

Moral Sense and Virtue in Hume's Ethics

Paul Russell (University of British Columbia)¹

“This constant habit of surveying ourselves, as it were, in reflection, keeps alive all the sentiments of right and wrong, and begets, in noble natures, a certain reverence for themselves as well as others, which is the surest guardian of every virtue.”

- Hume, *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, 9.10²

I. Moral sense and “moral beauty”

On the face of it, Hume's understanding of the relationship between virtue and moral sense seems clear enough. According to Hume, a virtue is a quality of mind or character trait that produces approval, and vice a quality of mind that produces blame (T, 614; cp. 473,575). This relationship between virtue and vice and our moral sentiments is described and analysed by Hume as part of his wider and more general account of the mechanism of the indirect passions. Any quality or object, Hume maintains, that is closely related to a person and that produces either pleasure or pain will give rise to an indirect passion. In the case of pride and humility the quality or object must be closely related to myself, whereas in the case of love and hate the quality or object must belong or be related to some other person. When the quality or object is pleasant we will feel either pride or love, when it is painful I feel either humility or hate. To illustrate this Hume provides the example of a beautiful house (T, 279,289, 330, 516,584,617). When a house is viewed as giving pleasure and comfort and it belongs to myself it produces an independent and distinct pleasurable feeling, which is pride. If the same house is sold or given to another person, it will generate love (i.e. as directed at that person). If the house is found to be in any way unfit for occupancy or poorly designed then it will produce either humility or hate, depending on whether the house belongs to me or to some other person.³

Hume suggests that there are several different kinds of things that may give rise to pride and humility, love and hate. These include, most notably, virtues and vices (i.e. qualities of mind); beauty and deformity (i.e. qualities of body); along with property and riches. It is an important aspect of Hume's system of ethics, therefore, that our senses of approval and disapproval (i.e. our moral sentiments) find their place in the wider fabric of our emotional responses to the pleasant and painful features and qualities that belong to all human beings. Related to these observations, Hume

¹ Forthcoming in Tim Chappell, ed., *Values and Virtues: Aristotelianism and Contemporary Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). I am grateful to my audience at the *Values and Virtues Conference* (Dundee, May 2004) for their helpful comments and discussion. I would especially like to thank Tim Chappell for his philosophical and editorial assistance.

² All page references are to the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch editions of Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* [T] (2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) and his *Enquiries* [EU/EM] (3rd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975). Other references to Hume's writings are to *A Letter from a Gentleman to his friend in Edinburgh*, ed. by E.C. Mossner and J.V. Price (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967); *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary* [ESY], rev. ed. by E.F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985); *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* [D], ed. by N. Kemp Smith, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1947).

³ Here I skirt around the details of Hume's complex account of the mechanism that produces the indirect passions. Fundamental to Hume's description is the double association of impressions and ideas. For more on this see Russell 1995: 61-2.

maintains that through the influence of sympathy we come to feel in ourselves, not only the immediate pleasure and pain that our own personal qualities and related objects may produce in others, but we also come to share the “secondary” influence of the approval and disapproval, love and hate, that they feel towards us on this account (T, 316, 332, 362-5). Simply put, when a person causes pleasure or pain in others, she becomes pleasant or painful to herself, through the influence of sympathy and the indirect passions. This influence is compounded by the love and hate that we arouse in others on the basis of our various qualities and characteristics. For this reason, our personal happiness depends to a significant extent on our “reputation” as determined by “the sentiments of others”. While the operations and influence of sympathy is significant as it concerns *all* of those features about us that affect the sentiments of others, Hume maintains that this is *especially* true of the virtues and vices (T, 285, 295).

In several different contexts Hume defines virtue and vice in terms of their power to produce the relevant indirect passions.

Now since every quality in ourselves or others which gives pleasure, always causes pride or love; as every one, that produces uneasiness, excites humility or hatred: It follows, that these two particulars are to be consider'd as equivalent, with regard to our mental qualities, *virtue* and the power of producing love or pride, *vice* and the power of producing humility or hatred. In every case, therefore, we must judge the one by the other; and may pronounce any quality of the mind virtuous, which causes love or pride; and any one vicious which causes hatred and humility. (T, 575; cp. 296, 473, 614)

Clearly, then, it is Hume’s view that our moral sentiments serve not only to distinguish virtue and vice, by way of making us *feel* a satisfaction or uneasiness on the contemplation of a character (T471), but that these sentiments also serve the purpose of securing some general correlation between virtue and happiness, vice and misery. On this view of things, human moral sense serves as a kind of “back-up” or “support” system for the virtues, whereby the moral sentiments generated by virtues and vices will directly affect on a person’s happiness, in so far as she contemplates her own character or is made aware of the sentiments of others (T, 365, 576-7, 591,620; EM, 276-7, 289).

Hume’s account of virtue leans heavily on the analogy involved in the phrase “moral beauty”. (This analogy is also prominent in Shaftesbury 1711 and Hutcheson 1725.) Any beautiful object, he points out, will give some sensible pleasure or satisfaction to those who contemplate it. In the case of inanimate objects, such as tables or houses, their beauty is chiefly derived from their utility (T, 299, 364, 472). However, a beautiful house or table will not produce love or pride unless the object is related to a person in some relevant way whereby the person becomes the object of this sentiment. In the case of physical or bodily beauty the relevant close relationship is easily identified and will produce love or pride for the beautiful person (T, 300). Moral beauty operates on our passions and affects our happiness in much the same manner (T, 295, 596, 618-21: EM 276). One difficulty with the “moral beauty” analogy is obvious. We do not generally regard people as morally responsible or accountable for qualities that are not chosen or do not reflect their own will in any respect. The difference between virtue and beauty, as it is generally understood, is not based simply on a distinction between mental and physical traits, but also between traits that do or do not reflect a

person's will and choices in life. Nevertheless, Hume, as his analogy suggests, plainly rejects this perspective on the distinction between virtue and beauty.

The unorthodox nature of this aspect of Hume's account of virtue is perhaps most apparent in his discussion of natural abilities. Hume rejects the suggestion that there is any significant distinction to be drawn between "natural abilities", such as intelligence and imagination, and moral virtues more narrowly conceived (justice, truthfulness, benevolence, etc.). In both cases, Hume argues, the qualities under consideration "procure the love and esteem of mankind" (T, 607; EM, 321-2). Hume also rejects the suggestion that the moral virtues are somehow more voluntary than physical beauty or the natural abilities. He admits that the distinction may be supposed to be of some significance, since we cannot use rewards and punishments or praise and blame to alter people's conduct very much in respect of their natural abilities, though we can in respect of justice, truthfulness and the other moral virtues (T, 609; cp. Plato, *Protagoras* 323c-d). This concession does not, however, alter Hume's basic position: that our natural abilities are found pleasurable, and give rise to sentiments of love and approval, just like the moral virtues.⁴

Hume's presentation of virtue as "moral beauty" raises a number of puzzles about how exactly he understands the relationship between virtue and moral sense. On Hume's analysis both beauty and virtue affect people pleurably, and that pleasure gives rise to some form of love and approval. It is also clear, however, that a beautiful person need not herself have any sense of beauty or deformity in order to be beautiful or become an object of love as produced by the pleasure she occasions. These observations raise the question of whether a person can be thought virtuous if they lack any *moral sense*. Is there is any essential connection or dependency, logical or psychological, between being capable of virtue and possessing moral sense? Surprisingly, Hume provides no clear statement about where he stands on this important issue.

This puzzle relates to another concerning the moral status of animals in Hume's theory. Hume points out that "animals have little or no sense of virtue and vice" (T, 326). It does not follow from this that animals lack pleasant or painful qualities of mind that may arouse moral sentiments in those who contemplate these traits. In fact, Hume makes clear that animals "are endow'd with thought and reason as well as men" (T, 176) and they are no less capable of sympathy and passions such as love and hate (T, 363, 397f, 448; and cp. EM, 302). It cannot be Hume's view that animals are incapable of virtue and vice simply because they acquire their mental traits *involuntarily*, since he is, as we have noted, careful to dismiss this as the basis of any account of virtue. Moreover, while it is true that human beings are superior to animals in respect of their powers of reason, Hume points out that differences of this kind can also be found from one person to another (T, 610). Given these

⁴ There are, of course, two questions about voluntariness and virtue in Hume that need to be distinguished. One is: Are moral virtues concerned only with dispositions of choice—is acting 'in accordance with virtue' solely a matter of our choices or decisions? The other is: Must moral virtues always be voluntarily acquired? Hume takes the same permissive approach to both questions; his position on the status of natural abilities makes it clear that he does not regard the moral virtues as limited in either of these ways. Someone can be properly called virtuous in ways that go beyond the nature of his dispositions of choice; and virtues need not be voluntarily acquired to be real. (Contrast Aristotle.) I discuss these points in more detail in Russell 1995, Ch.9.

observations, we may also ask whether Hume's account of virtue extends to cover the mental qualities of "mad-men" (T, 404) and infant children. In these cases, the individuals in question are obviously *people*, and as such are, according to Hume's principles, natural objects of the indirect passions (EM, 213n). Since they too possess mental qualities that are pleasurable or painful, isn't Hume bound to regard people in these categories as legitimate objects of moral sentiment (however incapacitated they may be in respect of reason, moral sense and so on)?

2. Moral sense and virtue: extrinsic and intrinsic views

I have argued elsewhere (Russell 1995: 91-3,179-80) that Hume's views about the nature of moral virtue run into serious difficulties on these questions, and that this is indicative of his general failure to provide any adequate account of moral capacity. For present purposes, however, I want to focus attention on the specific relationship between virtue and moral sense as presented in Hume's system. It may be argued, consistent with Hume's wider set of commitments on this subject, that there is something more to be said about the absence of moral sense in animals, the insane and infant children as it relates to their limited capacity for virtue. More specifically, there may be a deeper connection between moral virtue and the capacity for moral sense than a casual glance through Hume's writings seems to suggest. Hume may have overlooked or downplayed the significance of this relationship because he has—unlike Aristotle—little or nothing to say in his major writings about how the virtues are actually acquired, developed and sustained. One obvious possibility here is that our "moral sentiments" or "moral sense"—as Hume uses these phrases, to denote our general capacity for moral approval and disapproval—have an important role to play in the way that we acquire the virtues and provide support for them. It is this suggestion, as it relates to Hume's ethics, that I want to consider more closely.

Hume draws a basic distinction between the natural virtues (e.g. generosity, benevolence, and compassion) and the artificial virtues (e.g. justice and loyalty). In the case of the artificial virtues he is primarily concerned with a system of conventions and rules that determine property and its distribution in society. Hume describes in some detail how these conventions arise and the way in which self-interest is our original motive for establishing and complying with them. He also points out, however, that injustice will displease us even when it is "so distant from us, as no way to affect our interest" (T, 499). The psychological basis for this is that we naturally sympathise with the effects of unjust conduct on other people; for this reason we will view even "remote" cases of injustice as vice. (Thus we *moralise* the conventions of justice.) Given our interest in justice, and our moral attitudes in respect of the rules involved, children quickly learn, according to Hume, the advantages of following the conventions that have been laid down, as well as the importance of their "reputation" for justice (T, 486, 500-01, 522, 533-4; EM 192). Our moral sentiments, therefore, play an essential role in cultivating our reliability and trustworthiness in respect of the virtue of justice. Both parents and politicians, Hume observes, rely on this mechanism to support artificial virtues of this kind. When an individual ceases to care about her honour and reputation as it concerns justice and honesty, we can no longer be confident that this person will follow those conventions on which our society and mutual co-operation entirely depends.

If, on Hume's account, moral sense plays a crucial role in developing and supporting the artificial virtue of justice, then the next question is: Does moral sense play any similar role with

respect to the natural virtues? Although Hume pays less attention to this issue, very similar considerations apply. As a child grows up she is made aware that her mental qualities, as they affect others and herself, will inevitably give rise to moral sentiments in the people she comes into contact with. When a person is generous and benevolent, not only will she be treated well by others, she will become aware that she is being treated well *because* other people approve of her virtue. Through the influence of sympathy, the approval of others will itself become an independent source of her own happiness and provide further grounds for feeling proud or approving of herself. This entire process of becoming aware of the moral sentiments of others, and then “surveying ourselves as we appear to others”, is one that serves to develop and sustain the natural virtues just as well as the artificial virtues (T, 576-7, 589, 591, 620; EM, 276, 314). Experience of this kind gradually makes a child aware of those dispositions and traits of character that bring approval; and this approval serves as a fundamental source of happiness for the virtuous person, thereby supporting and sustaining these dispositions. This whole process depends on the individual’s not only having a capacity for the particular natural virtues, but also a capacity to experience the kinds of moral sentiments that cultivate and sustain these virtues.

Whether we are concerned with the relationship between natural virtue and moral sense, or the relationship between artificial virtue and moral sense, two different interpretations of Hume’s views seem possible. The first, which I will call the *extrinsic* view, denies that there is any role for moral sense in cultivating and sustaining the virtues. On this view, the role of moral sense is limited to distinguishing between virtue and vice and providing some mechanism that correlates virtue with happiness and vice with misery (i.e. as might also be done in a future state). There is, on this view, no suggestion that the virtuous agent must also be capable of experiencing and interpreting moral sentiments in order to *become* virtuous. It must be granted that Hume’s relative reticence on the question about the relationship between virtue and moral sense, and his apparent lack of interest in providing any detailed account of how we acquire and sustain the virtues, may seem to suggest that he takes the extrinsic view.

In contrast with the extrinsic view, the *intrinsic* view maintains that virtue is acquired and sustained through the activity and influence of moral sentiments or moral sense. More specifically, according to this view it is because people have acquired the habit of “surveying themselves as they appear to others”, and aim to “bear their own survey”, that these people are able to acquire the virtues that they have. It is this pattern of moral development, on the intrinsic account, that is essential for the full and stable creation of a virtuous character.⁵ My claim is that, although Hume’s remarks on this subject are scattered and disconnected, a number of his remarks and observations are consistent with the intrinsic view; and a case can be made for saying that this is the view that he takes.

3. The intrinsic view and the role of moral reflection

What is the significance of the intrinsic view of the relationship between virtue and moral sense for our understanding of Hume’s wider ethical scheme? It is, as I have already suggested, a general failing of Hume’s account of virtue and vice that he has so little to say about moral capacity and incapacity. More specifically, Hume’s suggestion that virtues and vices should be understood

⁵ For a recent discussion of moral emotions in moral development see Damon 1988, Ch. 2.

simply in terms of pleasurable and painful qualities of mind seems both implausible and incomplete. However, perhaps the intrinsic view of the relationship between virtue and moral sense can help us here. If moral sense is required for the full development and stability of a virtuous character, we may ask, what is required to develop and preserve moral sense?

It is commonplace to give a rather “thin” reading of Hume’s account of the nature of moral sense, taking it to be constituted simply by pleasant or painful feelings of a peculiar kind (T, 472). But this reading does not do proper justice to the complexity and subtlety of Hume’s account. In a number of contexts, and most notably in the first section of the second *Enquiry*, Hume argues that moral evaluation of conduct and character involves the activity of both reason and sentiment.

The final sentence, it is probable, which pronounces characters and actions amiable or odious, praiseworthy or blameable; that which stamps on them the mark of honour or infamy, approbation or censure; that which renders morality an active principle and constitutes virtue our happiness and vice our misery: it is probable, I say, that this final sentence depends on some internal sense or feeling, which nature has made universal in the whole species ...But in order to pave the way for such a sentiment, and give a proper discernment of its object, it is often necessary, we find, that much reasoning should precede, that nice distinctions be made, just conclusions drawn, distinct comparisons formed, complicated relations examined, and general facts fixed and ascertained. (EM, 172-3)

It is evident, then, that according to Hume, the exercise of moral sense involves a considerable degree of activity by our “intellectual faculties” (EM, 173). Hume further explains this feature of his ethical system by returning to the analogy of “moral beauty”.

There are, Hume claims, two different species of beauty that require different kinds of response from us. In the case of natural beauty our approbation is immediately aroused and reasoning has little influence over our response one way or the other. On the other hand, the kind of beauty that we associate with the “finer arts” does require a considerable amount of reasoning “in order to feel the proper sentiment; and a false relish may frequently be corrected by argument and reflection” (EM,173). Hume argues that “moral beauty partakes of this latter species, and demands the assistance of our intellectual faculties, in order to give it a suitable influence on the human mind” (EM, 173). The sort of “intellectual” activities required include, not only learning from experience the specific tendencies of certain kinds of character and conduct, as well as the ability to distinguish accurately among them, but also the ability to evaluate character and conduct from “some steady and general point of view” (T, 581; EM, 227 ff.). Our ability to enter this general point of view and evaluate a person’s character and conduct from this perspective, is essential, on Hume’s account, if we are to be able to formulate a “standard of merit” that we can *all* share and refer to (T, 583, 603). When we evaluate a person’s character—including our own—from this wider perspective, we find that this more “distant” and “impartial” view of our object of evaluation generates calm passions, which may easily be confused with the effects of reason alone (T, 583, 603; and cp. T, 417-8, 470).

The significance of this account of how our moral sense depends on the activity and influence of our “intellectual faculties” in relation to virtue is clear. Insofar as the cultivation and

sustenance of virtue depends on moral sense, it follows that virtue also requires the intellectual faculties involved in the exercise of moral sense. An animal, infant child or insane person obviously lacks the ability to perform the intellectual tasks involved in producing moral sentiment. It will therefore not be capable of acquiring those virtues that depend on moral sentiment. It follows that we cannot expect the virtues that are so dependent to be present when the relevant psychological capacities are absent or underdeveloped. It is evident, then, that on Hume's account, there is more to moral sense than mere pleasant or painful feelings. No one who lacks the reasonably high degree of intellectual development required for moral reflection from "the general point of view" is capable of moral sense, nor can they acquire and maintain the moral virtues that depend upon it.

4. Moral reflection as a master-virtue

The question I now want to turn to is whether moral sense can itself express or manifest a virtue of any kind. Once again, Hume's analogy of "moral beauty" sheds some light on this issue. The cultured or refined individual, who shows appreciation for "the finer arts", is a person who possesses a "delicacy of taste" (ESY, 235). This capacity to become a refined and cultivated person requires training, experience and (again) intelligence of a certain kind. The "true judge" in respect of these matters, Hume says, has a "strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice" (ESY, 241). To possess refined taste is itself, according to Hume, a manifestation of a "valuable character" (ESY, 241). Hume's analogy of "moral beauty" suggests that the virtuous person must also develop an ability to measure his own merit and that of others by means of some relevant "standard of virtue and morality" (T, 583, 591, 603; EM, 229). For this reason, we should no more expect a virtuous person to lack any reliable moral sense than we expect to find a refined person who lacks any "delicacy of taste". Moreover, as we have noted, the moral sense, no less than delicacy of taste, requires experience, comparison and an impartial perspective. Clearly, then, virtue, like refinement, must be cultivated through relevant forms of experience and training that are filtered through the lens of a disinterested and impartial "general point of view". An individual who regularly and reliably "surveys" herself in this way is best placed to "correct" her own character and conduct where it strays from the relevant shared standard.⁶

The development of moral sense begins with an awareness of being the object of the moral sentiments in the context of family and friends, but we then learn to view ourselves in this same light—in Burns's phrase, "to see ourselves as others see us" (T, 292, 303, 320-22, 486, 589).⁷ This disposition to "survey ourselves" and seek our own "peace and satisfaction" is, as Hume says, "the surest guardian of every virtue" (EM, 276). It may be argued, therefore, that moral reflection, where we direct our moral sense at ourselves, and review our own character and conduct from a general point of view, serves as a *master virtue*, whereby a person is able to cultivate and sustain other, more particular virtues. A person with this disposition of moral reflection is one who we might otherwise describe as "conscientious" or "morally aware"—moral awareness being a character trait that is, on

⁶ It is worth noting, however, that the beautiful person, unlike either the refined or virtuous person, need not herself possess any relevant "standard" of beauty in order to be beautiful. On the other hand, a refined delicacy of taste may help a person to cultivate her own (physical) beauty.

⁷ Cp. Smith 1976: 83, 110, 111n., for the metaphor of holding up a "mirror" to ourselves so that we can "judge of ourselves as we judge of others".

Hume's account, essential to acquiring a fully developed and steady moral character. An agent who entirely lacks this disposition is a person who will lack all those virtues that depend on moral reflection for their development and support: hence he will be, for instance, completely shameless.

The role of moral sentiment is crucial, on this interpretation of Hume, for cultivating and sustaining the moral virtues. However, Hume also points out certain limits and complexities that arise here. For example, as we have noted, Hume points out that although the natural abilities and moral virtues are "on the same footing" in respect of their common tendency to produce the indirect passions of approval and disapproval, he also acknowledges that praise and blame have little influence in changing the former (T, 609). It may be argued, going beyond Hume's observation, that one of the reasons we draw a significant distinction between the natural abilities and moral virtues is precisely that the development and cultivation of the former prove to be generally *insensitive* to the role of praise and blame or moral reflection. That is to say, in other words, that the natural abilities, like our physical attributes and qualities, are "deaf" to praise and blame in a way that the moral virtues are not. Both the stupid and ugly person may be acutely aware how their qualities affect others but this awareness does little or nothing to improve or change their qualities and characteristics. This is not to say that the moral virtues can be chosen or altered at will – obviously the situation is not as simple as this. It is, rather, that through a *process* of moral reflection and awareness of the moral sentiments of others the agent's will can be *gradually* transformed or modified, especially when the agent is still young and her character remains malleable. The natural abilities are generally less sensitive to any influence of this kind.⁸

I have argued elsewhere (Russell, 1995, 91f and 126f) that Hume's interpretation of moral virtue in terms of pleasurable (or painful) qualities of mind is too wide. More specifically, our moral sentiments should be understood in terms of *reactive value* – we value people according to how they express or manifest value for themselves and others. This is why neither the ugly nor the stupid person can be judged an appropriate object of moral disapproval. This observation relates to the general point that I have made above about the relevance of moral sense to moral virtue. When an agent is an object of reactive value (i.e. moral sentiments) this may serve to restructure her own value commitments in some relevant way. There is no similar possibility in relation to fundamental physical qualities or natural abilities since they are not themselves bearers of value commitments.

It may be argued that in some contexts Hume expresses considerable scepticism about the power of moral reflection to alter or change our moral character. For example, in the *Treatise* Hume suggests that it is "almost impossible for the mind to change its character in any considerable article, or cure itself of a passionate or splenetic temper, when they are natural to it" (T, 608; cp. 517; and EM, 321; ESY, 169, 244)." At the same time, however, he is equally insistent that our "constant habit of surveying ourselves, as it were, in reflection, keeps alive all the sentiments of right and wrong, and begets in noble natures, a certain reverence for themselves as well as others, *which is the surest guardian of every virtue*" (EM, 276; cp. 314; T, 620). Moreover, where we find ourselves lacking some motive required for virtuous conduct, we will he says, hate ourselves on that account and may nevertheless perform the action "from a certain sense of duty, in order to acquire by practice, that virtuous principle, or at least to disguise to himself, as much as possible, his want of it" (T, 479). Moral sentiments, therefore, serve to "correct" and restructure our conduct and character in

⁸ Even here, however, this limitation can be exaggerated. Clearly work, study and application can always *develop* our talents – in so far as we have talents.

such a way that the mind is able to “bear its own survey” (T, 620). This is, indeed the most powerful influence available to promote and preserve a virtuous character.

Clearly, then, while Hume acknowledges that there are some limits to the influence of moral reflection, it has, nevertheless, considerable influence on our character and conduct. In his essay “The Sceptic” Hume perhaps expresses his “complex” view on this subject with more precision than he does elsewhere in his philosophical writings. In this essay he begins by pointing out that “mankind are almost entirely guided by constitution and temper”, but he goes on to qualify this claim in some important respects.

If a man have a lively sense of honour and virtue, with moderate passions, his conduct will always be comfortable to the rules of morality; or if he depart from them his return will be easy and expeditious. On the other hand, where one is born of so perverse a frame of mind, of so callous and insensible a disposition, as to have no relish for virtue and humanity, no sympathy with his fellow-creatures, no desire of esteem and applause; such a one must be allowed entirely incurable... He feels no remorse to controul his vicious inclinations: He has not even that sense or taste, which is required to make him a better character. (ESY, 169)

This kind of character clearly bears close resemblance to Hume’s much-discussed “sensible knave”, who appears in the “Conclusion” of the second *Enquiry* (EM, 282-3). This is an individual who has “lost a considerable motive to virtue”—which is an “inward peace of mind, consciousness of integrity, a satisfactory review of our own conduct” (EM, 283). The problem with the sensible knave is that he is not disposed to moral reflection, and so is capable neither of the happiness derived from virtue nor of the particular form of misery occasioned by vice. Without the master virtue of moral reflection the sensible knave lacks an especially important motive to virtue, and without this we may, as Hume observes, expect that his “practice will be accountable to his speculation” (EM, 283).

If our “sense of honour and virtue” is “the surest guardian” of our moral character how, we may ask, can we cultivate this disposition to moral reflection and self-correction? Hume’s remarks in his essay “The Sceptic” make clear that no philosophical system or method can provide a reliable “remedy” to the predicament of the “sensible knave”. There is, however, an “indirect manner” by which we can cultivate a “sense of honour and virtue”. In the first place, Hume suggests, “a serious attention to the sciences and liberal arts softens and humanises the temper, and cherishes those fine emotions, in which true virtue and honour consists” (ESY, 170). According to Hume, a person “of taste and learning ... feels more fully a moral distinction in characters and manners; nor is his sense of this kind diminished, but, on the contrary, it is much encreased, by speculation” (ESY, 170). (This description, of course, closely follows Hume’s account of the “true judge” in respect of matters of taste.) Hume goes on to note that along with the influence of “speculative studies” in cultivating a sense of virtue and honour, we may also add the importance of habit and having a person “propose to himself a model of a character, which he approves” (ESY,170). Clearly, then, there is, Hume suggests, a degree of truth in the suggestion that we can learn to be good. This process begins, on his account, with the cultivation of a sense of virtue and honour through “speculative studies” and the sort of intellectual disciplines that facilitate, among many other things, moral reflection.

5. Conclusion: three fallible but reliable correlations

Let me conclude this paper by returning to the problem that we began with. I have been primarily concerned to show that although Hume has little to say of a direct nature about the relationship between moral sense and moral virtue, we can, nevertheless, fill out a more complete understanding of his position by putting together a number of scattered and disjointed observations that he makes. The most important of these observations, I have argued, lead us to Hume's "intrinsic" understanding of the relationship between virtue and moral sense. It is Hume's view that a person's ability to cultivate and sustain the virtues depends to a considerable extent on her possessing a moral sense. More specifically, it is the disposition to moral reflection—the constant habit of surveying ourselves from the general point of view—that is "the surest guardian of every virtue". For this reason, as I have explained, the disposition to moral reflection, as based on our moral sense, may well be described as a "master virtue" for Hume's system of ethics. This point suggests that there are interesting parallels between Hume's "master virtue" of moral reflection and Aristotle's account of practical wisdom as a master virtue (i.e. one which is always involved where the virtues are present) (NE 1144b20).

With another reminiscence of Aristotle, our moral sense as Hume understands it may be described as functioning like the rudder on a ship, which keeps us sailing in the direction of virtue, away from the rocks of vice (cp. Aristotle's use of *oiakizontes* at *Nicomachean Ethics* 1172a21). This rudder, however, cannot guide us by means of either reason or feeling on its own. On the contrary, for moral sense to guide us in the direction of virtue we must first exercise those "intellectual faculties" that "pave the way" for our sentiments of approval and disapproval. Our moral sense, therefore, operates effectively to promote virtue only through the *fusion* of reason and sentiment.⁹

One final set of points need to be made if we are to remain faithful to the full complexity of Hume's final position on moral sense and virtue. The relationships that structure Hume's system of ethics are those between virtue and happiness; moral sense and virtue; and moral education and moral sense. In the case of virtue and happiness, though it is clear that our happiness depends on more than being virtuous, and that even the most virtuous person may not enjoy "the highest felicity" (ESY, 178), it is still Hume's basic contention that "the happiest disposition of mind is the virtuous" (ESY, 168; cp. EM, 140). The general correlation that Hume sees between virtue and happiness is not infallible, but it is strong and steady enough to support moral and social life.

Similar qualifications apply, as we have noted, to the correlation between virtue and moral sense. The presence of moral sense is not a *perfect* guarantor that a person will always act in a morally admirable manner. It is, however, a reliable sign that this person will be strongly motivated to virtue, and that whenever she departs from the rules of morality she will aim to reform her conduct. The same imperfect but sufficiently reliable connection holds between moral education and moral sense. There is no philosophical program or system, Hume maintains, that can provide us with a perfect formula that will always succeed in producing a sense of virtue and honour. Nevertheless, by means of "speculative studies" and philosophical reflection, we may employ our "intellectual faculties" to "pave the way" for those refined sentiments which will generally serve to support and sustain a tolerably virtuous character.

⁹ Cp. Chappell, ESSAY 7, on practical wisdom as knowing how to combine desire and belief inputs to form reasons.

Any philosophical system or program that aims to provide us with correlations more perfect than these, Hume suggests, depends on illusion and encourages vain hopes and expectations. The important point for Hume's purposes is that the relevant correlations between virtue and happiness, moral sense and virtue, and moral education and moral sense are all steady and strong enough to support moral life as we actually live and experience it. The modest task of Hume's philosophy is simply to identify and describe these general correlations, and to show us their influence and importance in the operations of the moral world.