori, can the Hume of the naive subjectivist interpretation. The thought that the latter model is misguided becomes even stronger when we notice how Hume emphasises that the morality of an action depends on facts about the principles of the mind of the agent - not, that is, on any facts about the spectator:

' 'Tis evident, that when we praise any actions, we regard only the motives that produced them, and consider the actions as signs or indications of certain principles in the mind and temper' [T477; cf T575].

This should not, as I have mentioned, make us think that Hume is in any way a 'realist'. For unless there are outward criteria by which to assess an action we could never agree or disagree about approval or disapproval.

I now want to argue that the most illuminating way of thinking of Hume's moral theory is along projectivist lines. And from this point of view, Norton's admission that he finds 'Hume's ontology of morals...elusive' [Norton (1) p.116n] is unsurprising. For he neglects the role Hume attributes to the imagination in associating external objects with internal impressions.

Norton in fact notes that Hume uses a secondary quality analogy. But he does not develop the point. What he says is this: to say that virtue and vice are analogous to secondary qualities, 'is not necessarily to commit oneself to a complete subjectivism regarding these qualities' [ibid p.112n]. Hume's 'position in morals', he continues,

'appears to be analogous to that of the modern philosopher who maintained that our perceptions of secondary qualities have objective correlates, or are in fact affective responses to publicly available aspects of the world' [ibid].

However Norton does not consider the significance of the fact that Hume also uses a comparison with secondary qualities in his account of necessity. This I shall now briefly do.

There are illusions and illusions. In Chapter II, for example, we saw Hume explaining the genesis of the illusion that objects have 'occult qualities'. Such an illusion, or fiction, belongs to philosophers; though, as his explanation makes plain, it has its origin in principles of the imagination that are 'changeable, weak, and irregular' [T225]. Thus however common such principles are, their conclusions ought to be resisted. In the same way, one

'who is tormented he knows not why, with the apprehension of spectres in the dark, may, perhaps, be said to reason, and to reason naturally too: But then it must be in the same sense, that a malady is said to be natural; as arising from natural causes, tho' it be contrary to health, the most agreeable and most natural situation of man' [T225-6].

The question is: are ascriptions of goodness and bravery like the false claims that there are ghosts in the dark?

The most recent answer to this is given by Robert Fogelin in Hume's Skepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature. After arguing for a projectivist interpretation, he writes:

'Hume is fond of attributing endemic false beliefs to the plain man. The plain man believes that colors, tastes, scents, etc., reside in objects, but that is false...We are now told that the same species of falsehood infects all of his moral beliefs' [Fogelin p.144].

Fogelin, then, would give a positive answer to the question. However, it is worth pointing out that Hume never says that all 'moral beliefs' are false; indeed, he does not speak of 'moral beliefs' at all. But then nor does he say that all moral 'pronouncements' are 'false' or 'untrue'.

It is better, I think, to hold fast to the distinction between ordinary moral language, and statements about such language. (This is a comparable distinction to that between ordinary causal language and claims about 'ultimate powers' discussed above in section 7 of Chapter I). What the distinction amounts to is this. On the one hand, all moral agents will tend to associate 'internal' impressions of pleasure with 'external' impressions. Thus it seems to all that such and such an action is different from another, and is to be preferred. On the other hand, there are philosophers, sophisticated and naive, who take it upon themselves to account for this appearance by suggesting that there is a 'real' quality of 'goodness' that is assimilable to matters of fact.

On this reading, the former group, by saying that 'X is good' do not thus show that they are holding false beliefs. For they may not be holding any beliefs at all about the relation of moral attributes to the world; they will probably be quite uninterested in such discussions. And why should we attribute to them a definite (false) view about the logical status of moral attributes? The person who cries out that there is a ghost in his dark room is making a more or less definite claim about what, he fears, can be found in his room. But the person who says that Alexander is brave, because it appears to him that *Alexander should be distinguished from others*, is not committing himself to any theory about the status of that quality. Therefore they cannot be accused of making a mistake.

Philosophers also make moral distinctions. A philosopher may, for example, want to explain a pronouncement that 'X is kind' when he sees X stop in the street and, he thinks, 'pass the time of day' with a lonely old widow. He may want to explain his pronouncement in terms of the Humean theory under consideration. He conjoins, he explains, an internal impression with an external impression; and he says that upon having an impression of X's action with an impression of pleasure, he

expresses his feelings using a language which informs others of what they would feel if they viewed X thus. Accepting this 'productive' theory, no mistake would be made, no false belief held, unless he had misunderstood, perhaps through naivete, the action, as when, for example, he thought X was 'saying a kind word' when really, she was giving a signal to a mugger around the corner.

On this line of argument, the only makers of mistakes would be either those who hold erroneous philosophical theories about why Alexander is brave or why swallowing goldfish alive is cruel, or else those who for one reason or another do not appreciate the pain or pleasure consequent upon certain actions.

Now I have already said that one point of discussing the role of the imagination in the science of Man is that it is the best way of finding the unity within that project. This is apparent when we consider together his account of virtue and vice with his account of necessity.

We saw in Chapter I how Hume explains the idea of necessity through the effect that the constant conjunction of objects has on the mind:

'Necessity...is the effect of this observation, and is nothing but an internal impression of the mind, or a determination to carry our thoughts from one object to another. Without considering it in this view, we can never arrive at the most distant notion of it, or be able to attribute it either to external or internal objects, to spirit or body, to causes or effects' [T165].

Thus we do not get the impression of necessity from our senses; so Hume reasons that it must arise from an 'internal impression' or an 'impression of reflexion'. And the only such impression, in his phrase, 'which has any relation to the present business', is the propensity to pass from an 'object to

the idea of its usual attendant' [ibid]. In this way, then, we are able to reason about 'causes and 'effects'.

Now his account in Book III of the genesis of our ideas of virtue and vice is remarkably similar. Here too he begins by saying that

'nothing is ever present to the mind but its perceptions; and that all the actions of seeing, hearing, judging, loving, hating, and thinking, fall under this denomination' [T456].

And, just as his argument in section vi, Part III of Book I is designed to show that reason fails to explain our inference from cause to effect, so too in the first section of Book III does he attack the claim that moral distinctions are founded in reason. Likewise, nor is there an impression to be found through the senses: if you consider a vicious action, he says, 'in which-ever way you take it, you find only certain passions, motives, volitions and thoughts' [T468]. Thus as he puts it in the Enquiry:

'The approbation or blame which then ensues, cannot be the work of the judgement, but of the heart; and is not a speculative proposition or affirmation, but an active feeling or sentiment [E II 290].

And in the Treatise, he writes of how you can never find the vice

'till you turn your reflexion into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action' [T468-9].

Now this 'internal impression' of disapprobation, always makes its appearance together with the 'external impressions' of the action; without the latter, of course, there would not be the former. In the same way, the 'internal impression' of necessity

always makes its appearance with constant conjunctions. In each case, the imagination conjoins impressions; and so actions, for example, are considered as 'good' or 'bad'; and events are considered as 'necessary'. This, then, is what Hume means by speaking of the tendency of the mind to 'spread itself on external objects' [T167].

I think it is worth noting a similarity that has been brought out in the discussion of Norton's approach and that of the 'projectivist' to Hume's theory of morals. Both contradict the naive subjectivist interpretation and emphasise that some form of objectivity is available. But how, in each case, is this explained? Norton argues for a perception of interdependence between sentiments and values:

'In Hume's opinion, there is some kind of objective moral standard to which our moral judgments can be made to conform more or less closely, but he apparently does not think that this standard has an existence independent of human beings or that our moral judgments are right or wrong only as they correspond to some extrahuman reality' [Norton (1) p.309-310].

But what is meant by that 'made to conform'? This indeed is one problem with Norton's interpretation. That is, he has not shown how Hume thinks that men can arrive at such standards. Norton seems content to find Hume describing the fact that human beings make moral distinctions without noting Hume's account of their genesis in the imagination.

If, however, we have this genetic account in hand, we can see how Hume thinks that human beings can reach 'objective' decisions in the field of morals. Yet how can this be so? How, from the peculiar fact that some internal impressions are united with external impressions, can any degree of agreement be reached? The answer, he thinks, lies in the way that men learn to detach themselves from their own point of view, and to judge instead by means of impersonal standards. This may not be

easy, and I may not always feel the verdict which I pronounce. For example, I may have no personal connection with a victim of an attack which I am told about. However, because of the resemblance of this person with others, I extend to his case the 'concern' that I have for these others [T603]. Without this ability to act upon general rules, we would indeed be at the mercy of capricious tendencies of the imagination.

'The 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. And tho' the heart does not always take part with those general notions, or regulate its love and hatred by them, yet are they sufficient for discourse, and serve all our purposes in company, in the pulpit, on the theatre, and in the schools' [ibid; cf E II 272].

This searching for rules may sound familiar. In the first chapter of the present work, I noted how Hume relies on our ability to act upon general rules in order to explain how we regulate our judgments about causes and effects. Some such account is needed, for Hume wants to say that 'all reasonings are nothing but the effects of custom; and custom has no influence, but by invivening the imagination, and giving us a strong conception of any object' [T149]. If this is the case, then how do we explain those instances where judgment and imagination seem to be contrary? As, for example, when we happen to be hanging in an iron cage out of a very high tower. This difficulty, says Hume,

'we can remove after no other manner, than by supposing the influence of some general rules' [ibid].

We attribute the fear to the imagination; the belief that he will not fall to the judgment. The belief, in fact, is attributable to the influence of general rules through which we regulate our judgment.

So too with morality. Here there is often an 'opposition' between our 'feelings' and our moral commitments. Here too there is a need for general rules to make social life possible. It is impossible, Hume writes, that

'men cou'd ever agree in their sentiments and judgments, unless they chose some common point of view, from which they might survey their object, and which might cause it to appear the same to all of them' [T591].

Such a point of view can only be found, Hume thinks, by considering the 'interest or pleasure' of the character under examination; or that 'of persons, who have a connexion with him':

'such interests and pleasures...are alone admitted in speculation as the standard of virtue and morality. They alone produce that particular feeling or sentiment, on which moral distinctions depend' [ibid].

This, then, is how the 'internal impression' of disapprobation is arrived at; and it is difficult, to see how this account could be presented without placing the imagination at its centre. But if we do this, we can have a far more complete interpretation of Hume's moral theory than the one given by Norton. Norton, that is, believes that Hume's 'moral ontology' is 'elusive' [Norton (1) p.117n]; and so Norton in effect assumes an interdependence of values and sentiments. He thus misses the chance to show how Hume advances a theory which explains, through the use of a few simple principles, how 'the productive faculty...raises in a manner a new creation' [E II 294]. In this way men have moral (and aesthetic) standards which are as objective as they need.

## section 4

### dangers

I want to end by discussing where Hume thought that the danger to morality lies.

Firstly, I will argue that Hume wants to redefine the sources of danger to morality, moving from the philosophical arena, as represented by the selfish theorists, to religion. Integral to his considered view on the philosophies of Hobbes and Mandeville is his attempt to dissociate himself from those who think that their philosophies are dangerous. This in fact is to contradict Norton's thesis that Hume's moral theory developed in response to a moral crisis introduced by Hobbes and Mandeville.

Secondly, Hume wants to assure the reader that a theory, such as his own, that denies, as we have seen, common prejudices about the objectivity of morals, will have no direct effect on practice.

Finally, I argue that the projective propensity of the imagination plays a crucial and thematically unifying role in explaining the genesis of false (and dangerous) views about morality.

We can begin with the first point. Norton presents Hume as responding to a 'Crise Morale': this 'crisis' Norton suggests, was due 'in no small way' to Hobbes, the 'Terror of Malmesbury' [Norton (1) p.13]. Hume's response, he says, is to be seen as attempting to place ethics on an 'objective' foundation and so refute the 'moral scepticism' of Hobbes and Mandeville [ibid p.43]. Hume is a member, he says, of an 'antisceptical tradition' the principal

figures of which are Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, and which included Ralph Cudworth, George Turnbull, and Lord Kames. Shaftesbury, Norton says, found the 'scepticism of Hobbes and Locke' more than ridiculous. He paraphrases:

'They are a threat to the whole fabric of morality; they threaten to undermine moral concern because they deny the objectivity of morals' [ibid p.36].

Hutcheson too, he says, 'finds the egoism of Hobbes a real threat to the well-being of mankind' [ibid p.63].

The adequacy of Norton's analysis of Shaftesbury's and Hutcheson's fears cannot be examined here. What I will now consider is Hume's understanding of the relation between the theories of the 'moral sceptics' and practice.

There are reasons I believe for thinking that Norton has overestimated Hume's anxiety about the claims of the 'moral sceptics'. This is not to say that Norton ignores other issues in determining the shape of Hume's intentions in ethics - he rightly emphasises the problem Hume discerned in religion [ibid p.151; cf ibid p.246-249]. Nevertheless, Norton passes from the anxiety of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson to answer the sceptics, to Hume, without remarking on the great difference between the thoughts of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, and Hume's own beliefs about the effects of 'moral scepticism' on common life.

The question is not whether Hume disagreed with the conclusions of the 'moral sceptics'. The question is: should one present Hume as part of an 'anti-sceptical moral tradition', even with the proviso that he belongs to other traditions as well [Norton (1) p.43]. Relatedly, should we say with Norton that Hume's theory of morals 'developed in response...to...a moral crisis' [ibid p.9]? Norton's thesis, then, is not just that Hume is a de facto member of an 'anti-

sceptical moral tradition', in the same way perhaps, as a suffering Wagnerian might consider her grumbling husband as a de facto member of an anti-Wagnerian tradition. The analogy would instead be with a husband whose aesthetic principles are based on his rejection of Wagner.

But the major problem with this idea is that Hume did not consider the 'moral sceptics' dangerous. We shall see that he goes out of his way to dissociate himself from the common view that the 'selfish theorists' are dangerous.

Evidence that Norton calls on, to present Hume's moral theory as a response to a moral crisis, includes the letter Hume wrote to Hutcheson in 1739, which was briefly discussed in section 3 of the previous chapter. In that letter, Hume comments on Hutcheson's words on a draft of Book III of the Treatise, and he says that it 'affected him' that Hutcheson had noticed little 'Warmth in the Cause of Virtue'. Now, Norton claims that this is a reference to a supposed neglect of the issue of 'moral scepticism'. But if we look carefully at the Treatise, Norton suggests, 'we can see that he did think of himself as defending the cause of virtue'. Moreover,

'we can also see against whom he was defending that cause, and that at least as early as 1738-9 he was beginning to identify [Hobbes' and Mandeville's] views as sceptical' [ibid p.45].

Yet if we place the 'warmth' sentence in a fuller context it appears quite impossible to interpret it in Norton's way. Hume writes of Hutcheson's worry about the want of

'a certain warmth in the Cause of Virtue, which, you think all good men wou'd relish and wou'd not displease amidst abstract Enquirys' [L I 32].

Surely we are not to think that Hume is distinguishing between the philosophy of Hobbes and Mandeville and 'abstract Enquirys'? Furthermore, Norton's understanding of the 'warmth' phrase would make totally mysterious the reason that Hume offers Hutcheson in defence of his approach:

'Any warm Sentiment of Morals I am afraid, wou'd have the Air of Declamation amidst abstract Reasonings, and wou'd be esteem'd contrary to good Taste' [L I 33].

How could he have worried, that the sort of arguments displayed in the Second Enquiry about the selfish theorists, could have an 'air of declamation'? Far from being maidenly outbursts against wicked men, his rejection of their theories is based on observation [E II 214-218; E II 295-302].

In the essay 'Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature', Hume notes how on the one hand there are 'those who represent man as a kind of human demigod'; and on the other hand, there are those who: 'insist upon the blind sides of human nature, and can discover nothing, except vanity' [G I 151]. But Hume is not content with stating these opinions and thereafter assessing them. He also wants to explain why one person should prefer one side of the question to another.

Employing a typical approach, Hume begins the essay by drawing our attention to the way that philosophers, poets and theologians, have divided over the issue. It is not, he notes, always possible to chart the influence of these sects: the learned may act through the force of sympathy without anyone being aware of this; nevertheless, such pressures have a large influence on the content of a philosopher's beliefs:

'though sometimes...[these sects]...come not to an open rupture, they give a different turn to the ways of thinking of those who have taken part on either side' [ibid 150].

Ultimately, however, the divisions on the issue of the dignity of human nature depend on the individual constitution of its members. For against the vulgar view about, say, Mandeville, that he was an evil man with evil intentions, Hume refers us to the psychological causes that lead to the views of the selfish theorists. Thus the 'views' of Mandeville, or such a philosopher, are explained by reference to his predominant passions and the forces of cantonization. So if his

'turn lie towards irony and ridicule, he naturally throws himself into the party of those denigrating man' [ibid].

On the other hand, those who 'possess the talent of rhetoric and declamation' will be more likely to exalt man and represent him as 'a kind of human demigod' [ibid].

What of the influence of these sects? As to the selfish theorists, Hume says that he is 'far from thinking, that all those, who have depreciated our species, have been enemies to virtue' and have acted with any 'bad intention' [ibid]. Indeed a 'delicate sense of morals' may lead to a 'disgust of the world' and so the belittlement of motives [ibid]; one might add that Swift would seem a suitable example here.

Nevertheless, Hume is of the opinion that the sentiments of those 'who are inclined to think favourably of mankind are more advantageous to virtue, than the contrary principles' :

'When a man is prepossessed with a high notion of his rank or character in the creation, he will naturally endeavour to act up to it, and will scorn to do a base or vicious action, which might sink him below that figure which he makes in his own imagination' [ibid].

But such secular philosophies have little effect on practice. Hume thinks that there is a 'dispute of words in the controversy': it is impossible for one to be so 'selfish, or

rather so stupid' as to have no preference for certain people or qualities. One who claims that all benevolence flows from self-love will in fact distinguish between injury and kindness [ibid 154]. In brief, whatever the causes of our sentiments, the practice remains the same. So one, Hume writes in the Enquiry, who imagines that those who profess a philosophy of self-love cannot possibly feel the sentiment of benevolence, will 'find himself, in practice, very much mistaken' . Thus we find, for example, that Hobbes and Locke lived 'irreproachable lives' [E II 296; cf H VI 153].

Yet the case is not the same with other propounders of the view that man is a mean creature. Such as certain religionists: these form 'a new and secret comparison between man and beings of the most perfect wisdom' [G I 153]. This is an element in the way it corrupts the heart of man. Religion is an inconstant force, and sometimes this perfect being is feared, and man enters with gratitude into the austere regimen that the priests prescribe; sometimes, however, this fear is forgotten, and religion functions as a cover for the pursuit of worldly goods. Thus religion makes contact with the passions and interest in the way that speculative views alone cannot. (Though with this added impetus, it is perhaps hardly surprising that secular 'selfish' philosophies such as those of Hobbes and Mandeville appear). Hume's views on the nature of religious belief are the subject of the final chapter; for the moment the argument can be noted that it is against religion, rather than against the 'moral sceptics' that Hume wants to defend the 'Cause of Virtue'.

The second point I consider is the way that Hume attempts to reassure his readers that a belief in the subjective source of our moral sentiments will not of itself have any influence on practice.

Hume did not believe that by itself belief in a subjective theory of morals would lead to the neglect of one's moral duties. If we place the well known comparison of values with secondary qualities as given in the Treatise and 'The Sceptic' in a larger context we can see his interest in this issue. In the former he writes:

'this discovery in morals, like that other in physics, is to be regarded as a considerable advancement of the speculative sciences; tho', like that too, it has little or no influence on practice. Nothing can be more real or concern us more, than our own sentiments of pleasure and uneasiness; and if these be favourable to virtue, and unfavourable to vice, no more can be requisite to the regulation of our conduct and behaviour' [T469].

After presenting the comparison in 'The Sceptic', Hume writes:

'This doctrine, however, takes off no more from the reality of the latter qualities than from that of the former: nor need it give any umbrage either to critics or to moralists. Tho' colours were allowed to be only in the eye, wou'd dyers or painters ever be less regarded or esteem'd?' [G I 219n].

The reason is that we act on account of the impressions we receive. Moral life, in fact, is only interrupted when philosophical theories serve to cover the activities of certain sectional interests.

And this leads me to the third and final point about danger and the gilding imagination. In Chapter II we saw Hume's view that the propensity of man to hypostatize necessity plays an important role in the construction of the false view of man as a creature of reason. This conception of man as distinguished from the animals naturally supports a religious metaphysic, not least through presenting man as uniquely equipped to find the secrets of the universe. Now the same pattern is found in morality. It is

reason that is thought to guide man in his conduct. The error begins with our mistaking calm passions for determinations of reason. Thus speaking of calm passions such as feelings of benevolence, or the aversion to evil, Hume writes:

'When any of these passions are calm, and cause no disorder in the soul, they are very readily taken for the determinations of reason, and are suppos'd to proceed from the same faculty, with that which judges of truth and falshood' [T417].

Because of this it becomes natural to suppose that the viciousness of a murder is something, crudely, that the mind discovers. Either this is on account of our supposedly 'discovering' the viciousness 'in' the act; an illusion due to the way we associate certain acts with viciousness - the way we 'gild' the world; or it is due to the manner in which our faculty of reason is thought to discover eternal relations of morality.

Thus on the one hand Hume attacks such views; on the other hand, he explains, through appealing to the faculty of the imagination, their development. But the attack on this picture of rational man has a theological significance which provides an essential counterpart to his work on miracles, and his attack on natural theology. Prudent in the Treatise, this is well brought out in a letter to Hutcheson written in 1740:

'I wish from my Heart, I could avoid concluding, that since Morality, according to your opinion as well as mine, is determin'd merely by Sentiment, it regards only human nature & human Life...If Morality were determin'd by Reason, that is the same to all rational Beings: But nothing but experience can assure us, that the Sentiments are the same. What experience have we with regard to superior Beings? How can we ascribe to them any Sentiments at all?' [L I 40].

Hutcheson, of course, believed that through revelation we have had experience of superior beings.

Hume believes, I have argued, that the danger to morality lies in religion, and not in any form of scepticism. The former can make contact with the passions of man; the latter cannot. In the final chapter I argue that he believed that not only do the clergy invert the proper relation of reason and the passions in order to create a supernatural sanction for their morality; but the content of Christian morality is arrived at through inverting natural moral precepts. Instead of serving society, Christian precepts serve one section of society, that is, the clergy. However, before then, I will turn to consider the way that Hume founds his science of politics on the imagination. Here too, we will find Hume's interest in religion playing a crucial role. What we are beginning to see, then, are some of the practical as well as the theoretical implications that Hume believes his work on the imagination has.

## Chapter V

### Politics

#### introduction

The family motto of the Homes was 'True to the End'. The motto is peculiarly fitting to Hume's beliefs. To be sure, after the publication of A Dissertation on the Passions, Hume wrote no more of the imagination; but letters, essays, and the volumes of the History, written after this date, all show Hume employing principles of human nature that he had attempted to explain in terms of the imagination in the Treatise. In the final chapter I will examine in detail instances in the History where these conclusions inform Hume's thought. But in the present chapter, which is about how his work on the imagination underpins his political writings, the continuity in his thought is illustrated mostly through reference to letters and essays.

In studying Hume's political writings, Duncan Forbes has taught us to make the distinction between the political amateur observing the scene, and the philosopher whose 'chief business' it is 'to regard the general course of things' [Forbes (1) p.125; G I 288]. In the first two sections of this chapter, the argument supports the idea that the opinions of Hume the amateur on certain political episodes that occurred in the last twelve years of his life, have their intellectual foundation in the Treatise. For what we can see is that in the 1760's and 1770's, Hume began to conclude that the English did not possess the required ability to discern the public interest. Certain episodes, perhaps above all the Wilkes affair, led him to conclude that here was a country rapidly falling back to a barbarous state. He found evidence for this conclusion in the way that the English were allowing themselves to be ruled by the primitive disposition to serve the interests only of their own clan - which in eighteenth century England, often meant

serving the interests of their political party. They did not seem to possess, that is, the civilised training that teaches men to rise above such dispositions and to take an impartial view of matters. Certainly, responding to the interests of friends and fellow Whigs or Tories is natural in one sense of the term. Because the imagination works as it does, we are more affected by the beliefs and desires of those whom we are near, those to whom we are related, and those to whom we resemble. But it is also natural for men in a larger society to be able, in a manner, to detach themselves from such feelings. The savage or barbarian cannot do this; the citizen of the civilised society must. And when he is a member of a society which has a delicately balanced constitution, the matter becomes all the more pressing, and all the more difficult.

In the third section I note that a constant theme in his late letters about the English is that they had neglected the arts for the delights of faction. What is the significance of art for the growth of political wisdom? I suggest that Hume conceived an important part of the training necessary to take complicated political decisions, as consisting in the cultivation of an interest in the arts. To appreciate a work of art, Hume argues, one has to detach oneself from one's own desires and interests, and find the point of view that the work requires. One consequence is that the more practised one is at appreciation, the more one can have 'command of oneself'; and so ignore, in the examination of questions, the irrelevant. Hume is quite explicit about art strengthening our powers of judgment in general: in this section I attempt to draw the political consequences. I argue that he thought that art provides for the many that process of discipline which philosophy provides for the few.

One effect of art, then, can be the dampening of the violent passions that so disturb judgment; and which, given the social nature of political activity, and man's susceptibility

to share the passions of others, disturb political judgment in particular.

In section 4 I turn attention to another genre, the essay. Once again we see Hume's earlier conclusions shaping his thought. Here the subject is his conception of the role of the philosopher in political life, as it is discussed in the 1741/2 essays. An important element in this role is found in Hume's commitment to the virtue of 'moderation'. I argue that here we see Hume employing his theory about how the passions and the imagination interact that was discussed in Chapter III. More specifically, I suggest that his analysis of the causes of immoderate behaviour in party life is founded on certain assumptions that have their foundation in Book II of the Treatise. Above all, I try to bring out the importance of the Principle of the Conversion of Passion.

The final two sections concentrate on Hume's analysis of party or faction.

The finely balanced British Constitution made it imperative, Hume thought, for men to understand that they could best serve those they most cared for by serving the interests of all. It was also necessary to see how men can be misled, perhaps even so far as to endanger the Constitution itself, by their factious behaviour.

So in section 5 the subject is Hume's analysis of how parties evolve reasons which seem to their members to justify riding roughshod over the claims of justice. This analysis provides Hume with an analysis of factious behaviour of far greater subtlety than the common Augustan conclusion that party men are merely hypocrites. For he shows how, approved by members of their own party, men come to believe that their sectional acts are praiseworthy. The party thus benefits by the way that man is adapted for social life.

In section 6, I discuss Hume's analysis of why men gather into political parties. It is argued that his 'scientific' explanation is founded on the way that men associate certain ideas in the imagination. Finally, I turn to his examination of the parties of his day. What he thinks is revealing about the Whigs and the Tories is the way that they have produced philosophical reasons to cover their real motives. These reasons are in fact religious reasons. And it is precisely the religious element in British political life that explains the peculiar and dangerous immoderate behaviour of the parties. The very weakness of religious belief leads men, on the one hand, to desire to bolster it through the support of the like minded; and on the other hand, to hate those whose lack of belief weakens their own belief.

## section 1

### judgment and prejudice

One aim of this chapter is to bring out Hume's view that in a modern polity, man needs a certain sort of civic training if his judgment is not to be perverted through dispositions more suitable to a 'barbarous' age. The thesis will be developed through examining on the one hand, a series of letters written late in his life; and on the other hand, his theoretical writings. So I begin by comparing his comments on the Wilkes affair of 1768-1771 with his comments on two other events: the 'Popish Plot' of 1678, and the Douglas Cause of 1763-9. Later in the chapter I will attempt to show the foundations for his views in his philosophical writings.

But what were these events? In 1764 John Wilkes fled to France after being expelled from the House of Commons for printing an obscene parody of Pope's 'Essay on Man', called 'Essay on Woman'. Wilkes, however, had annoyed the government in the months previous to this scandal. He had infuriated George III through a bitter campaign against the Treaty of Paris that ended the Seven Year War in 1763. In fact he went so far as suggesting in his newspaper, the 'North Briton', that the King should not profane St. Pauls by attending a service of thanksgiving there [Plumb p.106]. His subsequent arrest was followed by a claim of innocence; the successful suing of Halifax for damages done to property during his arrest; and for the first time the cry in the streets of 'Wilkes and Liberty'. From the evidence of the letters all this seems to have disturbed Hume little: we can only find him remarking on Wilkes' apparent conversion to the anti-Scots prejudice of London political life. Wilkes' 'national Reflections', he says in a letter to Andrew Millar, 'are low, vulgar, & ungenerous' [L I 383]. In contrast, four years later, after Wilkes had

returned to London, Hume at times expressed the bitterest sentiments.

What happened? Troubles began when Wilkes stood as a parliamentary candidate for Middlesex and gained massive support. The government, under the Duke of Grafton, prosecuted him for obscene libel and he was jailed for eighteen months. Yet the people re-elected him; and went on re-electing him when the House declared his election illegal. The electors of Middlesex believed that he had been hounded by the government for political purposes; and that the House of Commons was a 'complaisant tool of the royal will' [Plumb p.106]. Over the next few years, Wilkes became the focus of radical opposition [Pocock p.81].

It is true, Hume's anxiety during this period cannot be wholly explained through reference to Wilkes. That such an affair, one fit to be ridiculed when it began [L II 197], should take a hold on the political life of Britain, was an indication, Hume seems to have believed, of a deep cultural and political malaise. The country seemed by the autumn of 1769 to be divided. Indeed, writing to Strahan in October 1769, Hume went so far as to wonder whether the discontent on the streets would infect the army [L II 210]. On the one side there were the Wilkites and the mob shouting for liberty - without, says Hume, knowing what liberty they want: they are

'without any Grievance, I do not only say, real, but even imaginary; and without any of them being able to tell one Circumstance of Government which they wish to have corrected: They roar Liberty, tho' they have apparently more Liberty than any People in the World; a great deal more than they deserve' [L II 180].

On the other side, there was the King and Lord Grafton. It is difficult to think that Hume had a high opinion of the former; and though he thought well of Grafton, he remarks, in

the letter to Strahan already quoted, that 'Youth deprives him of Experience and still more of Authority' [ibid 210]. I dare not venture, he adds, 'to play the Prophet, but think you are in great Danger' [ibid].

As I mentioned above, Hume compared the Wilkes affair with two other events.

Writing to Hugh Blair in March 1769, Hume makes the comparison between the 'madness about Wilkes' and the 'absurdity of Titus Oates and the popish plot' - the latter being the illusion that there was a Catholic plot to oust Charles II. In fact he thought that the folly of the former exceeded that of the latter. The

'popish plot...being derivd from Religion, flow'd from a Source, which has, from uniform Prescription, acquird a Right to impose Nonsense on all Nations & all Ages' [L II 197].

Now the reason for his comparison can be found in the History. In his discussion of the 'plot', Hume remarks at one point:

'In this disposition of the nation, reason could no more be heard than a whisper in the midst of the most violent hurricane' [H VI 342].

Such was the power of the passions, aided and abetted, as it were, by the 'mutual contagion of the sentiments', that men 'reasoned more from their fears and their passions than from the evidence before them' [ibid 340].

The very idea that there was a 'popish plot' reduced Hume to astonishment at the credulity of the people. But such was the 'torrent...of national prejudices' that 'even some later historians...[were]...swayed by the concurring judgment of such multitudes' [ibid 347]. What was lacking was the detachment

necessary to apply 'reason and argument and common sense' [ibid 333]. For example, it was clear to Hume that it is 'an obvious principle, that a witness, who perjures himself in one circumstance, is credible in none' [ibid 347; cf T522]. And yet, the 'tremendous fictions' of the 'infamous villain' Oates, were believed by the people [H VI 343; 345].

Hume saw similar forces at work in the affair of the Douglas Cause. This was a dispute between the guardians of the Duke of Hamilton and those of James Edward Steuart over the inheritance of the Duke of Douglas, who died in 1761. Archibald Steuart was claimed to be the nephew of the late Duke; but the guardians of the Duke of Hamilton, who included William Mure and Andrew Stuart, close friends of Hume, disputed Steuart's lineage. In 1769, to Hume's great dismay, his friends lost their case in the House of Lords.

Hume perceived passion, partiality and prejudice in the support that many gave to this 'obviously' wrong judgment. The same factors, that is, that he perceived as wrecking judgment in the case of Wilkes. It was not a lack of intelligence that was the problem; but the want of a detached application of the understanding. Unfortunately, he said, writing to Blair,

'the public..are perfectly pleas'd with the Sentence; being sway'd by Compassion and a few popular Topics' [L II 198].

The arguments accepted by the Law Lords were 'scandalous'; alas,

'all was good enough for their Audience, who, bating their Quality, are most of them little better than their Brethren, the Wilkites, in the streets' [ibid].

Hume also wrote to Mure about the affair. Two years previously he had cause to congratulate Mure on the Court of Session's

judgment in favour of Hamilton. In that letter he expressed his belief that there was 'little Chance' that the Law Lords would reverse the decision [L II 153]. This mistake may explain his interest in providing a full analysis of their Lordship's supposed error, just as, perhaps, it may itself be explained by the factors of passion and partiality that figure in that analysis. As in the letter to Blair already quoted, Hume reports how he sees this as a battle lost against 'Prejudice, Clamour and Nonsense'. Lord Mansfield, the victorious protagonist in the Lords won because he trusted the 'Prejudice of the Public' who never sought to understand the details of the case, and who were 'sway'd by Compassion' [L II 200].

Here, then, is another instance of the failure of judgment as a consequence of prejudice. And this is why Hume compares the 'Audience' at the Lords to the 'Wilkites in the street'; and the Wilkes affair to the 'popish plot'.

However, to appreciate the causes of Hume's anxiety, we must go deeper than the comments of Hume the amateur political observer. He understood, I suggest, the causes of the 'approaching crisis' in terms of the defence of the rules of justice against the consequences of the primitive disposition to gather into groups. Or, in the political arrangements of a civilised nation, factions. Ultimately, it is only through considering his beliefs about the dispositions of the imagination that we can explain his view that sound political judgment is possible only if man has been trained to detach himself from such forces of prejudice. For that is a condition for the establishment of justice; and that is also a condition for sound political judgment.

Here the factions were the King and his ministers and Wilkes and the opposition. Hume's hope was that the rule of law would be upheld against the forces of faction, and that Grafton would act with vigour:

'This frenzy of the people, so epidemical and so much without a Cause admits of only one Remedy, which however is a dangerous one, and requires more vigour than has appeared in any minister of late' [L II 210].

So he thought that the 'Matter will only be worse, if there be no shooting or hanging next Winter' [ibid]. Four months later he told Strahan that

'Open Violence gives such a palpable Reason for the severe Execution of the Laws, a thing much wanted, that it ought immediately to be laid hold of, and it will have a very salutary Effect' [L II 213].

And in March 1770 he wrote:

'There must necessarily be a struggle between the Mob and the Constitution...I wish...(I cannot say I hope) that vigorous Measures will be taken; an impeachment immediately voted of the Mayor...and Habeas Corpus suspended till next meeting of Parliament' [L II 218].

Now we shall see later that Hume was not alone in fearing the effects of faction. But what is striking is how his analysis has a foundation in the view, presented thirty years before, that justice is always under the potential threat of faction on account of the way that the imagination works. Not to put too fine a point on the matter: reasons of justice are only 'satisfactory to man in his civilis'd state and when train'd up according to a certain discipline and education' [T479]. Only then will he submit to the authority of established government, and not endanger the rules of justice. Otherwise, he will be motivated by partial demands of a clan - or faction. And so the question for Hume was: how 'civilis'd' were the English? Or would they destroy the rules of justice through their factious behaviour?

We have already seen, in Chapter III, the theoretical foundation in the imagination of a phenomenon integrally

related to this threat. This is the phenomenon of 'madness'. It is related in that it is sympathy which makes possible that 'prejudice' which defines a faction where a point of view is shared by all its members. This happens through the communication of sentiments. This 'contagion' of thought, however, sometimes has the effect that a person will be wholly under the influence of the beliefs of a faction and thus quite unable to judge the evidence with the detachment necessary for an objective point of view.

It is in this context that we should understand the language of madness and faction that Hume uses in letters during the 1760's and 1770's. Thus he comments to Strahan in March 1770, with reference to the Wilkes affair, 'Good God! What abandon'd Madmen there are in England!' [L II 218]. For Adam Smith, a month earlier, *he had described the English as 'wicked, abandon'd Madmen'* [ibid 214]. In the summer of 1770, he wrote to Strahan:

'The Madness and Wickedness of the English (for do not say, the Scum of London) appear astonishing, even after all the Experience we have had. It must end fatally either to the King or Constitution or to both' [ibid 226].

Indeed, his perception of the madness and factiousness in England is reflected in his attitudes towards his own projects. In January 1772 he tells the Comtesse de Boufflers that he will write no more history or philosophy: he does not want to 'expose [himself] to the censure of such factious and passionate readers as this country abounds with' [ibid 255; cf ibid 209, 214]. Two weeks later he remarks to Benjamin Franklin:

'So factious is this country! I expected, in entering on my literary course, that all the Christians, all the Whigs, and all the Tories, should be my enemies. But it is hard that all the English, Irish and Welsh, should be also against me' [ibid 258].

Strahan, meanwhile, soon receives a reminder that the English are 'factious Barbarians' [ibid 261]; and then in January 1773 he is told that Hume will not be continuing his writing not least because of the 'prejudices of a stupid, factious Nation', with whom Hume is 'heartily disgusted' [ibid 269].

It certainly seems to be the case that Hume was keenly aware of the phenomena of faction, prejudice, and madness. A clue as to the reasons behind this concern may be found in a remark of February 1774 made to Smith, a fellow observer of the English scene, and of the 'general course of things' [G I 260]. Hume remarked that 'Faction, next to Fanaticism, is, of all passions, the most destructive of Morality' [ibid 286]

How does his earlier work on the imagination help us in understanding these sentiments? Perhaps we can begin to answer this question if we turn to see how he thinks that the rules of justice develop.

## section 2

### justice and government

Faction, it seems, is capable of upsetting judgment. I now want to turn to the theoretical description of this danger found in his account in the Treatise of how man acquires the capability of discerning the public interest. I begin with the formation of the conventions of justice.

Man does not enter into the conventions of justice out of benevolence, but from interest [T489]. Yet that interest is not adequately described through reference to his own desires: if we 'consult common experience' we will find that whilst it is rare to meet with one who loves any person more than himself, it is also rare

'to meet with one, in whom all the kind affections, taken together, do not over-balance all the selfish' [T487].

This narrow orientation towards a few would not, however, render a union with others precarious were it not for the scarcity and insecurity of external goods [ibid]. Such a conjunction of temper and circumstances seems incommodious and even dangerous to the union. The remedy arises from artifice,

'or more properly speaking, nature provides a remedy in the judgment and understanding, for what is irregular and incommodious in the affections' [T489].

But it is not that our desire for the welfare of ourselves and family is somehow lessened by reason. This would be to contradict Hume's famous thesis about reason and the passions. Rather reason shows man how to achieve his desired end [cf T414]. So it guides the passions away from their 'partial and contradictory motions'. We discover that

'Instead of departing from our own interest, or from that of our nearest friends, by abstaining from the possessions of others, we cannot better consult both these interests, than by such a convention' [ibid].

So in order to maintain the society that is necessary for 'the well being and subsistence' of both ourselves and those we love, we find that we must train ourselves so as to guide certain other natural tendencies of the imagination. For the rude savage cannot understand the notion of justice as a principle 'capable of inspiring men with an equitable conduct towards each other' [T488; cf E II 247n]. This is because praise or blame depends on the usual force of the passions [T488; cf T483]. And in the 'original frame of mind' the strongest attention is to ourselves, and then to our family, and then to acquaintances.

'From all which it follows, that our natural uncultivated ideas of morality, instead of providing a remedy for the partiality of our affections, do rather conform themselves to that partiality, and give it an additional force and influence' [T489].

Ultimately this is due to dispositions of the imagination. Because of their familiarity and the fact that they are connected with ourselves, there is an 'easy transition' from the idea of ourselves to the idea of family and friends. And so these 'objects' are conceived in more 'lively manner' than others. Thus the normal invigorating effects of company are increased; consequently, we gain an affection for them [T353; cf section 2 Chapter IV ].

This, then, is why in one sense of the term, justice is not natural. Far from a rude savage being satisfied with a rule of justice as a reason for action, he would not 'understand the Meaning of them, independent of Society' [LG 32]. If he gains satisfaction, then this is on account of his having served the interests of his clan.

Hume's account of how we acquire the capacity to make political judgments proceeds on similar lines. Here too we must see beyond the immediate interests of our family or clan. And again, government is necessary not because of the weakness of reason, but because of the situation we find ourselves in with regard to external objects. And if it is the circumstances and situation that renders a passion calm or violent, and we cannot change our passions, then we had better - as with justice - change our situation with regard to those objects. For

'men are mightily govern'd by the imagination, and proportion their affections more to the light, under which any object appears to them, than to its real and intrinsic value' [T534].

So here too Hume finds his account of political obligation through drawing consequences from his theory of the imagination. What happens is that we will prefer that good which strikes us more forcefully to the greater good. We 'yield to the solicitations of our passions, which always plead in favour of whatever is near and contiguous' [T535]. This characteristic of man is made more dangerous through the disposition we have to imitate each other. Your (bad) example 'pushes me forward by way of imitation' as well as showing me a new reason for contravening the rules of justice [ibid]. Again, Hume is using an insight displayed elsewhere to bolster his (Hobbesian) point that if you are not going to obey the rules, then I have no reason to either; the insight is of the imitative aspect of human nature that is one aspect of the phenomenon of sympathy [cf section 2 Chapter III].

The remedy is government: as we cannot change our passions,

'the utmost we can do is to change our circumstances and situation, and render the observance of the laws of justice our nearest interest' [T537].

So we render the observance of justice the immediate interest of those we call civil magistrates, kings and their ministers' [ibid]. These persons, our 'governors or rulers', enforce the dictates of justice [ibid]. And this is the first advantage of government.

There is another function of government in the deciding about controversies between parties according to the rules of justice. This may be highlighted by comparing his account with what Locke has to say about this need for impartiality. Locke thinks that one of the principal reasons that man has for entering political society is that the Executive and Legislative power that man possesses in the state of nature, will lead to quarrels that can only be resolved by civil government. For

'tis easy to be imagined, that he who was so unjust as to do his Brother an injury, will scarce be so just as to condemn himself for it' [Locke (2) para. 13].

Hume, though, employs an inference from his 'experimental' account:

'As violent passion hinders men from seeing distinctly the interest they have in equitable behaviour towards others; so it hinders them from seeing that equity itself' [T538].

But the indifference that the magistrate has to 'the greatest part of the society' will result in a more equitable judgment than 'every one wou'd in his own case' [ibid].

In this way, then, government is founded and men are made to perceive their interest in supporting a 'composition', which, though composed out of men subject to 'all human infirmities', is 'in some measure, exempted from all these infirmities' [T539].

Evidently, though, there can be disputes not only about a theft of acorns, but about the extent of the government's own powers. Such was the case with the Wilkes affair.

Hume, we saw in the previous section, viewed the result of the Douglas Cause as symptomatic of the prevalence of harmful factious prejudice. But if Hamilton's loss was not as dangerous as the Wilkes affair, that affair can in turn be distinguished from the 'popish plot' as being an 'Extravagance peculiar to Ourselves' [L II 197]. This singularity was on account of the particular nature of the British Constitution. Where a part republican, part monarchical government is combined with great liberty, the opportunities for factious behaviour are great. It is precisely because of this fact that those living under the British Constitution will have to acquire, if the constitution is to survive, two different sorts of knowledge. On the one hand they will have to acquire an understanding of their own peculiar constitution, and this will *naturally be more* difficult than for a people living under a simple constitution. On the other hand, they need to have an understanding of their own natures and the forces at work that can corrupt their judgment; especially, the causes and the effects of faction. Ruder arrangements allow ruder people to live within them, but that delicate political balancing act, the British Constitution, needed a high degree of political wisdom from the political classes. Hume's fear in the last years of his life, as shown by his comments on Wilkes and the Douglas Cause was that the English did not possess such wisdom. He saw the prejudice and the partiality as more fitted to 'savages' than to members of a civilised society. Though of course, the modern English savage does not belong to a tribe - our 'barbarian' belongs not to a clan, but to a faction.

On this interpretation we should see his political essays, as well as his letters, as a contribution to the necessary educative process. The English must be taught about

their constitution, and about the forces that disturb political judgment, such as man's peculiar sensitivity to the claims of faction. As has been seen, Hume believed that justice and political agreement originated through men's desire to serve the interests of those with whom they had a close union. In the process, their dispositions are disciplined and their interests come to be better served. The paradox for Hume in the last years of his life was that those very tendencies to loyalty, that are in fact a consequence of man's social nature, now covered with fallacious theory, threatened to take man back to a state previous even to the establishment of the rules of justice. The cantonising disposition in man that made the establishment of justice and government possible, now threatened, through its expression in faction, to lead to civil war.

If the term 'factious' is Hume's favourite epithet for the English during this period, his second favourite is 'barbarian'. What I now want to suggest is that this is a clue to understanding his view that a vital element in the acquiring of the political knowledge required for civilised man, is the cultivation of the arts. And a chief cause of the lack of political understanding in the English was the neglect of the arts.

Six months before his death, Hume remarked to Gibbon of the 'Fall of Philosophy and the Decay of Taste' in England. Like Swift and Pope in the previous decade, Hume, increasingly, thought of the English as having neglected polite letters for the satisfaction of baser pleasures. He continued in the letter to Gibbon,

'your Countrymen, for almost a whole Generation, have given themselves up to barbarous and absurd Faction, and have totally neglected all polite Letters' [L II 310].

Ten years before, he suggested to Horace Walpole that the only admissible difference between one age and another is their 'different progress in learning and the arts'. Of his own age he says,

'Our enemies will only infer, that we are a nation which was once at best but half civilised, and is now relapsing fast into barbarism, ignorance, and superstition' [ibid 111].

Such a thought ran counter to the optimism of the Philosophes. In a letter to Turgot of June 1768, Hume tries to throw doubt on that writer's faith in the gradual perfection of society. Hume argues that 'Events in this Country', by which he means the 'Disorders' of the Wilkes affair, suggest that Turgot is being too optimistic in hoping to avoid 'the usual Returns of Barbarism and Ignorance' [ibid 180]. Five years later, Hume is more conclusive. No Englishman could continue his History, for

'that Nation is so sunk in Stupidity and Barbarism and Faction that you may as well think of Lapland for an Author' [ibid 269].

He names Tristram Shandy as the 'best Book, that has been writ by any Englishman these thirty Years'; adding, 'bad as it is' [ibid].

Now in section 1 I drew attention to the themes of prejudice and faction in Hume's late letters. In this section I have gone on to suggest that such thoughts may be better understood in the light of Books II and III of the Treatise: the peculiar workings of the imagination mean that we are prejudiced in favour of the group to which we belong. Only if man is trained can he overcome those aspects of his social disposition that cloud his judgment. After this I suggested that a chief part of this education is given by the pursuit of the arts. Evidently, though, more must be said about this. What

is the connection between factiousness and the neglect of art and philosophy? Why does Hume think that learning and the arts have a fundamental role in political education?

### section 3

#### politics and the arts

In the essay 'Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion', Hume writes of a species of temper which results in immoderate reactions to the ordinary events of life. A person who has a certain 'delicacy of passion' is a person, Hume seems to suggest, who is under the sway of violent passions. Passions that is, which are characterised by their emotional intensity. He says of such persons that

'Any honour or mark of distinction elevates them above measure; but they are sensibly touched with contempt' [G I 91].

When a person who has this 'sensibility of temper' meets with any misfortune,

'his sorrow or resentment takes entire possession of him, and deprives him of all relish in the common occurrences of life' [ibid].

It might be said that such a person is 'ruled by his passions'; or that he is too 'passionate'. Strictly speaking this is wrong. The error comes from confusing the calm passions with reason [cf T417]. More accurately, then, a man of delicate passions is one who is disposed to respond with violent passions. Thus, says Hume, he will have 'pungent sorrows'; and 'lively enjoyments'. The smallest misfortune will give him a 'piercing grief' [ibid].

Now Hume believes that the cultivation of a delicacy of taste will help cure men of this incommensurable delicacy of passion. If we consider the reasons he has for this belief, we can progress towards understanding the relation he perceives between the arts and political wisdom.

'Taste', properly understood, involves reason as well as sentiment:

'In order to judge aright of a composition of genius, there are so many views to be taken in, so many circumstances to be compared'

that only one possessed of the 'soundest judgment' will ever be a tolerable critic in such performances [ibid 93]. Precisely because of this involvement of reason, we have in the arts an activity that will refine our judgment. Thus here is 'a new reason for cultivating a relish in the liberal arts', a reason over and above the great pleasure of that activity:

'Our judgment will be strengthened by this exercise: We shall form juster notions of life: Many things, which please or afflict others, will appear to us too frivolous to engage our attention: And we shall lose by degrees that sensibility and delicacy of passion, which is so incommodious' [G I 93].

Yet Hume does not want to say that an increased capacity for judgment has the consequence that we are anaesthetised to life. He says that he has 'gone too far' in saying that the cultivation of one's aesthetic sensibilities 'extinguishes the passions' [ibid]. Rather, he thinks that it 'improves our sensibility for all the tender and agreeable passions', and 'renders the mind incapable of the rougher and more boisterous emotions' [ibid].

In support of this belief, Hume offers two considerations. One of these is the thought that the improvement in one's judgment that is consequent upon appreciation of the arts, disposes us to care for a few like creatures. A cultivated person 'feels too sensibly, how much all the rest of mankind falls short of the notions which he has entertained' [ibid 94]. Love and friendship are served, for because his affections are confined in a narrow circle, they can be carried further. This

idea, has not, I think, any obvious political implications, which might help us, for example, in understanding the connection between the factiousness of the English, and their neglect of the arts. But the other consideration that Hume offers in the essay may do just that.

This is the idea that the appreciation of the arts fosters the 'soft and tender' passions because the attention that is necessary for understanding and enjoying the object involves detaching oneself from 'interest' and 'business'. Only if the object is regarded with a disinterested frame of mind can it be appreciated. Thus in 'Of the Standard of Taste' Hume says that it is necessary for appreciation that there should be 'A perfect serenity of mind, a recollection of thought, a due attention to the object' [G I 271]. We will find it more difficult to be disinterested if we know the artist involved: this may 'diminish the applause due to his performance'; likewise, 'jealousy' and the influence of 'authority' may obstruct true judgment [ibid].

The pursuit of the disinterested point of view, that the work of art demands, is described in 'Of the Standard of Taste' as an attempt to bring the 'fancy to a suitable situation and disposition' [ibid]. Now it may easily be imagined that this exercise, this pursuit of the required point of view, will have effects on our dispositions outside the gallery or the theatre. When the matter is discussed in the Treatise, it is seen, in fact, that the attempt is of the utmost relevance to knowledge of oneself. It is difficult, he says,

'for a man to be sensible, that the voice of an enemy is agreeable, or allow it to be musical. But a person of a fine ear, who has the command of himself, can separate these feelings, and give praise to what deserves it' [T472].

Now one who is practised in ignoring considerations that are irrelevant to the work of art - one who, as we say, has developed his critical faculties - will be more able than others to view his own temper and actions with a critical eye. And he will be more disposed to try to rid himself of immoderate passions, than one who has only the natural refining effects of the moral life from which to benefit. Why? He is at once in the habit of criticism and at the same time keenly aware that immoderate passions disturb, and may perhaps even destroy, firstly, his happiness; and secondly, what is a part of that happiness, his enjoyment of music or literature.<sup>1</sup>

If he is successful in self-criticism, then he will find that he will be more able to live a life with others: he will not immediately think, for example, when someone happens to laugh at him that that person despises him and is perhaps a vicious enemy. He will no longer be 'transported beyond the bounds of prudence' [G I 91]. This is because he is no longer so subject to those passions that disturb calm reflection. And nor of course is it only in social life that his prudence improves. Perhaps he will no longer reach for the bottle when he gets a parking ticket. Secondly, as he now has 'command of himself', he will now be able to attend a performance of King Lear without weeping bitterly, and so increase his enjoyment (and in this instance, the enjoyment of those around him).

Thus when such a person, and we are all such people to some extent, is helped, through art, to view himself as an object, he will find that he insensibly decreases the influence of 'boisterous' emotions. His mind becomes quite 'incapable' of experiencing them; and his life is given over to the 'tender and agreeable passions'. The beauties of poetry, eloquence, music or painting, then,

'give a certain elegance of sentiment to which the rest of mankind are strangers...They draw off the mind from the hurry of business and interest; cherish reflection;

dispose to tranquillity; and produce an agreeable melancholy, which, of all dispositions of the mind, is the best suited to love and friendship' [G I 93].

Understood in this way, the arts provide for polite society what philosophy provides for the few. Thus the language that Hume uses elsewhere in writing of the effects of study is strikingly similar. A 'serious attention to the sciences and liberal arts' he says in 'The Sceptic', 'softens and humanizes the temper' [G I 223]. Again, the practice of thinking with a disinterested frame of mind, has its effects:

'The bent of his mind to speculative studies must mortify in him the passions of interest and ambition, and must, at the same time, give him a greater sensibility of all the decencies and duties of life' [ibid].

Evidently, it is not the content of these subjects that changes the 'disposition of the mind', or affects the imagination, it is the habit of detachment necessary for their study. Because of this, it appears that even chemistry may be beneficial to its students, quite apart from any advantages brought by its particular discoveries.

In short, the arts and sciences civilise us; and a person who is subject to a delicacy of the passions is uncivilised. He will be unfitted for society as he has not his passions, as we say, under control; or, properly speaking, he is too disposed to react with violent rather than with calm passions. His judgment, therefore will be partial and confused.

We can now return to the problem that precipitated the above enquiry into Hume's thoughts on how learning and the arts can train the mind. The problem, that is, of explaining why Hume couples his observations on the 'artistic' ignorance of the English with observations on their political wilfulness and factiousness.

It was suggested that learning (for the few) and art (for the many) strengthen the critical faculties by disposing the person to leave his particular situation and consider the object, or evidence, on its own terms. (Moreover, the habit of self-criticism is also thus strengthened.) A work of art, in order 'to produce its due effect on the mind', must be surveyed from the point of view it requires: it is quite irrelevant to an appraisal of a piano sonata that the composer is black. Similarly, with regard to to any philosophical or scientific problem: it is quite irrelevant to a proper appraisal of the results of an experiment that they do not seem to forward the award of a research grant.

But in political questions the wicked fairy that wrecks judgment is likely to be the influence of faction. And a person of *heady passions* is more likely to be under the sway of a faction than one ruled by the calm passions. The former will be too influenced by the opinion of others, the opposition of others, the anger, sorrow, hatred, revenge, fury of others. This is, of course, on account of the phenomenon of sympathy. Even a 'normal person feels such passions more from communication than from his own 'natural temper' [T317]. Only a trained and discriminating mind can hope to withstand these effects, and identify his interest not with those who, for example, are related to him, but with the public interest. Of course, this is difficult; just as it is difficult to withstand the 'trivial' propensities of the imagination that lead to error in philosophy [cf T224; T123]. Naturally, the more delicate the political problem, the easier it is for the passions to prompt plausible ruses; the easier it is for us to be satisfied with what we are sure will in any case serve our own interest. Similarly, the more delicate the problem in natural philosophy, the more 'constancy' and 'sagacity' is needed 'to choose the right way among so many that present themselves' [T175]. No constitution could be more delicately balanced than the British: so no constitution needed more able

players.

In the next section I want to turn to Hume's earlier attempt to educate the English about their complicated, and potentially dangerous constitution.

## section 4

### faction and moderation

In the previous sections we have seen something of how Hume's early work on the imagination informs his observations about faction. I want to continue the discussion through enquiring into his conception of the role of the philosopher in political life.

In the Preface to the original edition of the 1741/2 essays, Hume expresses the hope that the reader 'will approve of my Moderation and Impartiality in my Method of handling POLITICAL SUBJECTS' [G I 41]. He hopes that his work will be considered free from 'PARTY-RAGE'; *this he has 'endeavour'd to repress, as far as possible'* [ibid]. I shall shortly consider how his work on the imagination underpins such sentiments.

I want to begin by turning to the third essay in that edition, 'That Politics may be Reduced to a Science'. This starts with the popular and topical question as to whether every form of government may not become good or bad, according to whether it is well or poorly administered. If that is the case, then 'Zeal for one constitution above another, must be esteemed mere bigotry and folly' [G I 98].

Hume's first step in arguing against such a sorry conclusion is made by distinguishing between 'absolute' and 'free and republican' governments. In the former case, the quality of the government must indeed depend on the administration. So here it matters whether the ruler is strong or weak, benevolent or cruel. But the distinguishing feature of the latter form of government, is that 'checks and controuls' make it the interest 'even of bad men, to act for the public good' [ibid 96].

His second step is to argue that the wisest legislators will not rely on the hope that the ruler will be good. Rather, they 'ought to provide a system of laws to regulate the administration of public affairs to the latest posterity' [ibid 105]. Thus he finds reasons to uphold 'those forms and institutions by which liberty is secured, the public good consulted, and the avarice and ambition of particular men restrained and punished' [ibid 106].

But it is the third step that is the most interesting from our point of view. For we now begin to see his understanding of how men construct 'reasons' for action. In another age, he suggests, the philosopher seeking to serve the public good, might rest with the task of finding reasons for favouring free government. Yet, by the 1740's, the British Constitution was not so much widely accepted as widely revered. And the problem now arises that the zeal for the constitution and the public good becomes a cover for the interests of faction. This is Hume's diagnosis. What he thinks necessary in such circumstances is a lesson in 'moderation'. This lesson, we shall see, is made possible through his employment of principles that describe certain dispositions of the imagination. It was suggested in Chapter III that Hume employs common principles of the imagination, based on the Principle of the Conversion of Passions, through a wide variety of subjects, within the science of man, such as commerce, religion, and divorce; now we can see them employed in his political writings.

The subject matter that Hume chooses for the lesson in moderation within the essay is the state of the parties 'into which our country is presently divided' [ibid 107]. More particularly, their opinions on the character of Walpole. But the first half of the essay informs the lesson: the behaviour of the contending parties would be more fitting to an 'absolute' government. There, the character of a minister is

the only object of appraisal; but in a government of laws it is the constitution itself to which we must look.

When this distinction is made, we can see the point of the following reasonings: the English must train themselves to deserve their constitution. They must not fall back on political thinking that consists of little more than loving one's own leader and clan and hating their enemy. 'Public Spirit', he writes in the Preface to the original edition:

'shou'd engage us to love the Public, and to bear an equal Affection to all our Country-Men; not to hate one Half of them, under Pretext of loving the Whole' [ibid 41].

That is not the sort of behaviour which the nature of the Constitution requires in order for it to work properly. To be sure, given the pressures that factions create, such self-discipline will be difficult. But the alternative of the dissolution of the Constitution was such a dreadful prospect that Hume did not, at this time, despair. When he did, as we saw in section 1, he decided that the appalling behaviour of the English was an effect of a deep cultural malaise that is not discussed in these essays or in the extant letters of the later thirties and early 1740's.

He believed that the English did not understand their political situation. On the one hand, Bolingbroke and the Tory writers argued that Walpole

'is not only a wicked minister in himself, but has removed every security provided against wicked ministers for the future' [ibid 107].

He had, that is, undermined 'the best constitution in the world' [ibid]. To these interested arguments Hume replies that if

'our constitution does in any degree deserve these

eulogies, it would never have suffered a weak and wicked minister to govern triumphantly for a course of twenty years' [ibid 108].

And if he was wicked and weak, then the Constitution could not have been so gloriously perfect as claimed.

On the other hand, the supporters of Walpole also failed to remember that they were living in a country of laws and rules - which laws and rules provide the context in which to assess the actions of any individual. So again Hume starts with the Constitution: if it is so excellent, as the partisans of Walpole hold, 'then a change of ministry can be no such dreadful event' [ibid]. But if the constitution is bad, then, whatever the administration, 'Public affairs...must necessarily go to confusion, by whatever hands they are conducted' [ibid 109].

In this way, through reminding the reader of the nature of political arrangements, the rules of the game, Hume hopes to detach the reader from feelings about Walpole that are the product of the pressures of faction; the feelings, that is, which Hume perceived as clouding the appreciation of what is in the public interest and thus in the reader's own interest. This detachment from the pressures and novelties of the day is not a form of quietism: in fact he thinks that it leads to a keener attachment to the ends of politics:

'I would not be understood to mean, that public affairs deserve no care and attention at all' [ibid].

For he believes that

'the surest way of producing moderation in every party is to increase our zeal for the public' [ibid 107].

That is, if we are conscious that our interest lies in the promotion of the common good, we will make allowances for the party prejudices that almost inevitably encourage the violent passions. Or, in the discredited language, those prejudices which act on our passions to the detriment of our reason. So the activities of a Walpole should be condemned or praised with a 'suitable degree of zeal' [ibid 109]. And this is only possible if we understand the nature of the political arrangements - here the British Constitution; and also, the factious pressures we are under. Without moderation, the outlook is bleak:

'I would only persuade men not to contend, as if they were fighting pro aris & focis, and change a good constitution into a bad one, by the violence of their factions' [ibid].

Now Peter Jones has pointed out that Hume's use of the notion of moderation owes much to Cicero. Cicero had argued that moderation is above all 'the art of doing the right thing at the right time' [Jones p.156; cf p. 157-8; De Officiis 1 40]. Jones also notes how Hume's notion of moderation does not imply an idea of compromise [Jones p.156]. Nor, as has been seen, does it imply quietism. What can be added to Jones' remarks is that Hume's notion of moderation in political life has a theoretical foundation in his theory of the imagination. It is with this issue that I end this section.

In the essay under consideration, Hume refers us to the immoderate language of the Tories and Whigs. The former call Walpole wicked; the latter ascribe all political and economic blessings to him. Hume comments:

'When this accusation and panegyric are received by the partizans of each party, no wonder they beget an extraordinary ferment on both sides, and fill the nation with violent animosities' [G I 108].

To see what underlies this assumption, we must turn to his work on the calm and violent passions that is found in Book II of the Treatise. When I considered this matter in detail in Chapter III, I argued that a central part of his interpretation of the so-called 'struggle' between reason and the passions is the role played by any opposition that the passions find. Thus for example, it is perhaps precisely the opposition that British Rail provide, that makes visiting one's auntie such an attractive idea. The opposition to a 'rendezvous' with one's favourite auntie is found in the passion of frustration, and this passion is 'swallowed up' by the predominant passion of love, thus increasing the passion of love. Similarly, Hume writes:

'Tis a quality very observable in human nature, that any opposition, which does not entirely discourage and intimidate us, has rather a contrary effect, and inspires us with a more than ordinary *grandeur and magnanimity*' [T433].

This 'quality', then, finds its expression through his model of the imagination where a conversion of passion occurs through an obstacle producing a minor passion. The mind 'naturally seeks after foreign objects, which may produce a lively sensation, and agitate the spirits' [T353]. For the 'mind, when left to itself, immediately languishes' [T421]. What is needed is 'work for the imagination' [T422]. Then,

'The efforts, which the mind makes to surmount the obstacle, excite the spirits and inliven the passion' [T421].

The consequence is that the emotion which opposition excites is converted into the predominant passion, 'and encreases its violence, beyond the pitch it wou'd have arriv'd at had it met with no opposition' [ibid]. Thus does the Principle of the Conversion of Passion come into play.

It is easy to see the application of this theory to the present question: political opposition will increase the vigour with which beliefs are held. Thus do factions grow fiercer and more extreme in their claims when they are heartily opposed. Also, the process will have the consequence that beliefs which are not actually very relevant to political issues, such as those about the character (or indeed sex) of a minister, may bloom so as to hide substantial questions. Moreover, if opposition raises the temperature, so to speak, the influence of sympathy within the faction will be proportionately increased. I will sympathise with my raging colleagues: I begin to rage myself. And then the opposing faction will be stirred by the opposition that we give. And so on.

Yet this is not all. 'Opposition', Hume notes,

'not only enlarges the soul; but the soul, when full of courage and magnanimity, in a manner seeks opposition' [T434].

So we can desire enemies! Just as we love the company of our friends for its enlivening of our thought [T353], so, for the same reason, do we desire, in 'certain dispositions', the challenge of opposition.

Of course, this applies just as much to philosophers as to pamphleteers and parliamentarians. Thus we saw in discussing moderate scepticism in Chapter II, how Hume's perception of such qualities in human nature provide one of the chief reasons for welcoming that scepticism. The seeking of opposition, for example, is a tendency of philosophers that Hume draws our attention to in the Introduction to the Treatise when he discusses the 'present imperfect condition of the sciences' [T xiii]. What I have tried to show in this section is how a crucial element in his political writings have the same foundation.

## section 5

### factions

Hume's interest in factions or parties - he makes no distinction - was characteristic of his age. Many believed that the claim of parties to promote the public good was a mere pretence, and that their real objective was 'power and prizes' [Kramnick p.153]. For example, the Marquess of Halifax wrote:

'the best Party is a kind of conspiracy against the rest of the nation' [Halifax (Works p.157), quoted in Wolin p.248].

But when Hume raged against the 'factious barbarians' and when he remarked that the 'influence of faction is directly contrary to that of laws' [G I 127], he is drawing on an understanding of the nature of factions of far greater subtlety than that which consists merely in an appeal to 'hypocrisy'. This can be seen if we consider his thoughts on how parties create 'opinion' by turning to the essay 'Of the First Principles of Government'.

He begins by claiming that as the ruled have a greater force than their rulers, it is therefore 'on opinion only that government is founded' [G I 110]. He divides this opinion into two kinds: opinion of interest and opinion of right. By the former he means, firstly, 'the sense of the general advantage which is reaped from government'; and secondly, the opinion that the 'particular government, which is established, is equally advantageous with any other that could easily be settled' [ibid]. By 'opinion of right' Hume means the 'right to power' and the 'right to property'. It is on this basis, then, that 'all governments' are founded 'and all authority of the few over the many' [ibid 111].

Note what is happening: Hume is developing an account of how men respond to particular ideas in political society. These are the beliefs that will inform political decisions. It is clear, from what we have already seen of Hume's conception of man, that some such account is needed. For on that conception, it is quite implausible to see man as plotting within factions and only pretending to care for the wider public. For Hume does not think, that is, that man is without any concern for society. But on the other hand, Hume's belief about man's limited generosity rules out the idea that the party men are determined wholly by their love of the public. This, in one way or another, is what many parties would have us believe; whilst their enemies will attribute to them the former motives.

Thus the issues that interest Hume are those that reveal the force of the benevolent and self-interested principles in man; what prevalence the opinion of right has; how opinion of interest results in security; how other principles 'add force' to the opinions of right and interest; and how they 'determine, limit, or alter their operation' [ibid]. The upshot is, as we shall see in a moment, that he can refuse to accept the dichotomy between sincerity and hypocrisy that informs the arguments of contending parties. This is transcended: such is the force of opinion that party men are caught up in ways of seeing the world that cannot easily be escaped: for parties evolve within themselves reasons to justify their passions. Indeed, it is precisely because they are not simple hypocrites that they are so dangerous.

We can see how such an explanation of belief structures his account of faction creating opinion if we consider the essay 'Of the Independency of Parliament'. Hume there says that it is 'a just political maxim, that every man must be supposed a knave' [ibid 118]. He then asks why this maxim is 'true in politics' if it is 'false in fact' [ibid 118-9]. The answer

lies in the way in which groups represent anew the true state of things:

'Honour is a great check upon mankind: But where a considerable body of men act together, this check is, in a great measure, removed; since a man is sure to be approved of by his own party, for what promotes the common interest; and he soon learns to despise the clamours of adversaries' [ibid 119; cf H VI 276; H VI 513].

Thus groups evolve the regulatory power akin to that given by a system of moral sentiments. A point of view is constructed which does not coincide with the moral point of view. Approval is met with if members act accordingly. And, of course, men have a natural desire for approval; a desire which has been strengthened from their early years through their moral education. Elsewhere Hume remarks that

'a mind will never be able to bear its own survey, that has been wanting in its part to mankind and society' [T620].

And it is precisely from this disposition of man that factions draw their strength. They are parasitic on our social nature.

This may be seen if we recall that for Hume, moral behaviour is in part a product of our desire for a good name and reputation. This 'spring of our constitution' leads us to survey ourselves 'in reflection', through earnestly considering how we appear in the eyes of those who 'approach and regard us' [E II 276]. This is not to say that our moral beliefs are dependent on the beliefs of others: our interest in what others think must have an independent foundation or else we would not be able to account for moral argument. But nevertheless, in order to attain the end of 'preserving a character with ourselves',

'we find it necessary to prop our tottering judgement on the correspondent approbation of mankind' [ibid].

More generally, Hume allocates a powerful influence to other people in the formation of belief. For example, in Book I of the Treatise, he suggests that more than one half of the opinions which prevail among mankind are owing to education [T117]. We saw in Chapter II that the benefits of cultivating a moderate scepticism are not least due to the fact that even men of 'the greatest judgment and understanding' find it difficult to follow their own reason in opposition to that of their daily companions [T316]. Therefore, we should not be surprised that the social dimension of man plays such an important role in his account of morality, if we consider morality's basic role as a regulatory system of society. Indeed at one point Hume describes the virtuous as the 'party of human-kind against vice or disorder, its common enemy' [E II 275]. And nor should we be surprised if parties, that are composed of like minded men with common interests, satisfy the need for approval that their members have.

This was to contradict the conclusions of Shaftesbury about how we are to understand the power of faction. He believed that political parties are inevitable developments of the 'associating spirit'; 'wheels within wheels' are formed, 'one empire within another' [Shaftesbury (1) p.76-7]. The paradox is that the very sociability that makes society possible leads to separateness and selfishness. Shaftesbury writes:

'And the associating genius of man is never better proved than in those very societies that are formed in opposition to the general core of mankind, and to the real interest of the state. In short, the very spirit of faction for the greatest part, seems to be no other than the abuse or irregularity of that social love and common affection which is common to mankind' [ibid p.77].

So pace Shaftesbury, then, we cannot understand faction by referring to 'the abuse or irregularity of...social love and common affection'. What we must understand is the way that factions enable men to live with themselves through providing 'moral' reasons to justify their passions. This is not the abuse of affection, it is the abuse of the capacity we have to detach ourselves from the opinion of the unjust.

So the common Augustan belief that party men are mere hypocrites and pretenders is not Hume's view. Rather, their sincere belief in the merits of whatever serves their party is due to the fact that opinion of interest receives all the motivation associated with an opinion of right. The issue is discussed in 'Of the First Principles of Government. Hume writes:

'When men act in a faction, they are apt, without shame or remorse, to neglect all the ties of honour and morality, in order to serve their party'[G I 110].

Paradoxically, however, there is the phenomenon of a faction being motivated by a sense of duty alone:

'when a faction is formed on a point of right or principle, there is no occasion, where men discover a greater obstinacy and a more determined sense of justice and equity' [ibid 110-111].

Such determination arises from the backing and support of a fellow group of believers appealing directly to the moral sentiments.

Thus 'the same social disposition of mankind is the cause of these contradictory appearances' [ibid 111]. On the one hand, men riding roughshod over the claims of morality when their group's interest is served; and on the other hand, the moral obstinacy shown by some factions. These are both

phenomena to be explained by man's social nature: his reasons for actions must have the support of others for him to believe them.

Evidently, when Hume speaks of men in factions following their 'interests' he does not mean their real interests. For these lie in the service of the common good. In his last years the significance of the distinction became frighteningly clear for Hume. In the language of the Treatise, men were preferring the 'trivial advantage, that is present, to the maintenance of order in society, which so much depends on the observance of justice' [T535].

We saw in sections 2 and 3 particular reasons as to why Hume thought that the English were failing in this respect. Yet whatever these reasons are, it is clear that a chief purpose of the essays is to teach men about certain relationships between their social dispositions and the problems of living with their Constitution. The science of politics, he says in the Introduction to the Treatise, is the science of how men are 'united in society, and dependent on each other' [T xv]. The philosopher's task, therefore, is to bring to consciousness the nature of that dependence. This involves not only an examination of the apparatus of government, but also the psychological dependence that men have upon each other. It is here that we find the sources of discord and ill-considered political action. That factions lead to error is a commonplace; however, Hume attempts to give an experimental foundation to this thought. In the next section we will hear more about the ways that men are misled.



factions, Whigs, Tories, and Christianity

As I have already noted, Hume was not alone in his age in being interested in the phenomenon of factions; nor the apparently trivial reasons upon which they were founded. In Gulliver's Travels, Lilliput is divided into two factions called the Tramecksans and Slamecksans 'from the high and low heels on their shoes, by which they distinguish themselves' [Swift p.45]. Redresal, the Principal Secretary of Lilliput, tells Gulliver that the 'animosities between these two parties run so high that they will neither eat nor drink, nor talk with each other' [ibid]. In 'Of Parties in General' Hume says that the Prasini and Veneti factions destroyed the Greek empire; though what, he asks,

'can be imagined more trivial than the difference between one colour of livery and another in horse races?' [G I 128].

In the History, he writes how in Oxford, during the 1540's, the foundation of a chair for teaching Greek divided the students into parties they called 'Greeks' and 'Trojans'. They sometimes fought, he says, 'with as great animosity as was formerly exercised by those hostile nations' [H III 332]. Furthermore, he adds, the 'Grecians' then divided amongst themselves, between those who favoured one form of pronunciation, and those who favoured another [ibid].<sup>2</sup>

So why is it that 'the smallest appearance of real difference' [G I 128] can produce factions? In considering this question we can see once again how Hume's science of politics rests on a model of the imagination. We can begin with some primary facts about social existence.

In Chapter III it was seen how Hume's doctrine of sympathy consists of an account of how an idea is transformed into an impression; this happens because of the transition of the vivacity there from the idea of ourselves, to whatever is related to it, such as an idea of a passion that a person has who is contiguous to us. This gives the otherwise languishing mind the stimulation that it needs [T352-3]. For not all objects are equally arousing. And yet, if the most enlivening ones are rational beings like ourselves, it is still true that we do not find that all people are equally the same in this regard.

It is the principles of association that guide the enquirer in understanding the variations that people will show in their reactions to others. These are the principles that help us to predict those relations which facilitate an easy transition from the idea to the impression. The first principle is resemblance:

'Tis obvious, that people associate together according to their particular tempers and dispositions, and that men of gay tempers naturally love the gay; as the serious bear an affection to the serious' [T354].

Whether we are conscious of the resemblance or not, this resemblance facilitates the transition of an idea into an impression. So here is the first way that his theory of the imagination illustrates principles which explain how factions or groups may be formed. Even the resemblance of complexion, as in the case of the sides formed in the 'MOORISH civil wars' [G I 129-130], or the colour of livery, may result in a faction being formed.

The second principle of association is that of contiguity. Impressions of objects are stronger when the objects are nearer:

'The breaking of a mirror gives us more concern when at home, than the burning of a house, when abroad, and some hundred leagues distant' [T429].

Likewise, the nearer we are to suffering, the more likely we are to feel it ourselves [T567]. Similarly, Hume employs the idea of contiguity as a factor in explaining how a nation forms a national character:

'Where a number of men are united into one political body, the occasions of their intercourse must be so frequent...that, together with the same speech or language, they must acquire a resemblance in their manners, and have a common or national character' [Es 248].

So if we add this factor of contiguity to resemblance, we arrive at a still more complete explanation of the propensity of men to create factions.

As well as these two principles, the phenomenon of 'acquaintance' deserves to be mentioned. We may be convinced of another's superior merit, but we do not prefer him to the person we know. Why is this? Hume writes:

'as the company of strangers is agreeable to us for a short time, by inlivening our thought; so the company of our relations and acquaintance must be peculiarly agreeable, because it has this effect in a greater degree, and is of a more durable influence [T353].

So the personal friendships that are found in factions are a further bond. Hume remarks that even

'in those factions which are founded on the most real and most material difference, there is always observed a great deal of personal animosity or affection' [G I 128].

In the light of this 'scientific' explanation of the forces behind the creation and sustaining of factions, we may proceed

to an examination of what he says about the parties of his own day. It will be seen that he considered the Whigs and Tories as examples of a very singular kind of party, 'parties from principle'. Such parties fall into a sub-class of 'real factions'. 'Real factions' are to be opposed to 'personal factions' such as the Prasini and Veneti, and the black and white Moroccans. The other sorts of real factions are those from 'interest' and those from 'affection'. But 'parties from principle' are the most extraordinary type of this sort. He writes:

'Parties from principle, especially abstract speculative principle, are known only to modern times, and are, perhaps, the most extraordinary and unaccountable phenomenon, that has yet appeared in human affairs [ibid 130].

So does not Hume even try to explain the nature of the Whigs and the Tories? This indeed would be a disappointing answer. But let us see what he says.

In any society there will be persons with various inclinations, even when they 'have been educated under the same government, and have early imbibed the same prejudices' [ibid 266]. And when we add this fact to the nature of the British Constitution, we immediately 'perceive in it a source of division and party, which it would be almost impossible for it, under any administration, to avoid' [ibid 133]. For the 'just balance' between the 'republican and monarchical' parts of government, that the Constitution demands, is so 'extremely delicate and uncertain', that

'different opinions must arise concerning it, even among persons of the best understanding' [ibid].

On the one hand, those who 'love peace and order, and detest sedition and civil wars' will always emphasise favourable views

of monarchy and will incline towards trusting the crown. On the other hand, those who are 'passionate lovers of liberty' will be 'terrified at the most distant approaches of tyranny and despotic power' [ibid 134]. Thus, says Hume, 'there are parties of PRINCIPLE involved in the very nature of our constitution' [ibid]. These parties, he says, 'may properly enough be denominated those of COURT and COUNTRY' [ibid].

If parties from principle are a defining mark of the modern age, then so is the British Constitution. The achievement of the Constitution would have surprised a Cicero or a Tacitus, who would not have understood how a mixed government could function without one rank swallowing another [ibid 119]. So, Hume believes that the peculiar nature of the constitution is the first cause of the strange phenomenon of parties from principle. But this is not enough of an explanation. Principles that express an interest in stability, or an interest in liberty, cannot thus be classified as principles of the 'abstract speculative kind', however much the conditions of the constitution dispose men towards holding them.

And it is this speculative element that Hume finds dangerous. Such principles lead to animosity even though there is no 'contrariety of conduct' consequent upon their differences:

'Where different principles beget a contrariety of conduct, which is the case with all different political principles, the matter may more easily be explained...But where the difference of principle is attended with no contrariety of action...what madness, what fury can beget such unhappy and fatal divisions?' [ibid 130-131].

Thus the motivation seems to spring not from 'opinion of interest'; nor from 'opinion of right'; nor indeed from the nature of the Constitution itself. So does this state of affairs defeat Hume's political psychology? Or does he attempt

to explain the causes of the elements that he finds so dangerous?

It is because the Whigs and Tories rely on religious principles that we can explain their need to fortify, through finding opposition, beliefs which would otherwise dissipate. For it is a tenet of Hume's philosophy that as the mind

'is wonderfully fortified by an unanimity of sentiments, so is it shocked and disturbed by any contrariety' [ibid 130].

Thus we can understand the

'eagerness, which most people discover in a dispute; and hence their impatience of opposition, even in the most speculative and indifferent opinions' [ibid; cf T433-4].

But this is not enough. After all, there were philosophical sects in the 'ancient world' that were more zealous than 'parties of religion' - yet these did not result in the fury and the animosity that is found in the latter [G I 132; cf T272]. We need, therefore, something else to account for this modern phenomenon. Hume suggests that we should look to the history of Christianity.

Most religions, Hume thinks, emerge in barbarous ages, and are soon controlled by the magistrate who thus unites ecclesiastical with civil power. Christianity, however, arose only to be despised by a 'polite part of the world' who held 'principles directly opposite to it'. This allowed the priests to 'engross all the authority in the sect' [G I 132]. From a desire to keep their power, they instilled violence into their followers; a spirit of persecution was engendered; that spirit, Hume says,

'has ever since been the poison of human society, and the source of the most inveterate factions in every government' [ibid; cf ibid 248].

From the first, the Whigs and the Tories were marked with the spirit of religion. They sprang from the Court and Country factions under James II. Those who petitioned for a session of parliament, the 'petitioners', were called Whigs by their enemies who acquiesced to the wisdom of the king. These latter were called the 'abhorrrers' as they abhorred any encroachment on the king's perogative. They themselves soon became known as Tories by their enemies who saw them as resembling the 'popish banditti' in Ireland who were known by this name. The Tories, meanwhile, called the petitioners 'Whigs' for supposedly resembling certain 'fanatical covenanters' in Scotland called thus [H VI 381].

But this connection with religion, that the originally opprobrious appellations signified, did not vanish with the common memory of their birth. This is because such factions needed to find reasons to justify their passions; and they chose theological reasons. So in 'Of the Original Contract' Hume writes:

'As no party, in the present age, can well support itself, without a philosophical or speculative system of principles, annexed to its practical one; we accordingly find, that each of the factions, into which this nation is divided, has reared up a fabric of the former kind, in order to protect and cover that scheme of actions, which it pursues' [G I 443; cf E I 11].

On the one hand, the Tories trace up 'Government to the Deity', so as to render it 'sacred and inviolate'; in this way, they attempt to make it 'little less than sacrilege' to interfere with its powers [ibid]. On the other hand, 'the other party', appealed to 'a kind of original contract'. Recent attempts at rescuing the idea owe their secular basis to Hume. But no

reader of the Second Treatise could fail to be aware that Locke's beliefs are represented as arrangements of God's purpose. The 'ideologies' of the Whigs and Tories, then, were implicitly or explicitly theological.

In attempting to make his readers aware of how parties annex a 'system of principles' by which to control 'opinion' so that they can 'protect and cover' their 'schemes of action', Hume believed that he was serving the cause of moderation. It is not just that he was pointing out the Civil War as an example of the horrible effects of immoderate politics; nor is he merely describing the Constitution from a perspective outside faction. I have tried to show that his lesson in moderation employs a model of the mind that can explain how men are seduced by prejudice; how they are driven by their passions to find reasons to justify their desires; and how factions can control 'opinion'. The influence of Christian thinking, which is part of Hume's account of the nature of the Whigs and the Tories, is examined further in the final chapter.

That Hume chose to present his conclusions in a series of essays should not hide the continuity in his thought. He wrote to Henry Home, in 1742, of his hope that they

'may prove like dung with marl, and bring forward the rest of my Philosophy, which is of a more durable, though of a harder and more stubborn nature' [L I 43].

Thus though the essays do not draw attention to the details of his previous work on the imagination, their conclusions stem from that work. And the same may be said about his letters. So I have argued in this chapter that when, in the 1760's and the 1770's, he wrote about the factious barbarians; and when in his essays, he attempted to explain the nature of British political factions, his analysis (and the way that analysis reflects his conception of the philosopher's role) is based on his work in

the Treatise. There, a model of the imagination is employed in his attempt to give the science of politics an experimental foundation. We cannot, for example, fully understand his work on factions in his later writings without reference to the way that the imagination is said to control our relations with others, through the association of ideas, and through the Principle of the Conversion of Passion.

In the final chapter I examine his writings on religion. There, more will be said about the way that men find reasons to justify their desires. Moreover, the peculiar nature of religious belief that Hume presents will throw more light on the causes of animosity between political parties that have theological principles.

## Chapter VI

### Religion

#### introduction

At the beginning of this work I suggested that Hume's fascination with religion is not only to be discovered in several famously clever arguments; but throughout his work. This, I suggested, has been missed by critics. For example, in two of the most substantial works on Hume in recent years (works which represent two very different approaches to studying the history of philosophy) Hume, by Barry Stroud, and The Sceptical Realism of David Hume, by John Wright, Hume's thoughts on religion are hardly mentioned at all. The same is true of a very much lesser work than either of these, *Wilbanks' Hume's Theory of the Imagination*. Yet Hume remarked upon, and attempted to explain, the profound influence of religion on almost all the philosophical assumptions of his age. Thus in every chapter of the present work, I have tried to show how we cannot understand his thought without considering his views on the influence of religion. I have also suggested that Hume believes that one general way that religion has misled is through its helping to create a false view of man as a creature of reason. I shall now summarise what I have said about this point; and also briefly indicate what is to be found in this last chapter.

Firstly, the natural propensity man has to consider necessity as independent of the mind, and beliefs as susceptible of ultimate justifications, is encouraged by the ambitions of natural religion. This is well brought out in the Enquiry. There, Hume says that a 'considerable part of metaphysics' arises,

'either from the fruitless efforts of human vanity, which would penetrate into subjects utterly inaccessible to the understanding, or from the craft of popular superstitions, which, being unable to defend themselves on fair ground, raise these intangling brambles to cover and protect their weakness' [E I 11].

We cannot hope, he adds, that too frequent disappointments will lead men to 'abandon such airy sciences'. This is not only because of the fact that there will always be found an 'adventurous genius' to leap at the prize; but also because 'many persons find too sensible an interest in perpetually recalling such topics' [ibid 12]. So as well as wanting to make clear the proper limits of thought, Hume is also interested in showing how men are led into the 'airy sciences' - both in terms of propensities of the imagination and the grip that certain sections of society have on men's thought.

His thoughts on the true nature of reasoning were the subject of the first two chapters; in this chapter, then, the subject is the growth of religious belief, and the self-deception and false consciousness that tends to corrupt philosophical opinions.

A second area that has already been discussed, in which Hume thinks he finds evidence that religion can corrupt thought, is political thinking. We saw in Chapter V that here too he is keenly aware of how religion can function as a cover for the interests of a section of society. But in this case, it is not the clergy who are served by an appeal to religion, or at least not directly, it is the political interests of a party or faction. The Tories attempt to find a justificatory theory by tracing up government to the Deity so as to make it 'little less than sacrilege...to touch or invade it, in the smallest article' [G I 443]. The Whigs, meanwhile, present their own point of view through using theological assumptions.

Now it is worth noting that in the case of politics, and in the case of 'metaphysics', Hume's account emphasises the fact that the theological constructions are to be understood as the products of groups of men. Why should this be so?

There is no adequate answer to this that does not take into account the various ways that man is adapted for survival through his membership of society. As I mentioned in Chapter I, in order to provide his empirical account of how men gather their beliefs, Hume finds that he has to give a central role to testimony and education. There I also argued that his explanation of our reasoning about matters of fact appeals to how men publicise their feelings of expectation, and how a language of causality develops. In each case I suggested that Hume's theory in these areas is developed in terms of principles of the imagination. The same point was made in Chapter III, where I discussed his theory of sympathy; and this, in turn, was found, in Chapter IV, to be of great import in his discussion of how a society develops a moral system.

However, it was seen in Chapter V that this proclivity men have to belong to groups sometimes has most unfortunate consequences. On the one hand, men come to approve anything that serves the interests of their party, because the party takes over, as it were, the regulatory force that belongs to morality; on the other hand, through their susceptibility to the influence of others, men commit themselves to theological beliefs from which, we shall see, no moral implications can be drawn. Such beliefs nevertheless inform their 'ideologies'. The consequence is that the party members are stirred to intolerance on account of the legacy of intolerance that Christianity has left.

But there is a particular reason why, of all areas of human activity, religion is where man's cantonizing tendencies have

perhaps the most significance. Hume thinks that religious belief is far weaker than the beliefs of common life, and would vanish were it not for the interest of some members of the 'group'; that is, the priests.

In this chapter I argue that this 'sociological' understanding of the relation between reason and desire provides much that is distinctive and unique in Hume's thought on religion. Firstly, on the development of religion in the primitives; secondly, on particular episodes in the history of religion, commonly viewed as showing the influence of the supernatural.

As to the first matter, this includes, for example, the development of Christian ethics. To some extent Hume's views on Christian ethics have already been discussed - in Chapter III he was presented as a figure battling against what he saw as a dreary morality full of useless austerities. In this chapter the discussion is taken further. Two points can be made here. Firstly, far from agreeing with the common view that a belief in an afterlife is a necessary bulwark for moral conduct, Hume thinks that religion provides a cover for sectional interests. Secondly, and as regards the actual content of Christian ethics, one reason, Hume thinks, why Christianity is so dangerous is because of the unnaturalness of its ethical precepts. Seeing it as a reaction against Roman ethics, Hume thinks of Christianity as in some measure a mirror image of a healthy moral outlook. It is a malign inversion. It was the product of a people in slavery.

Naturally enough the chapter includes an examination of the path of religion from polytheism to pure theism and superstition. Particular emphasis is placed on the way that Hume appeals to the projective disposition of the imagination.

The second matter is his explanation of particular episodes in the history of the Church. Now just as special attention was paid to the letters and the essays in the previous chapter, here the focus is on the massive History of England, which has been so neglected by Hume scholars. For our purposes, what is chiefly worth remarking is the way that in these volumes Hume employs his principles of the mind in order to account for behaviour hitherto explained in religious language. History, Hume remarks in 'Of the Study of History', 'affords materials to most of the sciences' [G IV 390]. Here, then, is where we can see Hume applying his principles to explain, not conjectures, as in the Natural History of Religion, but concrete events which were, and are, part of the history of the Church.

He also remarks in 'Of the Study of History', that history is of value in that it 'brings us acquainted with human affairs, without diminishing in the least from the most delicate sentiments of virtue' [ibid]. The sense of virtue in the man of the world is likely to be warped by interest; the philosopher who takes 'a general abstract view' of characters and manners is apt to be left cold and unmoved'; but the historian, and his readers are interested enough in the characters to have a lively sense of virtue, without having any particular concern or interest to warp their judgment [ibid 391-392].

Hume's examination of the history of religion in the History illustrates both these points from the essay. Firstly, the history of religion presents him with materials aplenty to which he can apply his principles of the human mind. Secondly, in making events intelligible, such principles, he thinks, allow him to achieve a moral point of view.

The major part of this chapter, then, is concerned with Hume's explanation of the causes of the particular religious

beliefs that men hold; and the nature and effects of religious belief. I end, however, with a consideration of the Dialogues concerning Natural Religion. At first sight, it might seem quite unlikely that that work has much to do with principles of human nature. Is it not a work about what 'foundation in reason' theistic claims have [NHR 21]? Certainly it is. But I think it also displays Hume's belief that his science of man can explain how attempts to produce natural religion are bound to go.

## section 1

### the development of religion (A)

Near the beginning of the Natural History of Religion, Hume speaks of the 'natural progress of human thought' [NHR 24]. The way that his theoretical beliefs about the imagination enter into his account of this progress is exhibited in what he says about the transition from polytheism to theism.

Thus he says that there is the 'clear testimony of history' that men 'in ancient times' were polytheists. The farther, he says, that we 'mount up into antiquity, the more do we find mankind plunged into polytheism' [NHR 23]. Here is the 'historical' aspect of his conclusion. The other aspect is of course not a priori but consists in the employment of principles discovered from the study of man, in the belief that human nature is, in some ways, uniform. So it 'seems certain', that the multitude must first have a 'groveling and familiar notion of superior powers' before they progress to the idea of a 'perfect Being' [ibid 24]. What beliefs underlie this certainty of Hume's?

It was seen in earlier chapters that Hume considers the mind to possess a productive or projective disposition. And it is likely that Malebranche's writings played a role in the formation of Hume's thoughts about this disposition. Malebranche argues that the mind 'spreads itself externally' [Malebranche p.657]: we fancy that objects actually have the power that God alone possesses. Our tendency to worship leeks, to use one of his examples, is a consequence of original sin. Not to put too fine a point on it, we hide from God and we look instead to leeks. This tendency is 'one of the most deplorable consequences of original Sin' [ibid]. Like Hume, Malebranche finds in history evidence to support his conclusions. Appealing to Vossius' De idolatria, Malebranche writes:

'almost all people have adored the sun because they have all judged it to be the cause of the goods they enjoy. And if the Egyptians adored not only the sun, the moon, and the river Nile, whose overflow caused the fertility of their Country, but also went as far as the vilest animals..[it was]..because of some utility they derived from them' [Malebranche p.684].

Hume's analysis of the productive disposition, we saw, is founded on the way that certain relations facilitate the association of ideas in the imagination. Considering the wider audience Hume was aiming at, it is understandable that in the Natural History he does not discuss such an analysis. Nevertheless, he uses its results implicitly and faithfully. He writes of how man's productive or projective tendencies lead him

'to transfer to every object, those qualities, with which they are familiarly acquainted, and of which they are intimately conscious. We find human faces in the moon, armies in the clouds; and by a natural propensity, if not corrected by experience and reflection, ascribe malice or good-will to every thing, that hurts or pleases us' [NHR 29].

The child who yells at the rake that strikes him, will soon be corrected by his parents; he gains, in effect, a consolatory lesson in the language of causes. Philosophers make the same category of error when they ascribe to matter sympathies and antipathies [ibid 30]. But the religious go so far as to ascribe to 'unknown causes' 'thought and reason and passion' [ibid].

The passion that Malebranche understands as activating the imagination of the idolaters, is a love of that which does us good [Malebranche p.681]. But the passions that Hume discerns are more varied and are drawn from the idolater's beliefs about the society in which he lives. In this way, Hume can attempt to explain more than Malebranche does about the content of the idolater's beliefs. In fact, we shall see this interest of Hume

throughout his writings on religion, even up to the content of the Protestant religions.

Men would not 'see' faces in the moon unless they were drawn, as when they notice a great silvery glow, to look at it. We would not 'see' power were it not for the interest we have in certain constant conjunctions. As regards unknown causes, Hume writes:

'We hang in perpetual suspense between life and death, health and sickness, plenty and want; which are distributed amongst the human species by secret and unknown causes, whose operation is oft unexpected and always unaccountable' [NHR 28-29].

As the 'passions are kept in perpetual alarm by an anxious expectation of the events' so is the 'imagination...equally employed in forming ideas of those powers, on which we have so entire a dependence' [ibid 29]. And in a variation of the language of projection, Hume says of such causes that the 'active imagination of men' begins to 'clothe them in shapes...suitable to its natural comprehension' [NHR 47]. Now given the unforeseen events of life, there is thought to be a dependence on these powers: and it seems that it is for this reason that they do not take on the character of our family or friends, but those we associate with leaders. For our family and friends are not comparable to the forces on which our happiness depends. Whatever our difficulties at home, our family will not, unless we are very unlucky, deprive us of our food as droughts and severe taxes can. So the imagination,

'represents them to be sensible, intelligent beings, like mankind; actuated by love and hatred, and flexible by gifts and entreaties, by prayers and sacrifices. Hence the origin of religion: And hence the origin of idolatry or polytheism' [NHR 47].

Thus Hume seems to think that the nature of polytheistic belief reflects the primitive's assumptions about the political structure of his society. The thought is developed further when Hume describes the subsequent transition to theism. He speaks of the 'distribution of power and territory' among the gods: a god may have 'jurisdiction' in a particular nation;

'or, reducing heavenly objects to the model of things below, they may represent one god as the prince or supreme magistrate of the rest, who, though of the same nature, rules them with an authority, like that which an earthly sovereign exercises over his subjects and vassals' [NHR 43].

The primitives will suppose him to be pleased, like themselves, with praise and flattery; in this way they try and 'insinuate themselves into his favour' [ibid].

They swell up the 'titles of this divinity', each of them seeking to outdo the other, 'til at last they arrive at infinity itself' [ibid]. And this is how polytheism gives way to theism.

So it seems that Hume believes that the progress of religion is consequent upon the development of society. Those qualities with which the primitives are familiarly acquainted include dispositions which are only found in societies which have a political structure that involves the notion of a ruler: religion, therefore, is not possible in those societies which are able to function without a government [cf T539]. In such societies there would be no notion of dependence on a superior's decision which could be transferred, or projected, onto an unknown cause; nor, of course, would there be an understanding of the wiles of entreaty and flattery. For in such a society man lives through familial affections and conventions alone:

'Look out for a people, entirely destitute of religion: If you find them at all, be assured, that they are but a few degrees removed from brutes' [NHR 76].

There is another way in which man's development in society controls the content of religious belief. This is seen in the ethical aspect of the transition from polytheism to theism:

'The mind rises gradually, from inferior to superior: By abstracting from what is imperfect, it forms an idea of perfection. And slowly distinguishing the nobler parts of its own frame from the grosser, it learns to transfer only the former, much elevated and refined, to its own divinity' [NHR 24].

This includes transferring to the divinity the highest moral qualities available in his society. Thus in making a similar point in the Enquiry, Hume speaks of the augmenting of the Divinity's 'goodness and wisdom' [E I 19]. However, the 'rude untaught savage...has but faint conceptions of a general rule or system of behaviour' [E II 274n]. Such a person, therefore, is unable to progress from his polytheism.

## section 2

### the development of religion (B)

We have progressed so far as to reach monotheism. In this section, after briefly noting how Hume thinks a superstitious monotheism has its origins, I turn to the origin of that which he calls 'enthusiasm'.

When men swell their Deity so that he possesses the attributes of infinity, they cannot, being of a 'vulgar comprehension', keep to this conception for very long. For this reason, Hume says, 'inferior mediators or subordinate agents' are invented in order 'to interpose between mankind and their supreme deity' [NHR 47. These are 'demi-gods' and their presence marks the decline of pure theism into superstition. There is, however, no danger of a return to the democracy of polytheism; for the fear which was responsible for the invention of religion keeps men 'from imputing to [the Deity] the least shadow of limitation and imperfection' [NHR 48].

How does superstition give rise to that 'species of religion' which Hume calls 'enthusiasm' [G I 144]? The detached historian does not want to explain the success of the Reformation by appealing to the workings of Providence. Moreover, it 'owed not its success to reason and reflection' [H III 140]. A 'convenience of events' contributed to the attack on an establishment that was so 'hurtful to the peace and happiness of mankind' [ibid 136]. The path was taken, and the content of the new beliefs formulated, partly because of political opposition.

To be sure, he thinks that there are principles of human nature which explain the expression and the success of a set of theological principles such as characterise the Protestant churches. So he writes in the essay 'Of Superstition and

Enthusiasm', that though the 'mind of man' is subject to the terrors and anxiety that feed superstition, it is also prone to fits of 'elevation and presumption':

'In such a state of mind, the imagination swells with great, but confused conceptions, to which no sublunary beauties correspond...Hence arise raptures, transports, and surprising flights of fancy' [G I 145].

Such raptures are attributed to the Deity, and in a little time, the 'inspired person comes to regard himself as a distinguished favourite of the Deity' [ibid].

Nevertheless, this does not happen in a vacuum, and if we attend to his work on the Reformation in the History, we can see how Hume attempts to explain the behaviour of Luther, and the basic content of Protestant beliefs - those beliefs which Hume classifies as beliefs of 'enthusiasts'.

We can see Hume wanting to show how Luther's acts should be understood as being the products of his passions; and not as due to theological reasoning. This in fact is an application of his general thesis that the thoughts and feelings of the religious should be explained through appealing to non-rational connections, rather than be explained in terms of rational beliefs about God's will. In arguing thus, Hume relies on principles that have been given their theoretical foundation in the Treatise. More particularly, we can see Hume employing his 'discoveries' about, for example, sympathy and opposition in order to make his thesis plausible.

We can pick up the story with Hume's reporting of how, in 1521, Bishop Ariemboldi gave to the Dominicans the task of selling 'general indulgences'. This, Hume says, angered the 'Austin' friars of Saxony, who had previously been entrusted with their sale. The Dominicans, subsequently, praised the merits of 'general indulgences' to a quite unprecedented

degree. This robust attitude of the Dominicans, Hume suggests, stemmed not from any beliefs about the quality of the product, but from a desire 'to prove themselves worthy of the distinction conferred on them' [H III 138]. However, their panegyrics scandalised the people, not, Hume says, because the 'general indulgence' was any more ridiculous than any other indulgence, but because the people were not yet used to it; furthermore, the scandal was intensified with the sightings of Dominicans spending the monies collected in places that were more infamous than taverns. All this helped create the general sentiment upon which Luther was to build.

In the 'Author's Introduction' to the Natural History, Hume speaks of the 'accidents and causes' that direct the operations of religion [NHR 21]. And in Saxony, in 1521, there just happened to be a man 'qualified to take advantage of the incident' [H III 139]. In describing the manner of Luther's reactions, Hume displays how his understanding of events and the nature of religious behaviour and belief is guided by principles of the imagination.

What at first animated Luther, Hume says, were not beliefs about the institution of indulgences, nor about the notion of a 'general indulgence', nor about the authority of the Pope, nor indeed about any theological issue at all. What happened was that he resented the 'affront put upon his order' [ibid]. Thus Luther's first harangues were not directed against the sale of indulgences; but against abuses that he claimed were committed by his rivals, the Dominicans. The implication is that history would have been different if he had regained, for his party or group, the indulgence sub-contract. Instead of success here, Luther found opposition, which, as we have seen throughout the present work, is always so provocative to the Humean mind. Only when faced with opposition to the interests of his order did Luther start to attack the notion of an indulgence. And then he found the authority of the Pope used as a weapon against his

order, so he began to attack that too. And turning to his books to find reasons to justify his desires, he kept finding, as he went through them, some 'new abuse or error in the Church of Rome' [ibid].

Luther was encouraged by the receptions of his doctrines, and he soon found himself pursuing an object far more pleasing than the power to sell indulgences. He became quite incapable

'either from promises of advancement, or terrors of severity, to relinquish a sect, of which he was himself the founder, and which brought him a glory, superior to all others, the glory of dictating the religious faith and principles of multitudes' [ibid].

Thus what began as a political fight within a massive institution between factions, or religious orders, that had their own interests, ended in the founding of another institution with its own supporters and principles.

The content of the Protestants' religious belief, Hume is suggesting, was not established through spiritual and theological illumination, but through the leader's political acumen. In the same way as Luther had found 'reasons' in order to justify the protection of his interests against the Church, so too did he and his followers arrive at theological principles, which, distinguishing them from Rome, served to unite them as a body. The genesis and character of the intellectual foundations of Protestantism that is, had a cause no more august than did their rancorous insults as in their referring to the Pope as the antichrist, and Rome as the 'scarlet whore'.<sup>1</sup> About the wild expressions of the Protestants, Hume remarks that such

'expressions were better calculated to operate on the multitude than the most solid arguments' [H III 141].

The 'enthusiastic strain of devotion' arrived at by the leaders gave to their people a common identity through its contrast to the established religion [ibid]. It therefore allowed the forces of sympathy to work on men. Just as Luther and his colleagues feverishly sought out biblical citations which, they thought, cast doubt on the leadership of Rome, so

'in contradiction to the multiplied superstitions, with which that communion was loaded, they adopted an enthusiastic strain of devotion, which admitted of no observances, rites, or ceremonies, but placed all merit in a mysterious species of faith, in inward vision, rapture and ecstasy' [ibid].

We have seen in previous chapters how Hume considers that opposition to any passion, so long as it is not overwhelming opposition, will effect to increase the intensity of that passion; so too will the effects of sympathy. Such principles, together with his beliefs about the behaviour of groups in regard to their interests, underlie his account of the formation of the content of the Protestant religions. So describing the Lutherans he says:

'Excited by contest and persecution on the one hand, by success and applause on the other, many of the reformers carried to the greatest extremities their opposition to the Church of Rome' [ibid].

But how does Hume justify attempting to explain the behaviour of the religious through reference to worldly desires alone? This is the topic of the next section.



### section 3

#### hidden desires

Luther's actions are explained in the History solely in terms of his desire for fame, the injury done to his party etc. In the History such a reduction of the motives of the religious to worldly motives is a constant move. From the top, as in Hume's explaining the actions of Rome:

'the pope and his courtiers were foreigners to most of the churches which they governed; they could not possibly have any other object than to pillage the provinces for present gain' [H II 4];

to the bottom:

'the preachers, finding that they could not rival the gentry...in opulence and plenty, were necessitated to betake themselves to other expedients for supposing their authority. They affected a furious zeal for religion...' [H IV 45].

Yet if we were to explain, for example, a planning squabble within the board room of a space agency, we would not start by discounting any real belief in the existence of places to explore, and appeal instead only to local interests. Why, then, does Hume discount belief in an after life? The answer is that he believes that the actions of the religious can be far more economically explained in terms of their worldly desires. But in fact the matter is not as simple as this. For he seems to think that there is often some belief, even if it is only a little. The way I will discuss this is by looking again at his explanation of concrete events.

Hume's scepticism about professions of religious belief makes its first appearance in the Treatise. In speaking of how Catholics deplored the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre of

Protestants, who, he says, were in any case condemned by the Catholics to eternal punishment, he comments:

'All we can say in excuse for this inconsistency is, that they really do not believe what they affirm concerning a future state; nor is there any better proof of it than the very inconsistency' [T115].

In the Natural History of Religion, Hume suggests that man's assent in religion

'is some unaccountable operation of the mind between disbelief and conviction, but approaching much nearer to the former than to the latter' [NHR 60].

Does this mean that Hume considers that all religious behaviour in the clergy is hypocritical? I will argue that Hume's understanding of the nature of belief and the psychology of group pressures gives him a far more interesting view of the hypocrisy and self-deception involved than any belonging to the more vulgar detractors of religion. Ultimately, in fact, it is his work on the imagination that allows him to take seriously many of the protestations of commitment; and yet still explain religion as sui generis and explicable through a naturalistic method.

Different degrees of hypocrisy, for example, emerge in his discussion of the struggle between Henry II and St. Thomas à Becket. As for the King, Hume presents Henry's actions towards the 'haughty prelate' as chosen solely with a view to his temporal interests. Thus excommunication was feared by Henry, says Hume, not out of fear for his soul, but because it might 'make his subjects renounce their allegiance to him' [H I 329; cf H I 337]. After Becket's death, Henry saw that:

'the point of chief importance...was to convince the pope of his innocence; or rather, to persuade him, that he would reap greater advantages from the submissions of

England than from proceeding to extremities against that kingdom' [H I 335].

Therefore,

'as it was extremely his interest to clear himself from all suspicion, he took no care to conceal the depth of his affliction' [ibid 334].

There is never any suggestion that Henry was sincere in his very public atonement for any part he played in causing the death of Becket. Hume implies that this was unlikely when Becket had been a man, who, through 'violence and ingratitude', had long disquieted Henry's government; and who had 'been the object of his most inveterate animosity' [ibid 355].

In discussing the Civil War, Hume remarks that religious hypocrisy 'is of a peculiar nature' and it implies less falsehood than any other species of insincerity' [H VI 142]. If we now attend to what he says about Becket, we may be able to see what he means.

Hume begins by making clear that he thinks that Becket was an extremely ambitious man. As Chancellor, Becket exceeded any previous subject of England in the luxuriousness of his life [H I 307]; but once ensconced as *Archbishop of Canterbury*, his outward manner quickly changed:

'He wore sack-cloth next to his skin, which, by his affected care to conceal it, was necessarily the more remarked by all the world...His aspect wore the appearance of seriousness, and mental recollection, and secret devotion: And all men of penetration plainly saw, that he was meditating some great design, and that the ambition and ostentation of his character had turned itself towards a new and more dangerous object' [ibid 310].

In his opposition to Henry, he was 'animated by the present glory attending his situation' [H I 325]. As Archbishop, he is

described as engineering the 'highest veneration of the public towards his person and his dignity' [ibid 331]. And he met his death, Hume says, because he trusted entirely to the sacredness of his character [ibid 333]: an ironic comment in that Hume is speaking of Becket's belief that no one would dare to attack his august personage, whilst giving the appearance of speaking of Becket's faith. Hume also notes how Becket compared himself to Christ [ibid I 324]. Furthermore, the description of Becket's journey to Southwark evokes that of Christ's entry into to Jerusalem:

'men of all ranks and ages, came forth to meet him, and celebrated with hymns of joy his triumphant entrance' [ibid 330].

Yet, and in contrast to his evident belief about Henry, Hume does not consider Becket a hypocrite. All his letters evidence 'a most entire and absolute conviction of the reasons and piety of [his] own party' [H I 334]. Nevertheless, as with Henry, his animating passions were not religious; there is deception. He was, says Hume,

'able to cover, to the world and probably to himself, the enterprizes of pride and ambition, under the disguise of sanctity and of zeal for the interests of religion' [H I 333].

So the deceived included himself.

One part of Hume's explanation of how this is possible reminds us of the primary significance of the social dimension of human nature. Becket's case, Hume seems to think, is an example of how a man can hide from himself certain desires, partly through his great desire to win the approval of his party. Though in reality religious feelings act in fits and starts [D 222; G I 246n; NHR 60], the individual may come to believe that religion is his animating principle not least

because this is what others attribute to him.( For as we have seen more than once, it is a cardinal principle that we find it almost impossible not to believe that which our daily companions believe [T316]. Especially, of course, if it is in our interest to believe it.) And he has led them to this opinion by carefully presenting his character so as to exclude the sight of his real motives.

One reason why the opinion of others is so important for the religious believer is because there is no primary religious instinct or sentiment, as there is, for example, in morals. This is why Hume lays such emphasis on the need for the religious believer to feign. Because fervour is often absent, a

'habit of dissimulation is by degrees contracted: And fraud and falsehood become the predominant principle. Hence the reason of that vulgar observation, that the highest zeal in religion and the deepest hypocrisy, so far from being inconsistent, are often or commonly united in the same individual character' [D 222].

Henry did not need to deceive himself in order to satisfy any ambition. He was, after all, the King. But Becket had to act like an Archbishop, and was treated like an Archbishop, at least by the clergy and the people. In this way he expressed that ambition which was already discernible in his younger days.

So the explanation of the behaviour of Becket does not rest with the passion of ambition. Hume presents his behaviour as bound up with his membership of a group. The support and applause Becket won from the clergy was a consequence of his forwarding their interests. His usefulness here, depended on the effect he made outside the group: in this case, the effect on the populace, for whose support Becket and Henry fought. His success, therefore, depended on the opinion of others. Whether they were willing to forward the interests of the Church or not

depended on whether they believed in his authority. In the same way as the government of a state is ultimately founded on opinion [G I 110], so too is the government of the minds of men by the Church. Though 'men be much governed by interest', he says, 'yet even interest itself, and all human affairs, are governed by opinion' [G I 125].

Becket, according to Hume, directed his energies precisely towards this end. On the one hand, he took 'affected care' to conceal his sackcloth; on the other hand, whilst giving up much, he

'maintained, in his retinue and attendants alone, his ancient pomp and lustre, which was useful to strike the vulgar' [H I 309].

Nor did his service to the interests of the clergy go without recognition. Hume notes how after his murder, the clergy were not idle

'in magnifying the sanctity of Becket; in extolling the merits of his martyrdom; and in exalting him above all that devoted tribe, who, in several ages, had, by their blood, cemented the fabric of the temple' .[ibid 336].

Other saints had died only for the Christian doctrines, but

'Becket had sacrificed his life to the power and privileges of the clergy; and this peculiar merit challenged, and not in vain, a suitable acknowledgement to his memory' [ibid; cf ibid 254].

Hume's explanation of the social forces that so shape men, even when they are dead, gives him room to sympathise with individuals whilst lamenting their actions. Hume, one can see, is no great lover of St Thomas à Becket; and nor is this surprising when one considers his bigoted Calvinist upbringing. But the detachment at which he aims at least has the

consequence that he is not really interested in passing moral judgments on Becket; and in this he distinguishes himself from the historians and religionists of his day. His chief interest lies in the manner in which a man can be led to act against the interest of society. So he regrets that the gifted Becket was ever moved from the Chancellorship, when he would have otherwise continued to have 'directed the vehemence of his character to the support of law and justice'; instead, alas,

'of being engaged, by the prejudices of the times, to sacrifice all private duties and public connexions to tyes, which he imagined or represented, as superior to every civil and political consideration' [ibid 333].

Another instance of detachment in the historian and an attempt to display the forces that can lead to self-deception, is found in Hume's discussion of St. Joan of Arc. If the passions that caused Becket's actions were ambition and a love of fame and glory, Hume presents Joan as being animated by the love of her country and compassion for the beleaguered, handsome, and 'amiable' Dauphin. In Joan's case too, the justification she gave for her actions were reasons of religion; and, like Becket, she is described by Hume as sincere.

From the beginning, the force of sympathy had a powerful effect on Joan's actions: 'inflamed by the general sentiment', that the sovereign should be relieved of the distress caused by the English, her

'unexperienced mind, working day and night on this favourite object, mistook the impulses of passion for heavenly inspirations; and she fancied that she saw visions, and heard voices, exhorting her to re-establish the throne of France, and to expel the foreign invaders'[H II 397-398].

Hume makes it fairly clear that he thinks that sexual attraction was behind Joan's dreams. She belonged, after all,

to that sex 'whose generous mind know no bounds in their affections'; moreover, Charles was not only a Dauphin-in-distress, but a character 'strongly inclined to friendship and the tender passions' [H II 397]. It is no wonder, Hume remarks, that he became a hero for women [ibid].

Whilst the theme of Becket's sincerity was advanced through an artful contrast with Henry, that of Joan's is developed through a contrast with the actions of the King and his ministers. They thought that she could serve their interests. Cunningly, the

'more the King and his ministers were determined to give into the illusion, the more scruples they pretended' [ibid 399].

Some of those they brought in to examine Joan were indeed credulous. But enough care was taken by the King and his ministers to market Joan in a way which suggests that they were not prepared to put all their trust in God. So 'miraculous stories were spread abroad' in order to dominate the minds of the vulgar; and a more romantic impression was effected by tampering with Joan's Curriculum Vitae: before she was a servant in an inn: now she is a shepherdess [ibid]. For good measure, they decided to lop ten years off her age [ibid].

This strategy went not without an effect:

'A ray of hope began to break through that despair, in which the minds of all men, were before enveloped. Heaven had now declared itself in favour of France, and had laid bear its outstretched arm to take vengeance on her invaders' [ibid].

Hume, of course, did not see matters in this light; and not only because the French lost. He writes of how

'Few could distinguish between the impulse of inclination and the force of conviction; and none would submit to the trouble of so disagreeable a scrutiny' [ibid].

Thus it was hardly surprising that Joan, believed in by thousands of Frenchman, should continue to see herself a heavenly deliverer. But in the end, of course, the forces of interest, again under the guise of religion, led to her death.

So Hume never doubts her sincerity. Indeed, perhaps because she was a victim of the English, and French, and a woman, Hume goes so far to say that 'the more generous superstition of the ancients would have erected altars' to this 'admirable heroine'[ibid 410].

There is another reason for his sympathy. Joan was a victim of the clergy.

'where the interests of religion are concerned, no morality can be forcible enough to bind the enthusiastic zealot. The sacredness of the cause sanctifies every measure which can be made use of to promote it' [D222].

By the 'interests of religion' Hume means the worldly interests of the sect. And indeed, such imputations were familiar to his readers; though, of course, it was always members of another sect - usually the Catholics - who were the guilty ones.

Hume's appeal to the interests of the clergy to explain their actions, marks him as a child of his time; and he introduces a critique as unsympathetic as that offered by any philosophe. Just as it is the financial and political will of the sect that controls its actions, so too, he argues, are men drawn to the ministry, not through recognising the will of God, but 'as people are to other employments, by the views of profit'; moreover, the dissimulation that is necessary, for religion acts by fits and starts, greatly harms their moral

character; their ambition is to control the beliefs of the multitude, and as their livelihood depends on this, they brook no opposition to their beliefs; they are, like women, very revengeful creatures, because, deprived of the means of violence, they fancy themselves despised; they are more conceited than other men on account of the veneration they inspire in the ignorant multitude; they hate to be contradicted, as they know that their livelihood depends on their beliefs [G I 246n].

It was hinted in Chapter II that Hume considers that there is a significant parallel between the Pyrrhonians and the religious. Neither group believe in what they say they believe with anything like the solidity that beliefs in common life possess. In one sense the Pyrrhonian and the religious believer are both pretenders. There is, however, a vital difference between them in that religion can be dangerous; whilst the Pyrrhonism is more a matter for humour [cf T272; E I 160]. In the following section, on toleration, we will see how Hume attempts to provide a theoretical underpinning for what he considers the wisest way for a magistrate to attempt to lessen the dangers of religion.

## section 4

### toleration

In this section I examine further Hume's work on the causes of religious behaviour, and argue that his theory of the imagination gives him a new and interesting perspective on religious toleration.

In the Dialogues Philo comments that a 'wise magistrate' should try to 'preserve a very philosophical indifference' to all religious sects, trying especially to restrain the 'pretensions of the prevailing sect' [D 223]. Or else he may expect endless quarrels. I shall approach the matter through exploring certain elements in his analysis of intolerance, beginning with his discussion of religious martyrdom.

An explanation of the fact that men appear to die for their faith is demanded from a theory of religious behaviour that holds that 'the conviction of the religionists, in all ages, is more affected than real' [NHR 60]. Hume finds his answer in the way that religious belief is strengthened through sympathy and esteem. 'It is in vain', he comments, in describing the behaviour of Walter Mill, a priest martyred in St. Andrews, a city once given over to lively theological disputes, 'for men to oppose the severest punishment to the united motives of religion and public applause' [H IV 21; cf H III 433]. Relatedly, Hume writes of George Fox:

'When he had been sufficiently consecrated in his own imagination, he felt that the fumes of self-applause soon dissipate, if not continually supplied by the admiration of others; and he began to seek proselytes' [H VI 143; cf H IV 14].

The esteem that the martyrs feed on can produce a constancy at the stake 'that appears almost supernatural' [H III 433; cf H IV 21].

Hume believes that it is the very weakness of religious belief that gives to sympathy such a comparatively powerful role. Belief is a lively idea related to a present impression. But there is little liveliness in a belief, say, about the afterworld, in comparison to the beliefs of common life. One who has visited the Holy Land, Hume says in the Treatise, will be a stronger believer in the miraculous events told of in the gospels:

'The lively idea of the places passes by an easy transition to the facts, which are suppos'd to have been related to them by contiguity, and increases the belief by increasing the vivacity of the conception' [T110- 111].

And sympathy, as we have already seen, also works by increasing the vivacity. The belief in the glory of a death for religion that the spectators at a burning have, inspires the one who is actually going to suffer. Naturally, he may begin to doubt the wisdom of his course; but in the sight of his fellow believers he believes again. Moreover, he naturally seeks praise from those he respects; a recantation would be a betrayal of them. Thus Hume seems to think that in a very real way the ordinary believer is as responsible for the deaths of martyrs as those who actually condemn him. But certainly he believes that such religious belief would wither away were it not for the artifice of those who have an interest in upholding it [G IV 401].

Hume's most extensive discussion of the sources of intolerance appears in his reconstruction of the arguments of Pole and Gardiner, as to whether heretics ought to be burnt.

The weak hold that religious belief has on the imagination, that makes one's brethren blessed, also has the consequence that it is made still weaker through the doubt of others. When faced with someone who denies a belief that we are perfectly assured of, we are likely to treat their doubt with contempt.

'But while men zealously maintain what they neither clearly comprehend, nor entirely believe, they are shaken in their imagined faith by the opposite persuasion, or even doubt of other men' [H III 431-2].

So they 'vent on their antagonists that impatience, which is the natural result of so disagreeable a state of the understanding'. [H III 432]. This anger leads them to find reasons that makes the passion not only forgivable, but praiseworthy. And if they can represent their antagonists not only as impious, but as a danger to civil government, then they 'can no longer be restrained from giving uncontroled scope to vengeance and resentment' [ibid].

It might be argued that severity from the beginning would deter all heresy, and so prevent the anger and resentment arising. Hume says to this that there will always be differences about questions that of all others are the 'least subjected to the criterion of human reason' [ibid]. For 'events' will occur that produce 'a faction amongst the clergy' and so give rise to differences of opinion [ibid].

Nietzsche once spoke of the 'world-historical stupidity' of all persecutors for bestowing on their opponents the honour of martyrdom [Nietzsche (1) p.171]. Hume shares this view. Furthermore, it is grounded in his earlier work: the desire for fame and approval, a considerable motive in many of our actions [T316], will only serve to stimulate the persecuted. Moreover, the melancholy that the fear of torture and death introduces into society makes men even readier for superstition. And, because of an association of ideas in the imagination, 'men

naturally pass from hating the persons of their tyrants, to a more violent abhorrence of their doctrines' [H III 433].

In the midst of dispute there is a flux between belief and doubt. The opponent of a believer will have the effect of weakening his belief. But the Principle of the Conversion of Passion ensures that the opposition and uncertainty that the opponent brings, serves to increase the belief. The effort that the imagination makes to overcome the uncertainty 'rouzes the spirits, and gives an additional force to the passion' [T422]. The fact that the person will belong to a group, and will be opposed by a group, intensifies the various effects; resolve is strengthened by the forces of sympathy [cf H V 256; H VI 182]; and, relatedly, by the desire to emulate [cf H V 12; H V 342].

But if a study of the imagination aids us in finding the sources of rancour, it can also help us find the path to peace:

'Open the door to toleration, mutual hatred relaxes among the sectaries; their attachment to their particular modes of religion decays...and the same man, who, in other circumstances, would have braved flames and tortures is induced to change his sect from the smallest prospect of favour and advancement, or even from the frivolous hope of becoming more fashionable in his principles' [H III 433].

Security diminishes the passions 'because it removes that uncertainty, which encreases them' [T421]. The result is that the mind languishes for a while, and the energies expended on religion become available for use elsewhere. Thus the security introduced by a strong magistrate is the best method of answering a special case of belief which is 'more affected than real'. The decrease in the sound of the opposition's drums will mean that men will not adhere to their own sect with the same degree of tenacity; the disappearance of terror will have the effect that the reliance on leaders will weaken, and with it, the strength of their own interest governed dominion; finally, the breaking down of the desire to gain the esteem of members

of one's own sect gives way to the hope of gaining the esteem  
of all.<sup>2</sup>

## section 5

### false religion

My overriding concern in this chapter has been to show how, in the field of religion, Hume presents his thesis that man is not to be understood as being determined by reason, but by the passions. The passions, in turn, are dependent upon the association of ideas in the imagination. It is in this way, Hume believes, that we can explain the nature of religious belief: it is not, that is, to be explained in terms of reason and insight, or Providence.

What I now want to do is to provide some background to this view. In section 4 of Chapter III, when discussing Hume's general views on reason and the passions, I suggested that if we are interested in the development of his views on reason and the passions, then for all the importance of Bayle, we cannot afford to ignore Malebranche; this is on account of the place the latter gives to the imagination in his account of action. However, I mentioned, in that discussion, Bayle's special importance for understanding the development of Hume's views on religious belief. And I will now argue that *Hume's account of the misunderstanding that he thinks Christians labour under* (his development in the area of 'religious' behaviour of the idea that man is a slave to his passions) was made possible by, on the one hand, the writings of Bayle; and on the other hand, by the pre-eminent English student of passionate man in the early 18th century, Shaftesbury.

We know for certain that Hume thought Bayle's Dictionnaire Historique et Critique particularly helpful for understanding the Treatise [cf L I 12]. But the book that is most relevant to our purposes is Pensées diverses sur la Comète [1683].

The notion that man is a slave to the passions, is at the heart of Bayle's analysis of religion as it has commonly been found. Without the benefit of grace, all behaviour is determined by self-love: ordinary religious practices, therefore, are just another opportunity for man to express his selfishness. For it is the selfish passions that determine fallen man. So in the Pensées, Bayle writes:

'The Jew...Christian and Infidel...Men who differ in almost all things else, except the general Notion of Humanity...exactly agree with regard to which passions we find in them' [Bayle (2) p.274].

'Whence can this proceed', Bayle asks,

'but from hence That the true Principle of Man's Actions (I except those in whom the Grace of the Holy Spirit operates efficaciously) is nothing else than the Complexion, the natural Inclination for Pleasure, a taste for particular objects, a desire of pleasing others...or some other Disposition resulting from the ground of our corrupt Nature' [ibid p.275].

The ostensible reason for propounding such conclusions was the question of whether the comet which appeared over Europe in 1680 should be taken to have any theological significance. This allowed Bayle the opportunity of examining the relation of speculative opinion to action.

The idea that the comet was sent by God in order to correct the vicious inclinations of man, says Bayle, is absurd. This is not only because, as there have always been comets, it would follow, he says, that in pagan times God wanted to convert men to paganism. More importantly, man is not the reasonable creature that he pretends to be. The view that he is such a creature naturally leads men to think that were it not for the sanctions of heaven and hell, the passions would be unrestrained. It is this view, then, that leads men to say that a society of atheists is impossible.

In fact, says Bayle, that which prevents men from destroying each other is nothing other than the laws. And far from superstitious belief providing an indispensable necessity to the moral life, it only serves to increase the opportunities for vice:

'For the passions themselves are so ingenious at making Representations that they find matters of Enjoyment in the very things design'd for their Mortification. What can be prettier than a Festival? [ibid p.277].

Unless one's heart is truly converted to God, and one 'is sanctify'd by the Graces of the Holy Spirit, the Knowledge of God and of a Providence, is too loose a Rein for the Passions' [ibid p.262]. Certainly, rulers know how to use religion: an idolatrous religion will tend 'to fix men to the Free-hold, make 'em of a piece with their City-Walls, and struggle lustily if there [sic] be attacked' [ibid p.262]. But it does not make them 'wise nor vertuous' [ibid]. And in so far as they do live moral lives, then this is because of 'Human Justice'[ibid p.329] and the desire for praise [ibid p.367].

These, he says, are the conclusions of experience [ibid p.271]. Perhaps if one considers matters 'in their Ideas & Metaphysical Abstractions' one might arrive at a conclusion that the sense of God corrects the vicious inclinations of man. But then why is it that if a people from another world had to spend time among Christians, they would so clearly arrive at the conclusion that 'the People here did not walk according to the light of their Conscience' [ibid]?

Bayle concludes that man is not determined to act by 'general Notions, or Views of his Understanding, but by the present reigning Passion of his Heart' [ibid p.279]; that men may believe and yet be dissolute; and that the chief influence of religion is bad: it fills us with

'a certain unaccountable Fervour in the practice of outward Acts of Religion: in a persuasion, that these with a Publick profession of the Faith, are a sufficient Bulwark against the Consequences of our Sins and will one day avail to our Pardon [ibid p.290].

Such conclusions, which contradict the Cartesian picture of rational man, would seem likely to be very important for understanding the genesis of Hume's work. But the general importance of Bayle's reasonings for Hume should not hide their role in influencing Hume's understanding of the relation between specifically religious speculative opinion and action. The example that Bayle showed in cutting through the self-consciousness of a society was certainly undertaken with a very different aim. Bayle wanted to make 'Man sensible of his extreme Depravity' so that he would pray for Grace [ibid 323]. But the exercise in teaching man about himself that Hume undertook ultimately leads to the conclusion that there is no reason to make such a contrast. The experimental method, furthermore, leads Hume to reject the thought that the religious believe in a way comparable to the beliefs of common life. The imagination does not rise to such solidity. And this, we have seen, is a chief reason why the ruling passions of religious believers can be so dangerous. An examination of this, however, must be founded on a study of the imagination: to be sure Bayle shows the way by turning to the passions of men: but precisely because he himself is working with Augustinian ideas, however much he appeals to experience, his work is flawed.

Now we saw in section 2 of Chapter III that Hume does not accept the Augustinian picture of man as a selfish creature that Calvinists such as Bayle propounded. On the other hand, we have seen in this chapter that he thinks that the forces of religion can unleash a selfishness that can tear society apart. What I am suggesting, then, is that the powerful attack (in the language of the passions) on religion that Hume makes was made

possible for him through Bayle's attack on idolatry (Catholicism) carried out in the name of Christianity (Calvinism). A 17th century analysis of human nature carried out for sectional religious purposes, that is, provided a crucial influence on the development of the greatest 18th century attack on all vulgar religion. What I now want to suggest is that this step was not made all at once; and that Shaftesbury played an important role in the development of a theory of religious behaviour that allowed Hume to impute to the religious that selfishness which they discern in the damned.

Shaftesbury was in fact friends with Bayle. He once persuaded, Elisabeth Labrousse says, the austere Bayle to accept the present of a watch [Labrousse p.46]. And when the latter died Shaftesbury wrote to Basagne:

'I must own my private loss makes me think less of that which the public has sustained by the death of so great a man. This weakness friendship may excuse, for whatever benefit the world in general may have received from him, I am sure no one in particular owed more to him than I, or knew his merit better' [Shaftesbury (2) p.372].

But Shaftesbury's conception of the affections of man are diametrically opposed to his friend's picture - at least as regards man in general. For in a crucial move Shaftesbury suggests that the selfishness which Bayle claims is at the heart of all men, excepting those who have received the Grace of the Holy Spirit, is more likely to be found in religious enthusiasts. Those religionists who can escape the attribution of selfishness completely are not the Calvinist elect, but the adherents of what Shaftesbury called 'True Religion'.

Shaftesbury argued that the principles of Christianity express a love of God and virtue for their own sakes. In practice, though, when someone is brought up with the sanctions

of heaven and hell imprinted upon him, his actions will be determined by the passion of fear. Furthermore, self-love, that 'principle' which nature has given man for the good of himself and the good of society, is thus fostered by such religion to an unnatural and debilitating degree. Self-love is made stronger 'every day' by the contemplation of the alternatives of heaven and hell. And,

'if the habit be such as to occasion in every particular, a stricter attention to self-good, and private interest; it must insensibly diminish the affections towards public good or the interest of society; and introduce a certain narrowness of spirit, which, (as some pretend) is peculiarly observable in the devout persons and zealots of almost every religious persuasion' [Shaftesbury (1) I p.269; cf *ibid* I p.274-5].

Now this disturbance in the natural harmony of man's affections, he says, occasions a misunderstanding of the nature of virtue. Christianity has corrupted the idea of virtue through presenting it as valuable *because of the consequence* to the agent - over and above the 'natural advantages' of virtue. Christianity makes virtue into a 'mercenary...thing' [*ibid* (1) I p.66]. There, virtue is presented as a means to satisfy the agent's own ends. Yet acts, he argues, performed from such motives are not in themselves meritorious. And any schema that contradicts this as Christianity does, thereby displays a misunderstanding of religion as well as of virtue:

'Whilst God is beloved only as the cause of private good, He is no otherwise beloved than as any instrument or means of pleasure by any vicious creature' [*ibid* (1) I p.269].

Furthermore, the more there is of the affection towards 'private good', then the less room there is for the other sort towards goodness in it-self' [*ibid*].

Hume agrees, we have seen, that religion is a force for selfishness. But he disagrees as well as agrees with

Shaftesbury's reasons for saying this. He disagrees in so far as he thinks that the religious person does not really believe in the afterlife: so that the behaviour that Shaftesbury interpreted as denoting a long term plan is really all about serving desires for things in this world. Nevertheless, Hume does sometimes give the impression of agreeing with Shaftesbury that religious people do believe in the afterlife, and they are made more selfish by it. For example, in the Dialogues, Philo virtually echoes some words of Shaftesbury noted above:

'The steady attention alone to so important an interest as that of eternal salvation is apt to extinguish the benevolent affections, and beget a narrow, contracted selfishness. And when such a temper is encouraged, it easily eludes all the general precepts of charity and benevolence' [D 222].

A critic might say that Hume wants to have his cake and eat it. He might reply that human nature is very inconstant. He never denied that there was any belief in the afterlife: just that it is natural for the believer and his observers to grossly overestimate its significance.

Whatever their differences, Bayle, Shaftesbury, and Hume were all writing against an intellectual background where, far from belief in an afterlife being thought of as a danger to moral rectitude, it was considered as an essential element of that rectitude. In the next section I want to discuss further how his conception of the imagination enters into Hume's rejection of this view; after this I will turn again to his views on Christianity.

section 6

the imagination, rectitude, and Christianity

In Hume's Philosophy of Religion, J.C.A.Gaskin quotes a typical eighteenth century argument as to the necessity of belief in the afterlife; it comes in fact from the first review of the Dialogues:

'But suppose that Mr Hume's principles are let loose among mankind, and generally adopted, what will then be the consequence? Will those who think they are to die like brutes, ever act like men? Their language will be, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. When men are once led to believe that death puts a final period to their existence, and are set free from the idea of their being accountable creatures, what is left to restrain them from the gratification of their passions but the authority of the laws?' [Gaskin p.201].

The same argument in fact, as Gaskin notes, is found in the Enquiry. As a reply to his sceptical friend's attack on the design argument 'Hume' says that

'men reason not in the same manner you do, but draw many consequences from the belief of a divine Existence, and suppose that the Deity will inflict punishments on vice, and bestow rewards on virtue, beyond what appears in the ordinary course of nature. Whether this reasoning of theirs be just or not, is no matter. Its influence on their life and conduct must still be the same' [E I 147].

His interlocutor is not given a reply to this. But there is a principle of the imagination which might have been used, though, it would undoubtedly have been referred to in the Enquiry, as a 'principle of human nature'. This is the principle which we have seen employed many times: for instance in Hume's discussions of justice, of government, and of sympathy. It appears as part of Philo's answer to Cleanthes' claim that 'The doctrine of a future state is so strong and necessary a security to morals that we ought never to abandon

it' [D 219]. Finite and temporary rewards and punishments, Cleanthes says, affect behaviour: ergo, infinite and eternal rewards and punishments will affect behaviour more [ibid 219-20].

Philo disagrees: the 'inference is not just' [ibid 220]. And in a passage that was scored out in 1776 he says that certainly, if we consider the natural self-love of man, we would expect such considerations not only to have a great effect, but to be 'absolutely irresistible and infallible in their operation' [ibid 220n]. For what could 'reasonably' counterbalance such motives, 'even for a moment'? He continues:

'But this is not found to hold in reality; and therefore, we may be certain that there is some other principle of human nature, which we have here overlooked, and which diminishes, at least, the force of these motives' [ibid].

This principle is nothing other than 'the attachment which we have to present things, and the little concern which we discover for objects so remote and uncertain' [ibid 220].

It is this principle, as we saw in Chapter V, that makes the rules of justice so precarious an invention. We are likely to fall prey to the temptation of filching our neighbour's gooseberries because the impression of the gooseberries is more forceful than the idea of the anarchy that may follow the deed. Ultimately, this is due to the fact that we are not, pace Cleanthes, other philosophers, and men of his day, governed by 'reason'. We are not reasonable about gooseberries, and nor about heaven and hell. No doctrine of original sin is needed to explain this. But nor can we just say that this is because we are beings of the passions rather than reason. Though there were reasons for Hume not wanting to lay out the details of a theory of almost forty years old, partly perhaps, because he had some doubts about the theory itself as well as doubts about the wisdom of offering it to the previously ungrateful public,

he nevertheless gives implicit credence to that theory. The theory which explains that we are determined by the association of ideas in the imagination. So in discussing the need for government in Book III of the Treatise, he says that

'men are mightily govern'd by the imagination, and proportion their affections more to the light, under which any object appears to them, than to its real and intrinsic value' [T534].

This is because of the contiguity of the object under consideration. The powerful impression that the temptation creates, enlivens the idea of pleasure in a way that counterbalances any effect from the promise of heavenly felicity.

The comparison with politics may be continued for a moment. We saw in Chapter V that the prospect of immediate advantages in government, even within an established constitution like the British, may lead men to neglect the longer term advantages of public order. This, of course, is due not least to the phenomenon of sympathy. But when this happens, reasons are found to 'justify' their actions; reasons, a fortiori, that are couched in the language of the public interest. So we saw Hume's interest in the phenomenon of faction and hypocrisy.

And we also saw this in earlier sections of the present chapter. For the point is not just the negative one that the prospect of an afterlife is unnecessary for moral rectitude. Hume believes that the language of religion will be used to justify actions consequent upon the great desires had for 'present things'. Like attention from one's Dauphin; riches and power; economic dominion in Africa; revenge against the United States; revenge in Northern Ireland; land on the West Bank; power in Nicaragua; and, no doubt, making a large Scottish philosopher suffer. So after being presented with arguments for

and against toleration, Hume says that Mary concurred with the latter as more agreeable to her 'cruel bigotry'. He continues:

'England was soon filled with scenes of horror...which prove, that no human depravity can equal revenge and cruelty, covered with the mantle of religion' [H III 434-5; cf H V 342].

It is in this context, I want to argue, that we should understand the core of Hume's attack on religion. It is not enough to see it, as it is invariably seen, as a series of sharp points which may indeed find better expression elsewhere. What is so extraordinary about it is the way that Hume provides a sort of genealogy of deception. To consider aright certain 'criticisms' of religion that are found in Hume's writings, for example, the idea that religion causes misery through terror; the idea that the 'monkish virtues' are useless; we should not see them as more or less arbitrary conclusions of a free thinker. They are part of a vision founded on a sophisticated theory of human nature. This may be further seen if we attend to what he says about the history and character of Christianity.

Now I suggested in Chapter I that Hume seems to think that Christianity has played its role in corrupting man's conception of himself as regards the belief that, unlike the animals who are governed by their passions, he is governed by reason. There is another corruption, he holds, as regards the content of morality. Thus in the Enquiry, after giving his account of that in which 'Personal Merit' consists, he comments that

'it seems a reasonable presumption, that systems and hypotheses have perverted our natural understanding, when a theory, so simple and obvious, could so long have escaped the most elaborate examination' [E II 268-9].

So how could men be led to reject a 'natural' system? To answer this we must first note his view that, in general, sects

will seek to please their Gods, not by virtue, but by 'frivolous observances, by intemperate zeal, by rapturous extasies, or by the belief of mysterious and absurd opinions' [NHR 70]. Why should this be so? If the Deity is perfect, he should be pleased with virtue alone. The reason Hume says is that in virtue 'a superstitious man' finds nothing which can be held to be performed for the sake of the Deity: virtue is what we owe to society. So,

'any practice, recommended to him, which either serves no purpose in life, or offers the strongest violence to his natural inclinations; that practice he will the more readily embrace, on account of those very circumstances, which should make him absolutely reject it' [ibid 72; emphasis mine].

I shall now try and see how Hume thinks this thought applies to Christianity. I noted in section 6 of the previous chapter how Hume places great emphasis for understanding the character of Christianity on the fact that in its early years it was a sect with principles 'directly opposite' to those of the 'polite part of the world' [G I 131]. By this latter phrase he means, of course, Rome. And the Romans 'despised the nation that first broached this novelty' [ibid]. It seems that he thought that because Israel was more or less in a condition of slavery, that Christianity was less content with distinguishing itself by means of more frivolous principles. For, unlike the religion of the ancients, it does not sit 'light on men's minds' [NHR 65]. It seems, then, that this product of a 'nation' distinguished itself from the moral principles of another nation - that is, Rome. If it had not contradicted these principles as a way of affirming itself, it would not have such a hold.

This reading would be consistent with Hume's belief that in a sense, Christianity has a tendency to malignly invert. This

may be seen if we consider for a moment what he has to say about the virtue of courage. ( And we can see that his phrase 'the corruption of the best things gives rise to the worst' [NHR 51], is not merely rhetoric). Understandably, he contents himself with attacking the Catholics and Mohammedanism:

'The heroes in paganism correspond exactly to the saints in popery, and holy dervises in MAHOMETANISM. The place of HERCULES, THESEUS, HECTOR, ROMULUS, is now supplied by DOMINIC, FRANCIS, ANTHONY, and BENEDICT. Instead of the destruction of monsters, the subduing of tyrants, the defence of our native country; whippings and fastings, cowardice and humility, abject submission and slavish obedience, are become the means of obtaining celestial honours among mankind' [NHR 52].

Now my point is not indeed that Hume was interested in installing in his readers a reverence for the martial virtues. Nor indeed am I denying that he perceived a considerable overlap between the values of Rome and those of Christianity; and nor that he would not have favoured many of the latter's in so far as they conflicted with the former's. However, if one is faced with a tyrant, or indeed a monster, then the right thing to do is to fight. And such was the character given to their heroes by the Romans and Greeks. Hume suggests that the Christian heroes did not whip monsters; they whipped themselves. They did not subdue tyrants, but slavishly submitted. They did not show courage and defend their lands, but showed cowardice. These, then, were the examples held up by the priests. But the influence of religion goes further. If one has written a fine play one should be proud of it and accept praise; and if one has contributed to the welfare of society, one should be proud of that and not pretend that one is not. But Christianity, he says, decries as 'purely pagan' 'intrepidity', 'ambition', 'love of glory', 'magnanimity' and all the virtues that 'have plainly a strong mixture of self-esteem in them' [T600]. Certainly, though, 'the world naturally esteems a well-regulated pride' [ibid]. This is 'natural', for

if we elevate humility above all else we deprive ourselves of a great propulsion to glorious deeds; and we may also drive men to misrepresent their real feelings of pride.

One way to consider Hume's understanding of this tendency of Christianity to invert is to see him noting Christianity thriving on opposition.<sup>3</sup> In discussing in the Treatise the way that opposition has a tendency to invigorate passions, Hume remarks that this is 'why we naturally desire what is forbid' [T 421]. This, then, would help explain how men may come to hold beliefs that are either in 'direct opposition to morality' or else are at least a distraction from their duties [D 222]. Christianity is attractive because we are not fitted for it. It is attractive because it is unattractive. It is attractive, that is to say, on account of the very difficulty of accepting moral values so unnatural to man. On this reading, men not only sometimes look for opposition from others, but also within themselves. The Christian, Hume thought, is indeed at war with the 'flesh'. But we should understand, as it were, the mechanics of this not in the language of Augustine; but through the vagaries of the imagination. This, I suggest, is the way that the Principle of the Conversion of Passion enters into his explanation of how the 'natural' system that he pretends to uncover, could be so long hidden from men. We associate, perhaps, the idea of transgression with the Christian doctrine of original sin. Hume, however, seems to have thought that Christianity not only preaches about transgression: it lives by it.

Yet how far does it live by it? Here we come back to the weakness of religious belief. It is this that creates so much of the character of religion. This is the reason why interest rules and the virtues take second place. Just as it is the attachment that we have to what is near that makes government necessary [T 535]; so too is it the attachment to earthly delights that leads to the hypocrisy of the religious.

As for Christianity, the great contrast between their moral principles and Roman and Greek principles, Hume remarks, led Machiavelli to say that the doctrines of the Christian religion

'which recommend only passive courage and suffering, had subdued the spirit of mankind, and had fitted them for slavery and subjection' [NHR 52].

Hume comments that Machiavelli's observation is one

'which would certainly be just, were there not many other circumstances in human society which controul the genius and character of a religion' [NHR 52]

So while they profess principles which would lead them into slavery, the weakness of religious belief is such that they find ways to satisfy their natural sense of morality and their other passions. The 'circumstances' include those we have already noted. For example, the influence of faction; passions which rule, such as ambition in Becket; and in general, the way that the passions are served by religion. And the result is not a slavish mentality; though there will be extended exercises in 'humility', especially amongst the clergy. In discussing the horrors of the Crusades Hume exclaims:

'So inconsistent is human nature with itself! And so easily does the most effeminate superstition ally, both with the most heroic courage, and with the fiercest barbarity!' [H I 250].

That curious mechanism, the imagination, is I have argued, at the centre of Hume's explanation of this inconsistency. He has, that is, adopted a different perspective on the rule of the passions from that given by Calvin, Malebranche, and Bayle, who all saw this rule as a consequence of the Fall. Crudely speaking, it appears that the the experimental study of human nature has replaced St. Augustine. All of these writers referred to this rule; and considering the early influence of

Calvin on Hume, we need hardly be surprised at Hume's fascination in finding ways to deny what the believer hardly dares to believe: that he is one of the elect and acting in a godly manner. Hume does this through showing how their behaviour is best explained in terms of the imagination directing the passions.

He agrees, then, that man is not guided by reason: but this is not on account of the Fall. Though if this chapter is broadly correct, Hume might say that the temptation to reach for what is forbidden - opposition rather than the devil enlivening our passions - has indeed a permanent significance for man. It should be understood in terms of overstepping the limits of reason; and also trying to make virtues out of what are at best morally insignificant acts, and at worst, vices.

## section 7

### the Dialogues (A)

A theme, not to say paradox, of previous sections has been Hume's interest in the weakness of religious belief. Human beings, he seems to think, cannot stand too much unreality, in the sense of trying to order their lives through 'God's will'. But the most economic explanation of this will not involve a reference to the Fall, but a study of the practice of religion together with other beliefs, such as political beliefs, and the means through which we arrive at them. The way Hume chose to present his answer, we have seen, is in terms of a 'principle of the imagination'. In this way he attempts to explain why men yield to their desires for riches, power, not to mention the love of one's Dauphin. The same principle, moreover, explains why others, though they are church goers, are hardly affected by religion. Hume's faith in this principle, undoubtedly arises from its generality. One of the best descriptions of it, for example, is found in his discussion of the origin of government. He writes:

'men are mightily govern'd by the imagination, and proportion their affections more to the light, under which any object appears to them, than to its real and intrinsic value. What strikes upon them with a strong and lively idea commonly prevails above what lies in a more obscure light...[we]...yield to the sollicitations of our passions, which always plead in favour of whatever is near and contiguous...This is the reason why men so often act in contradiction to their known interest' [T534-535].

Yet it is not only, Hume thinks, the religious who are influenced by non-rational factors in the question of religion. So is the sceptic. How? This is one of the questions I want to discuss in this section, which revolves around the Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion. I will argue that the Dialogues loses much of its mystery if we consider it less as a vehicle

for the arguments of Hume in the guise of Philo, and more as an artful work in which Hume investigates not only the existence and nature of God, but also the nature of religious belief. Though I am not offering a complete examination of the Dialogues, I want to suggest that we will not understand them unless we see in them the continued working out of the same basic picture of the way the human mind works which Hume arrived at almost forty years before they were published.

What of the great dispute over Philo's words in Part XII? The problem is that there, Philo seems to agree with the conclusion of the design argument which Cleanthes has been propounding, and which, hitherto, he seems to have been attempting to undermine. Certainly, as we shall see, the 'theism' at which he arrives is very far from any conclusion that Cleanthes would like to prove. Nevertheless, Philo says of himself that

'notwithstanding...my love of singular arguments, no one has a deeper sense of religion impressed on his mind, or pays more profound adoration to the divine Being, as he discovers himself to reason, in the inexplicable contrivance and artifice of nature' [D 214].

Few words from Hume have engendered so much commentary.

One answer to this 'inconsistency' is that this is a sign of Hume accepting that belief in design is a 'natural belief'. This is the answer of R.J. Butler [Butler passim]. That is, it is a belief which may not have rational grounds, but which is unavoidable; like, for example, belief in the external world. This would explain why all the disputants of the Dialogues affirm God's existence; and, furthermore, it would explain why Hume himself affirms this. J.C.A. Gaskin, in Hume's Philosophy of Religion, has usefully collected together the following statements from Hume that would seem to support this interpretation:

'From accusing me of believing nothing, they now charge me with believing everything. I hope you will be perswaded, that the Truth lyes in the middle betwixt these Accusations' [NL 231].

In 1743 Hume wrote of his objection to:

'every thing we commonly call Religion, except the Practice of Morality & the Assent of the Understanding to the Proposition that God exists' [ibid 13].

In the Introduction to the Natural History of Religion he writes:

'The whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author; and no rational enquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion' [NHR 21; cf 24, 26, 38, 42, 75].

If Hume thought that belief in God was a natural belief, such remarks would be explicable notwithstanding his fierce criticisms of theistic arguments.

However attractive the natural belief interpretation may seem at first sight, it has insoluble difficulties. As Gaskin points out, Hume does not think that belief in God is universal; unlike, say, belief in the external world. Nor is it a precondition of common life: some believe and some do not [NHR 21; Gaskin p.129-130].

Perhaps, then, Philo's words are a sign of an unacknowledged levity within Hume's philosophy? This would lend credence to Dr. Johnson's belief that, in general, Hume was not sincere. Only such a view could reasonably support the approach of one commentator who says: 'The conclusion being disconnected from the argued content of the Dialogues, I shall ignore it' [Jessop p.220].

Instead of this I will argue that Philo accepts the minimal theism of Part XII; and if one reason for this is that Hume is aware of the force of a 'natural propensity' to believe in design; another is the same factor of education that leads Pamphilus to prefer, against the conclusions of reason, the arguments of Cleanthes, his tutor. But whereas Pamphilus is the passive receptacle of the mighty influence of this propensity and education, Philo's awareness of their influence leads him to decide to concur with their conclusion; though of course, this is his minimal theism and not Christianity. He does not think that it is worth fighting against the forces of education, habit, and inclination.

And does this represent Hume's position? That Philo 'represents Hume throughout' is the view of most commentators. However, I shall argue that Philo helps us to some extent in the question of the views of his creator; and his creator's views, help us to some extent in understanding Philo's views.

\* \* \* \* \*

I will now try and show that the structure of the Dialogues is in a happy harmony with the content of its arguments. I start with the former. What is the significance of Hume's employment of the dialogue form? Unless we understand this, it seems unlikely that we can achieve the proper point of view required for its comprehension and appreciation.

The debt to Cicero's De Natura Deorum has been discussed by, amongst others, Christine Battersby and Kemp-Smith. Both writers note that a chief difference between the two works is that Hume does not speak in his own person, as Cicero does [Battersby p.245; cf p.247; cf D 61]. Instead, it is Pamphilus who introduces the discussion and who in the end 'judges' it. Now unlike Battersby, Kemp-Smith does not draw the conclusion

that the recognition of the model supports: that we should not take any single character to be representing Hume's opinions. That we must find a voice is a dominant assumption in the literature. James Noxon airs the assumption when he says:

'The Dialogues...have not proven to be the key to the riddle of David Hume. On the contrary, they have themselves posed a riddle: who speaks for Hume? Unless this question can be answered, Hume's last philosophical testament provides us with no clue to his own religious convictions' [Noxon (2) p.363].

Dugald Stewart, Pringle-Pattison, John Burton and B.M Laing, he says, opt for Cleanthes; Kemp-Smith, and, one can add, most recent commentators, choose Philo [ibid p.369]. No one, as yet, has argued that Demea should have the supposed honour. Noxon, himself alights on a footnote, as 'the only place available in such a composition for making his own voice heard' [ibid p.379].

In discussing Wagner and Parsifal, Nietzsche makes a reference to Hume's thoughts on 'psychological contiguity' in order to warn us not to confuse the creator with his creations [Nietzsche (1) p.101]. (Perhaps Nietzsche should have spoken of resemblance). Just because a Rottweilerphobic person creates a character, who wants to 'wipe out' all Rottweilers, and indeed, if he is allowed, all so called American Pit bull dog terriers as well, we should not assume that the writer shares such a policy. As regards the Dialogues, the point becomes all the more pressing the more we learn to appreciate the artistry of that work. As, for example, the way that the temperaments of the characters are revealed; and the way that the form enables Hume to explore the relation between speculative opinions and practice. We should, that is, agree with Battersby and refuse to say that a character represents Hume. Thus, however much any character resembles Hume, we should not say that he represents Hume, and for the same reason as we cannot say that a footnote

in Part XII represents Hume: in each case this would be to undercut any non-trivial explanation as to why he went to the trouble of writing such an intricate dialogue. It may well be the case that we come to the conclusion that there is no real difference between Hume's opinions and Philo's opinions, and conclude, furthermore, that in the writing of the work, Hume at times identified himself with Philo [L I 154; cf Stewart p.258]. Likewise, Cleanthes and Demea may also have an historical basis as M.A. Stewart has argued [Stewart p.258-269]. This does not conflict with the point that we should also attend to the psychology of the characters and understand how the dialogue form of this superb work reveals Hume's principles.

Thus to see why Hume chose a form where he is nowhere, is, paradoxically, to learn more about Hume's own opinions. Because he is not only nowhere he is also everywhere.

The first reason is given by Pamphilus. Any question of philosophy, he says, that is 'so obscure and uncertain, that human reason can reach no fixed determination with regard to it' seems 'to lead us naturally into the style of dialogue and conversation' [D 128]. This literary principle reflects the behaviour of the enlightened: in previous sections we have been seeing how, far from obscurity and uncertainty always leading to dialogue and conversation, these very factors can lead men to preach and kill. Demea is a useful contrast to Philo and Cleanthes in that he is not wholly thus enlightened: he refuses to continue to the end of the conversation; furthermore he is depicted as a rather intolerant figure: this seems a consequence of the uncertainty finding an outlet in impatience rather than philosophical inquiry. Such behaviour, then, contrasts with the spirit of free inquiry that the other two embody and which Hume had praised many years before in the Introduction to the Treatise [T xvii]. However, Hume's opting for the dialogue form was for reasons that ultimately, he

thinks, provide the best foundation for inquiry. Pamphilus continues:

'Reasonable men may be allowed to differ, where no one can reasonably be positive' [D 128].

The uncertainty referred to here is a reflection of Hume's scepticism: and so is the form. For we have seen that a main reason for welcoming sceptical principles is the dogmatic nature of man:

'The greater part of mankind are naturally apt to be affirmative and dogmatical in their opinions; and while they see objects only on one side, and have no idea of any counterpoising argument, they throw themselves precipitately into the principles, to which they are inclined; nor have they any indulgence for those who entertain opposite sentiments' [E I 161].

The dialogue form can counter such tendencies. Battersby points out that the sections are shorter than, for instance De Natura Deorum; and that there are frequent conversational exchanges within the sections [Battersby p.243].

A second reason why Hume chose the dialogue form is the following. This is that by presenting arguments through characters, Hume can display what little influence reason has against the forces of inclination and education. Clearly this is displayed in the character of the intolerant and bigoted Demea. It is also, I now want to argue, displayed through Pamphilus and Philo. In effect, this is to say that the answer to the problem of Part XII shows one reason why he chose the dialogue form.

The Dialogues takes the form of a letter from Pamphilus to his friend Hermippus. The letter recounts a discussion in which Pamphilus took no part. His youth, he says, rendered him a 'mere auditor'. Nevertheless, he adds,

'that curiosity, natural to the early season of life, has so deeply imprinted in my memory the whole chain and connection of their arguments, that, I hope, I shall not omit or confound any considerable part of them in the recital' [D 129].

The idea that this is not a purely formal device receives support from the content of Part I, and, we shall later see, from that of Part XII. So the conversation opens with Demea and Philo discussing the implications of a religious education. Demea congratulates Cleanthes on the care Cleanthes takes over Pamphilus' education. Of his own children, Demea says:

'To season their minds with early piety is my chief care; and by continual precept and instruction, and I hope too, by example, I imprint deeply on their tender minds an habitual reverence for all the principles of religion' [D 130].

Hume presents elsewhere his views on the passivity that makes 'education' possible through talking of 'imprinting' [eg T 117]. A nice example is found in a letter written to Hugh Blair:

'as to the youthful propensity to believe, which is corrected by experience; it seems obvious, that children adopt blindfold all the opinions, principles, sentiments, and passions, of their elders, as well as credit their testimony; nor is this more strange, than that a hammer should make an impression on clay' [L II 349].

Hume, then, is presenting Pamphilus as a product of his education. Thus it is not surprising that at the end of the conversation Pamphilus awards the laurels to his tutor, Cleanthes:

'nothing ever made greater impression on me, than all the reasonings of that day; so I confess, that, upon a serious review of the whole, I cannot but think, that PHILO'S principles are more probable than DEMEA'S; but that those of CLEANTHES approach still nearer to the truth' [D 228].

The point of this emphasis on the causes of belief in Part I can be seen by considering Part XII. In the sentence from Part XII that was mentioned above as providing such a puzzle, Philo says that no one 'has a deeper sense of religion impressed on his mind' [D 214]. Thus Philo seems to commit himself to 'religion', but his words, it should be noted, make room for that commitment to be explained not only in terms of reasons but in terms of causes. The reader might say: isn't this odd? Surely the Dialogues is concerned with the possibility of finding a 'foundation in reason' for religion rather than its 'origin in human nature' [NHR 21]? I am not denying that the philosophical (and historical) importance of the Dialogues lies in its examination of the former. But I am saying that if we want to understand this artful work as a whole we cannot ignore the expression of *Hume's interest in the latter*.

the Dialogues (B)

I will return to education in a moment. Before then, though, there are some other matters to which we must attend if we want to understand the relation between Part XII and the rest of the work. I shall begin with the 'propensity' to believe in design that I mentioned above.

The evidence that Philo believes in this can be brought out by reflecting on the differences between his beliefs and those of Cleanthes. In Part XII, Cleanthes says:

The comparison of the universe to a machine of human contrivance is so obvious and natural, and is justified by so many instances of order and design in nature, that it must immediately procure universal approbation...A false, absurd system, human nature, from the force of prejudice, is capable of adhering to with obstinacy and perserverance: But no system at all, in opposition to such a theory, supported by strong and obvious reason, by natural propensity, and by early education, I think it absolutely impossible to maintain or defend' {D 216}.

Philo, however, evidently does not believe that the theory is 'supported by strong and obvious reason': this is the burden of the earlier Parts. Therefore, his acknowledgment that 'suspense of judgment in the present case' does not seem possible [ibid] suggests that he considers that the other (non-rational) factors, such as the 'natural propensity' and 'education', have a proportionately greater role to play.

There is also direct evidence that Hume himself believed that we have a 'propensity' to believe in design. This appears in a letter of 1751 written to Gilbert Elliot of Minto in order to elicit stronger arguments for Cleanthes. For Hume hoped to avoid the 'vulgar error...of putting Nothing but Nonsense into the mouth of the Adversary' [L I 154]. His own researches, he

have uncovered no reason to think that the inclination to believe in design is any more universal and unavoidable than our seeing faces in the moon. That is, it is not as 'strong & Universal as that to believe in our Senses & Experience' [L I 155]. But this would be 'esteem'd a suspicious Foundation'.

'We must endeavour to prove that this Propensity is somewhat different from our Inclination to find our own Figures in the Clouds, our Face in the Moon, our Passions & Sentiments even in inanimate matter' [ibid].

Hume returns to the matter in a postscript. Cleanthes' 'Inference is founded on the Similitude of the Works of Nature to the Usual Effects of Mind'.

'The only Difficulty is, why the other Dissimilitudes do not weaken the Argument. And indeed it would seem from Experience & Feeling, that they do not weaken it so much as we might naturally expect'.

He adds: 'A theory to solve this would very acceptable' [L I 157]. In other words, there is some propensity, but Hume is looking for a strengthening of Cleanthes' arguments. He is also looking for a strengthening of his account of why belief in design does not diminish in proportion to the admittance of the weakness of the arguments. A weak propensity is not enough. His answer to this question in the Dialogues, I believe, is education. Education builds on the propensity to find resemblances, where, in fact, the resemblances are really very small indeed.

How does this affect the problem of Part XII? There are great differences between Philo's and Cleanthes' beliefs. Cleanthes believes that natural theology can support orthodox theism: but Philo's position is much more modest. The 'atheist' must allow that the analogy discernible between a rotting turnip and the generation of an animal is probably similar to the 'principle which first arranged, and still maintains, order

in this universe' [D 218]. The theist, on the other hand, must allow that there is a 'great and immeasurable, because incomprehensible, difference between the human and the divine mind' [ibid]. So he says,

'Will you quarrel, Gentlemen, about the degrees, and enter into a controversy, which admits not of any precise meaning, nor consequently of any determination?' [ibid].

Thus though he says that the 'atheist' can 'never possibly be in earnest' the 'theism' to which this figure is in reality committed is not theism in any usual sense. And the same can be said about the 'theist': in so far as he gives content to his theism through natural religion, he too is deluding himself, and can never possibly be in earnest.

The consequence, then, is that the argument 'resolves itself' into one proposition, 'that the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence' [D 227]. And if this is the case, then it follows that all other commitments must be explained by causal factors, such as education.

Now this applies to Philo himself. That is, he is aware, that he is subject to the influence of custom and education. This means that he will take into account such factors in his choosing to commit himself to emphasise one side of the question or the other. He is aware that there is a 'natural propensity' to believe in design; and aware that this is often supported by education. For what reason has he to battle against such forces? As long as there is no moral import to the choice, then he has no reason at all not to emphasise the 'theistic' angle, if he finds this easier.

This line of thought would go some way towards explaining the theme of education that the presence of Pamphilus

introduces. It also I think explains the difference in emphasis between the remorseless attacks that Philo makes on Cleanthes' arguments in Parts I-XI, and in Part XII when the arguments are discussed in the context of belief. As a philosophical argument, Philo says, the argument from analogy is far weaker than its adherents think; nevertheless, it is not totally without sense, though indeed the conclusion is hardly recognisable as 'theism'. But if we cannot suspend judgment on cosmological questions altogether [D 216], Philo thinks that the watered-down design argument is a far more attractive proposition than Demea's pretended renunciation of inquiry.

Similar reasons, I will now argue, underlie Philo's commitment to 'true religion'. Though I should probably say that what follows is more speculative than might be hoped.

Hume's remarks on 'true religion' are significantly few. In the Dialogues, Philo does not object to the following statement from Cleanthes:

'The proper office of religion is to regulate the heart of men, humanize their conduct, infuse the spirit of temperance, order, and obedience' [D 220].

In an unpublished preface to the second volume of the History, Hume writes:

'The proper Office of Religion is to reform Men's Lives, to purify their Hearts, to inforce all moral Duties, & to secure Obedience to the Laws & civil Magistrate' [quoted in Mossner (1) p.306].

In this way religion is defined by the very opposite characteristics to those we have been considering in this chapter. For we have seen how 'religion, as it has commonly been found in the world' [D 223], claims the attention of the historian and student of human nature not through the way it

fosters order in the state, but in its functioning, in Cleanthes' words, as 'a cover to faction and ambition' [D 220]. Far from ordinary religion humanizing man, Hume goes out of his way to lay at the door of religion the very worst acts of humanity. In contrast this new 'religion' serves the needs of man as social creature. It does not draw on his readiness to associate in order to create a divisive faction: on the contrary, it 'only enforces the motives of morality and justice' [ibid]. Its adherents would, one might say, be 'members' of the 'party of human-kind' that Hume talks of in the Enquiry [E II 275].

But why do Philo and Hume affirm any religion? My answer to this is fairly speculative. Hume, I think, saw the category of 'true religion' as at once a harmless outlet for the propensity that some will have to connect morality (which is independent of any theistic belief) and a minimal theism; and a way of highlighting what is false or inauthentic about ordinary religion.

As we saw in Chapter I, we are always seeking more general rules through which to explain events. Thus we have seen how, for example, some attempt to give to objects 'occult qualities', whilst others go further and ascribe to the Deity the active power in the Universe [T158]. Of course, such conclusions display a certain amount of sophistication. But the vulgar will also be led into conclusions about ultimate causes. For the need that we have to constantly expand and refine our 'scientific' principles, is expressed in their talk as well as that of the philosopher. Such a need may be described in the language of the Treatise in terms of the need to reduce our principles of resemblance to the fewest possible. Or else it may be described in the following way:

'from our earliest infancy we make continual advances in forming more general principles of conduct and reasoning...and that what we call philosophy is nothing

but a more regular and methodical operation of the same kind' [D 134].

Now the problem is that not only are we inclined to come to conclusions when we have insufficient evidence, but we also suffer from the propensity to transfer, because of the influence of the principle of resemblance, to objects qualities with which we are familiar. Philosophers are thus led to people the world with 'qualities' and the vulgar are led to create gods. Hume cannot indeed condone their arguments; but he does not completely dismiss the design argument.

Such dispositions, then, underlie the conclusions of natural religion. It is 'almost impossible' Hume says in the Treatise, for 'the mind of man to rest, like those of beasts' in a 'narrow circle of objects' [T271]. An example of the delight man finds in considering matters outside common life is shown in Pamphilus' words at the beginning of the Dialogues. After recounting questions about the nature of God, he says that

'these are topics so interesting, that we cannot restrain our restless enquiry with regard to them; though nothing but doubt, uncertainty, and contradiction, have, as yet, been the result of our most accurate researches' [D 128].

Thus the civic-minded philosopher should not be content with displaying how terrible the effects of religion can be. For his effort to teach men about themselves includes the lesson that we have a propensity to philosophise about final causes.

Two consequences of this view of Hume's about 'true religion' should be mentioned. The first is that there is now no cause for animosity between the theist and the atheist. The 'likeness' of the analogy that the theist emphasises and the atheist debunks are not, unlike 'quantity or number, susceptible of any exact mensuration, which may be the standard

in the controversy' [ D 218]. For the dispute seems at best 'merely verbal', or perhaps 'still more incurably ambiguous' [ibid]. So the particular gloss that one will give to the question, that will not admit of any precise determination will depend on psychological factors. Thus does this argument of Hume's pretend to provide a foundation for a more tolerant attitude on the part of disputants.

The second consequence is that this theism, if it may be so named, can afford

'no inference that affects human life, or can be the source of any action or forbearance' [D 227].

In the Enquiry, as in the Dialogues, Hume emphasises the relevance of his belief that all the rules of reasoning forbid us to infer anything more about the cause than is found in the effect. It follows, he says, that

'No new fact can ever be inferred from the religious hypothesis; no event foreseen or foretold; no reward or punishment expected or dreaded' [E I 146].

And this is to remove from religion its most characteristic and most harmful aspects.

I believe that more work needs to be done on the historical context of Hume's thoughts about 'true religion'. In the meantime, a couple of remarks about his scepticism may make his words more comprehensible. Firstly this scepticism allows for a considerable element of latitude in one's commitments. Hume says in the Treatise that a 'true sceptic will be diffident of his philosophical doubts, as well as of his philosophical conviction'; and he adds that such a sceptic 'will never refuse any innocent satisfaction, which offers itself, upon account of either of them' [T273]. It seems that it is for this reason that Philo, so long as he has made it very clear that he will

have no truck with Christian ethics, can fall, in good conscience, into the commitments that we have seen him make. Such commitments are not only easier with a point of view to having to live with a theistic upbringing; they also make life, at least in 18th century Britain, a little safer. And how can Philo be accused of hypocrisy when all he is doing is stressing that the analogy is of some worth? For if the question is 'incurably ambiguous', so are the terms which the disputants use [cf Kemp-Smith: D 72]. Then why should he not choose to call his description of the principle of order, the 'Deity'? This is his 'innocent satisfaction'.

The second remark I want to make about Hume's scepticism and Philo's arguments, arises from noting how in the Treatise Hume says that the pleasure that he finds in philosophical arguments functions as a reason for not giving them up - notwithstanding the weakness of human reason [T271]. This, I would argue, explains why it seems as if there is a reversal in Part XII. Philo loves arguing, especially if he can, in the process, annoy the likes of Demea. Thus for most of the conversation, he takes it upon himself to emphasise the weakness of the design argument; above all, he criticises the attempt to draw moral attributes of God from the world. This disposition is mentioned by Philo himself when he talks of his love of 'singular arguments' [D 214]. And it is recognised by Cleanthes, who says to Demea that he should have perceived how Philo has been 'amusing himself' at their expense [D 213]. But the reader has a much earlier warning than this. After Philo first expounds his sceptical principles in Part I, Pamphilus comments:

'While PHILO pronounced these words, I could observe a smile in the countenances both of DEMEA and CLEANTHES. That of Demea seemed to imply an unreserved satisfaction in the doctrines delivered: But in CLEANTHES'S features, I could distinguish an air of finesse; as if he perceived some raillery or artificial malice in the reasonings of PHILO' [D 132].

Demea, of course, is mistaken if he thinks that he has an ally in inconsistent fideism; and Cleanthes, who lives in 'unreserved intimacy' with Philo, is not [D 214;cf D 213].

What I have tried to do in these two final sections is to show how the structure of the Dialogues reveals Hume's opinion that the science of man throws light on why men are led into producing arguments for God's existence; and why sceptical arguments, in the face of training and inclination, have little effect on actual beliefs. We will not argue ourselves to unbelief any more than we will argue ourselves to belief. Though certainly, it would be absurd to deny that he thought that speculation has no influence at all. For unlike belief in the existence of body, we can doubt belief in God. Nevertheless, he seems pessimistic about the effects of his work.

In the Dialogues, Hume does not explain the influence of non-rational factors in terms of the imagination. After all, he wanted to try to disabuse people of their errors. The Dialogues, therefore, had to be a pleasant work to read. They are, however, misunderstood when they are considered merely as an attractive way of presenting Hume's thoughts on design and the problem of evil.

## Notes

### Chapter I: Belief

1) Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej, 9, 1963, pp.127-41. Most of the translations of Recherche de la Vérité which I use are from the Lennon and Olscamp edition. Exceptions are noted in the text.

2) For an extremely ambitious work on the concept of imagination in 'Western Culture', see Richard Kearney's The Wake of Imagination. This work makes references to Aquinas and also to Frank Zappa. For a brilliant attempt to explain the influence of metaphors of the mind on romantic poetry, see M. H. Abrams The Mirror and the Lamp. In 'Imagination and Perception' Sir Peter Strawson examines the 'family' of 'image', 'imagine' 'imagination' through reflecting on Hume, Kant and Wittgenstein [Strawson (2)]. Mary Warnock's Imagination provides an examination of the concept of imagination in several great thinkers, starting with Hume. Her discussion of Hume, however, makes no mention of the Science of Man. For the influence of Hume's work on imagination on Adam Smith, see D. D. Raphael's paper ' "The true old Humean philosophy" and its influence on Adam Smith'; and Andrew Skinner's 'Adam Smith. Science and the Role of the Imagination'.

## Chapter II: Morality

1) On the sense of talk of 'projecting' see Anthony Price's 'Doubts about Projectivism'. Abrams' The Mirror and the Lamp shows, in a discussion of conceits which present the mind as having a projective faculty, something of the influence of Hume on romantic poets [Abrams pp. 57-69].

## Chapter V: Politics

1) A novel which explores, amongst other things, the relation between self-understanding and art, is Money, by Martin Amis. For example, the narrator's own obsession with the possible infidelity of his girlfriend is one reason for his viewing the plot of Otello in the following way:

'The flash spade general arrives to take up a position on some island, in the olden days there, bringing with him the Lady Di figure as his bride. Then she starts diddling one of his lieutenants, a fun loving guy whom I took to immediately. Same old story. Now she tries one of these double-subtle numbers on her husband, you know, always rooting for the boyfriend and singing his praises. But Otello's sidekick is on to them, and, hoping to do himself some good, tells all to the guvnor. This big spade, though, he can't or won't believe it. A classic situation.' [Money p.300].

See Chapter III section 5 for Hume's understanding of the effect that a 'double-subtle number' can have. Montaigne rightly speaks of a 'thousand variations' on the experience of opposition increasing desire [Montaigne (1) p.166].

2) Hume, it can be seen, would not have been surprised at the following words after a 'cautious observation' of football fans at an 'End' of a terrace.

'Perhaps the most noticeable aspect of an End is its cohesion. Despite the fact that there are isolatable sub-groups within it, action often achieves a very remarkable unity - especially in singing, gesturing and the chanting of bloodcurdling imprecations. If you've ever stood in front of a terrace of people who are chanting, "You're gonna get your [immoderate language here] head kicked in", the unity can appear quite alarming' [Marsh p.363].

## Chapter VI: Religion

- 1) ' "Faith" has been at all times, with Luther for instance, only a cloak, a pretext, a screen, behind which the instincts played their game...one has always spoken of faith, one has always acted from instinct [Nietzsche (3) p.151].

Nietzsche believed that the psychological study of the religious man had hitherto failed because 'it itself believed in antithetical moral values and saw, read, interpreted these antitheses into the text and the facts' [Nietzsche (2) p.59]. Hume, I have argued, was aware of this problem. So he includes in his study of religious natures, the study of how Christianity created the values that blind inquirers. This is why the study of religion assumes a central role in the project of discovering a foundation for the sciences.

- 2) The conclusions which Hume arrives at through use of his 'experimental principles' are not, of course, always new. For example, in the view of Celsus (c.180) the social coherence within Christian groups was not the consequence of any internal principle but merely the result of being persecuted. "Their agreement is quite amazing, the more so as it may be shown to rest on no trustworthy foundation. However they have a trustworthy foundation for their unity in social dissidence and the advantage which it brings and in the fear of outsiders -

these are factors which strengthen their faith" [quoted in Chadwick p. 54].

3) Nietzsche also held Christianity to be a creation of opposition, of 'ressentiment' [Nietzsche (1) p.36]. Likewise, he argues that the Jewish people were conscious of their impotence [ibid p.33]; and that the result was a revolt against the 'knightly-aristocratic values' which are the expression of a life of a people. The 'oriental slave' took vengeance on Rome and 'its noble and frivolous tolerance' [Nietzsche (2) p.57]. So the principles of their enemies were denoted 'evil'; and their own 'weakness' was clad in 'ostentatious garb' and called a 'deed, a meritorious act' [Nietzsche (1) p.46]. This was their re-evaluation of values. A much lengthier comparison with the German might be of interest. (And not only because we know that he read Hume [Nietzsche (1) p.101]).

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