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A Philosopher in his Closet: Reflexivity and Justification in Hume’s Moral Theory

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When a man of business enters into life and action, he is more apt to consider the characters of men, as they have relation to his interest, than as they stand in themselves, and has his judgement warped on every occasion by the violence of his passion. When a philosopher contemplates characters and manners in his closet, the general abstract view of the objects leaves the mind so cold and unmoved, that the sentiments of nature have no room to play, and he scarce feels the difference between vice and virtue. History keeps in a just medium betwixt these extremes, and places the objects in their true point of view. The writers of history, as well as the readers, are sufficiently interested in the characters and events, to have a lively sentiment of blame or praise; and, at the same time, have no particular interest or concern to pervert their judgment.1

1 David Hume, ‘Of the Study of History’ in Essays Moral, Political, and Literary, Eugene F. Miller, ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics 1985), 567-8. Hereafter abbreviated as ‘Essays.’ I should mention (as David Fate Norton has pointed out to me) that Hume did not think this essay was particularly good, writing for instance in a letter to Adam Smith, ‘In that [1748] Edition [of ‘Essays moral & political’], I was engag’d to act contrary to my Judgement in retaining the 6th & 7th Essays [‘Of Love and Marriage’ and ‘Of the Study of History’], which I had resolv’d to throw out, as too frivolous for the rest, and not very agreeable neither in that trifling manner’ (The Letters of David Hume, J.Y.T. Greig, ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press 1932], 168). Hereafter abbreviated as ‘Letters.’ In what follows I hope to show that whatever Hume’s reservations about ‘Of the Study of History’ as a whole, he always held to the view proposed there of ‘a philosopher contemplating characters and manners in his closet.’
I Introduction

In a well-known letter to Francis Hutcheson, David Hume voiced concern about Hutcheson's complaint that a draft of the Treatise of Human Nature lacked 'a certain warmth in the cause of virtue.' Rather than deny the charge, Hume tried to justify the Treatise's bracing air by explaining the work's purposes. He wrote:

I must own, this has not happen'd by Chance, but is the Effect of a Reasoning either good or bad. There are different ways of examining the Mind as well as the Body. One may consider it either as an Anatomist or as a Painter; either to discover its most secret Springs & Principles or to describe the Grace & Beauty of its Actions. I imagine it impossible to conjoin these two Views.... An Anatomist ... can give very good Advice to a Painter or Statuary: And in like manner, I am perswaded, that a Metaphysician may be very helpful to a Moralist; tho' I cannot easily conceive these two Characters united in the same Work.²

Hume obviously liked his distinction between the anatomist and the painter, for he ended up including it in the closing remarks of Book III.³ The Treatise, he tells us there, is a work of moral anatomy. It pulls off the skin of virtue and displays its minute parts in a presentation that is liable at times to be somewhat 'hideous.' What it does not do is 'emulate the painter,' that is, it does not express the dignity and nobility of virtue. 'Such reflexions,' he says, 'require a work a-part, very different from the genius of the present.'⁴

I think the most natural conclusion to draw from these comments (and the passage I have quoted at the beginning of this paper) is that Hume thought the task of explaining our moral judgments and practices is distinct from the task of providing reasons for living in accord with morality, and that in his philosophical works he saw himself as attempting the former but not the latter.

Annette Baier⁵ and Christine Korsgaard,⁶ however, believe Hume's philosophical works attempt more than explanation. They claim to find

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² Letters, 32-3


in those works an attempt to establish that there is an overriding reason to be moral and that morality is consequently justified. They argue, in particular, that Hume proposes that we ought to live morally because such a life is successfully reflexive while the immoral life is a reflexive failure.

Baier and Korsgaard’s reflexivity readings have opened up revealing new perspectives on Hume’s work and raised important questions about moral justification in general. I think, however, that in crucial respects they have Hume wrong. In this paper I will explain why, arguing that in his philosophical works Hume does not attempt to justify morality as a whole and that in his non-philosophical works Hume justifies particular moral claims in a non-reflexive way.

Discussion of these interpretations of Hume raises other less exegetical issues as well. For Baier and Korsgaard think not only that reflexivity is central to Hume’s views on moral justification but also that some version of reflexivity must be central to the true view. I cannot address the entirety of this issue here, but I will suggest why I think Hume gives us good reason to place less justificatory weight on reflexivity than do Baier and Korsgaard.

I will proceed by first raising an exegetical problem (which applies to both Baier and Korsgaard) about the claim to find a reflexivity test in Hume. Next I will explain why I think Baier’s interpretation of Hume’s conception of moral normativity is flawed. Lastly I will argue that what I take to be the Humean conception of moral justification is at least initially as plausible as that which fuels Korsgaard’s criticism of Hume.

II ‘Conclusion of this book’

Baier and Korsgaard both argue that Hume advances a general justificatory test that can be applied to all human ‘faculties’ or ‘mental operations.’ To show that a faculty or mental operation can pass the test, according to their readings, is to show that the activities it grounds are justified or normative; it is to show that we ought to go in for those activities, that we ought to live in accord with them.

The tests of normativity that Baier and Korsgaard claim to find in Hume revolve around the concept of reflection or reflexivity. Now reflection can mean simply sustained thought or conscious attention,

and that sense of the word is relevant here. But to ground normativity, on this view, a faculty or mental operation must also survive reflection of a more focused sort. Specifically, it must survive when turned back on itself, i.e., it must not be destroyed by its own reflection. In slogan form, something is justified if and only if it can bear its own survey. As Korsgaard puts it, 'According to this theory a faculty’s verdicts are normative if the faculty meets the following test: when the faculty takes itself and its own operations for its object, it gives a positive verdict’ (Korsgaard, 60). Or as Baier writes, 'The whole of the Treatise searches for mental operations that can bear their own survey, sorting those that can (causal reasoning in its naturalistic and non-metaphysical employment, virtues and the moral sentiment which discerns them) from those that get into ‘manifest contradictions’ or self-destructive conflict when turned on themselves’ (Baier, 97). In her most succinct statement of the view, Baier writes, ‘Successful reflexivity is normativity’ (Baier, 99-100).

Initially there seems to be quite strong support for these reflexivity readings in the three page conclusion to Book III of the Treatise. For there Hume speaks of the importance of one’s being able to bear one’s own survey (T. 620) and of the ‘new force’ the ‘sense of morals’ acquires when it ‘reflect[s] on itself.’ He writes,

> It requires but very little knowledge of human affairs to perceive, that a sense of morals is a principle inherent in the soul, and one of the most powerful that enters into the composition. But this sense must certainly acquire new force, when reflecting on itself, it approves of those principles, from whence it is deriv’d, and finds nothing but what is great and good in its rise and origin. (T. 619)

Baier and Korsgaard suggest that these passages warrant attributing to Hume the view that reflexivity is the key to normativity. But the context in which the passages occur suggests otherwise.

The conclusion of Book III has a typographical break in it about a third of the way through.\(^7\) What comes before the break is written in the tone of someone reviewing what has come before. Hume tells us, in that first third, what it is he thinks Book III has accomplished. It is there that he runs through, in rapid summary fashion, the arguments he has made in the order he has made them. The arguments he summarizes are all explanatory; they are explanations, that is, of how we come to make the

\(^7\) Norton has informed me that this typographical break appears in the first edition of the Treatise and that it is reasonable to suppose that Hume himself requested it. I trust, though, that we can detect a significant shift in tone between the first and second paragraphs of T. 619, irrespective of whether it was Hume or the printers who decided to place the extra space there.
moral judgments we do. He does not give reasons to be moral or refer to any arguments seeking to justify the faculty or mental operation that grounds our moral practices in general.

The comments about reflexivity and bearing one's own survey occur after the break. This in itself is not necessarily damaging to the reflexivity interpretations, since it is possible that Hume reserved the ultimate spot in the Treatise for the justificatory conclusion to which his explanatory project had been building.

The problem with that interpretation is that Hume explicitly distances himself and the Treatise from the reflexivity comments. After the break and just before the crucial texts, Hume writes, 'Were it proper in such a subject to bribe the readers assent, or employ any thing but solid argument, we are here abundantly supplied with topics to engage the affections' (T. 619). If any comment should warn us off reading the remarks of a few paragraphs back into the entirety of a very long book, it seems that this one should. Later in the section, too, in the sentence immediately succeeding the one in which 'one's own survey' is mentioned, Hume writes, 'But I forbear insisting on this subject. Such reflexions require a work a-part, very different from the genius of the present' (T. 620).

There is also external evidence that an appeal to the 'peace and inward satisfaction' of being able to bear one's own survey does not function in the general justificatory way the reflexivity reading requires. Hutcheson, the most influential Scottish philosopher at the time of Hume's writing of the Treatise, says in the introduction to his Inquiry concerning Moral Good and Evil that he will show that moral motives cannot be reduced to self-interest, i.e., that egoism of any stripe fails as a moral theory. He mentions two broad classes of egoistic theories that he seeks to oppose. According to the second of the two egoisms, we are motivated to virtue at least in part because we receive a 'Sense of Pleasure arising from Reflection upon such of our own Actions as we call virtuous, even when we expect no other Advantage from them.' Although this theory (which might be Shaftesbury's) differs from one in which we are motivated by the promised rewards and punishment of a 'superior' being, it is still, on Hutcheson's view, egoistic. For its proponents claim 'that we are excited to perform these Actions, even as we pursue, or purchase Pictures, Statues, Landskips, from Self-Interest, to obtain this Pleasure which arises from Reflection upon the Action, or some other future Advantage.'

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9 Hutcheson's Inquiry, 109
I don't believe Hume and Hutcheson share the same justificatory strategy, and in general I think it unwise to answer questions about Hume's texts by use of the default assumption that he was in agreement with Hutcheson. But in this case the two of them do seem to have the same thing in mind. When Hume speaks of one's being able to bear one's own survey, he seems to be thinking of the self-interested motive that Hutcheson describes as the 'sense of pleasure arising from reflection upon such of our actions as we call virtuous.' This explains why Hume lists the happy survey of one's own conduct as one of the 'advantages' of virtue. Indeed, in the paragraph in which the text occurs Hume seems to be making suggestions about how we might carry out the relatively straightforward task of showing that the advantages of the social virtues outweigh 'any advantages of fortune' (T. 620). But this task is different from the one undertaken in the Treatise. The egoistic nature of the task, furthermore, sharply distinguishes it from the justificatory project the reflexivity reading locates in the concluding section of Book III.

Now Hume is not hostile to showing that acting morally is in each person's self-interest. In fact, he thinks it is one of the most valuable things a 'practical philosopher' can do. And he also thinks his examination of human nature can explain why acting morally can produce the pleasure of bearing one's own survey, which may very well facilitate the practical philosopher's task. But it is not Hume's task. Hume does not, moreover, argue either that the pleasure of bearing one's own survey is sufficient for a good life or that the only or ultimate reason to be moral is that the moral life produces pleasurable self-surveying while the immoral life does not.

So as I read Hume, he would happily allow that morality's conducing toward the end of being able to bear one's own survey can at times help convince people to act morally. But that will not always be the only reason to act morally, nor will it ground justification of morality in general. In certain contexts the most relevant reason for acting in a certain way may be that I will not be able to stand the sight of myself if I do otherwise. But in other contexts the most relevant reason may be that if

10 In both the Treatise (T. 621) and the Enquiries (E. 10) Hume tells us that he is presenting a somewhat 'hideous' view of human nature. The Oxford English Dictionary gives as its second definition of 'Hideous': 'Terrible, distressing, or revolting to the moral sense...' So if we take Hume to have something like this meaning in mind — and the dates of the O.E.D.'s examples of usage (1692, 1863) suggest that he might have — there is even more reason to doubt that he was concerned in his philosophical works to strengthen our confidence in morality. (Thanks to Norton for pointing this out to me.)
I don't perform certain actions innocent people will suffer. The reflexivity readings seem to imply that in the second case I should ask whether my judgment about the wrongness of letting people suffer is itself justified and that the answer will somehow depend upon whether the faculty or mental operation that grounds my moral judgments can bear its own survey. But in the concluding remarks to Book III Hume does not suggest that moral justification bottoms out in this type of reflexivity.11

So far, however, I have looked at only the final section of the Treatise. But Baier does not claim that section as her only support. Let us turn to a fuller discussion of her position now.

III Baier on Reflexivity

In A Progress of Sentiments Baier argues that for Hume 'reflexive self-understanding is the perfection of theoretical reason; reflexive self-approval, that of practical reason' (Baier, 277). She maintains that all three books of the Treatise build to the view that we ought to live in accord with those aspects of human nature that pass the test of reflexivity.

I will not address here Baier's reading of the Treatise as a whole, although I should say that I find much of that account fascinating and plausible. What I want to focus on is her discussion of Hume's 'catalogue of virtues' and her concern about whether the self-denying quasi-virtues

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11 In 'On Why Hume's "General Point of View" Isn't Ideal — and Shouldn't Be' (Social and Political Philosophy 11 (1994) 202-28), Geoffrey Sayre-McCord contends that Hume 'hopes his theory succeeds not just in explaining moral thought but also in justifying it' (203). In arguing for this, Sayre-McCord points to those features of Hume's general point of view that give us reason to endorse it over other possible moral standards. The general point of view, he shows, enables us to talk intelligibly to one another and promotes harmonious social life; it provides a stable, accessible, and univocal moral ground, and conduces to the happiness of those who adopt it. I believe Hume did think that the happiness of and harmony among members of society were perhaps the most important ends of human life. And so I think it is not inconsistent with his theory to judge a moral standard based on its accessibility, stability, and mutual intelligibility, since these features all promote harmony and happiness. But it seems to me that when Hume discusses these features of the general point of view it is only towards the end of explaining why this standard developed. I cannot hear Hume's attempt to justify or condemn moral standards in general. As I will explain in what follows, I think that when Hume condemns or praises he does so by pointing out that certain things thwart and other things promote ends of ours. So I don't think Hume would quarrel with Sayre-McCord's 'justification' of the general point of view — at least not to the extent that Sayre-McCord attempts to show that the general point of view promotes harmony and happiness. But I don't think that such justification was Hume's project.
of the religious moralists fail ‘to meet the Humean test of successful reflexivity’ (Baier, 216). Baier suggests in this discussion that Hume equates virtuous traits with those possessed by persons who can bear their own survey. I believe, however, that this is an inaccurate representation of the Treatise and of Hume’s non-philosophical works.

As Baier rightly emphasizes, Hume’s ‘catalogue of virtues’ (in part iii, Book III of the Treatise) is provocative in several respects. The ‘hedonism’ guiding its construction and the inclusion of (proper) pride, wit, and humor would indeed have scandalized many of the religious moralists of Hume’s day.12

Hume does not, however, argue for these provocative claims by establishing that people ought to become proud, witty and humorous. Rather, he observes that (proper) pride, wit and humor just are the sorts of things people approve of, and then goes on to explain why they do so.

Hume proceeds in this way because by the third part of Book Three of the Treatise he has already determined that virtue is nothing but that to which people have a certain favorable reaction (i.e., approval). He has also hypothesized that they have that reaction only to things that fit a particular four-fold division (‘useful or agreeable to the person himself or to others’). He then catalogues those things that elicit the reaction and shows that they do in fact all fit into his four-fold division, thus proving his hypothesis. The provocative nature of his result reveals that the religious moralists’ ‘hypothesis’ about what people approve of is easily falsified by the evidence. More generally, it exposes the inaccuracy of the religious moralists’ conception of human nature, which cannot explain people’s response to pride and humor, while establishing the superiority of Hume’s conception, which can explain the facts. Perhaps some ardent puritans would not be unduly consternated by these observations, since they would deny that one can learn of exalted virtue by observing fallen humans. But for those who think that the content of virtue must in some sense be read off of human nature, such observations will carry weight.

So Hume’s catalogue of virtues constitutes an explanatory criticism of the religious moralists. Their theory cannot account for the observable facts while his can.

It is true, though, that Hume not only is opposed to religious theories but also seems hostile to some religious practices as well. We get the distinct impression, for instance, that Hume feels contempt for the extreme self-sacrifice of certain Christian sects and would detest any attempt to raise children according to such ideals. Hume also looks

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12 See Baier, 199-203.
askance at those who trumpet the glories of warfare. As Baier puts it, he 'has almost as many doubts about the character of the hero as about the character of the humble saint' (Baier, 210).

Often Hume expresses these and other aspects of his moral character by telling us what is approved of by 'men of cool reflexion' or 'wise men' or 'men of sense.' To my ear these expressions sound incidental to the explanatory arguments Hume is explicitly making, and I think justificatory interpretations can easily read too much into them. But that need not stop us from asking why Hume disapproves of the traits he does.

Now if, as Baier maintains, Hume had seen reflexivity as a litmus test for virtue, we should expect to find that he condemns traits on the basis of the reflexive failure of the persons who possess them. But this is not the case. Hume's wariness about 'heroism, or military glory' and his antipathy toward the monkish pseudo-virtues are grounded in their negative consequences. About the former, for instance, Hume writes,

> Heroism, or military glory, is much admir'd by the generality of mankind. They consider it as the most sublime kind of merit. Men of cool reflexion are not so sanguine in their praises of it. The infinite confusions and disorder, which it has caus'd in the world, diminish much of its merit in their eyes. When they wou'd oppose the popular notions on this head, they always paint out the evils, which this suppos'd virtue has produc'd in human society; the subversion of empires, the devastation of province, the sack of cities. (T. 600-1)

Note, first of all, that the doubts Hume expresses about the virtue of heroism are fueled wholly by the negative consequences of the trait. Moreover, although this passage in isolation seems to be an attempt to disabuse us of our unreflective adoration of military heroism, the rest of the paragraph reveals that Hume's main goal is to explain why, despite heroism's negative consequences, people admire it. The key to this explanation is Hume's concept of sympathy, which leads us to be more affected by the active consideration of a particular person than by the unattended-to knowledge of harms to multitudes of faceless thousands.

Turning to the monkish pseudo-virtues, Hume writes,

> And as every quality which is useful or agreeable to ourselves or others is, in common life, allowed to be a part of personal merit, so no other will ever be received, where men judge of things by their natural, unprejudiced reason, without the delusive glosses of superstition and false religion. Celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude, and the whole train of monkish virtues; for what reason are they everywhere rejected by men of sense, but because they serve to no manner of purpose; neither advance a man's fortune in the world, nor render him a more valuable member of society; neither qualify him for the entertainment of company, nor increase his power of self-enjoyment? We observe, on the contrary, that they cross all these desirable ends; stupefy the understanding and harden the heart, obscure the fancy and sour the temper. We justly, therefore, transfer them to the opposite column, and place them in the catalogue of vices.... (E. 270)
The two points made about the ‘heroism’ passage also apply here. First, Hume’s expressions of disdain are fueled by his belief that monkish activities have negative consequences. Far from promoting desirable ends, as the monks claim, celibacy and fasting actually harm humanity. Second, Hume’s chief purpose in this part of the *Enquiry* is to show that the observable evidence supports his four-fold hypothesis about which traits are virtues, while the religious moralists’ ‘hypothesis’ cannot account for the moral distinctions people actually make. Thus, he introduces the section by writing:

> It may justly appear surprising that any man in so late an age, should find it requisite to prove, by elaborate reasoning, that Personal Merit consists altogether in the possession of mental qualities, *useful or agreeable to the person himself or to others*. And 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. But however the case may have fared with philosophy, in common life these principles are still implicitly maintained; nor is any other topic of praise or blame ever recurred to, when we employ any panegyric or satire, any applause or censure of human action and behavior. (E. 268-9)

Hume is not saying that the common run of people have for centuries been morally bankrupt and that his account will set them straight. He is attacking, rather, past philosophical accounts of morality, contending that they have ignored the most obvious observable data, which support the four-fold hypothesis so clearly that it is amazing no one has advanced it before.

What there is no hint of in these two passages, so far as I can tell, is the attempt to show that monks and military heroes fail the reflexivity test. I wonder, therefore, about Baier’s concern with ‘the awkward question’ of whether ‘anxious, rage-filled, self-hating persons’ can bear their own survey (Baier, 215). Why think that Hume is worried about answering this? There is no evidence that he thinks his account of morality is threatened by the possibility of the sour’s approval of soursness, the hard-hearted’s approval of ruthlessness, or the monk’s approval of his own mortification. As far as the self-approval of mortification is concerned, I imagine Hume would chalk it up to the monk’s deluded view about what self-abuse will achieve.\(^{13}\)

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\(^{13}\) See David Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to The Revolution in 1688 in six volumes* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics 1983), volume 1, chapter vii, pp. 333-4. Hereafter abbreviated as ‘History,’ followed first by the volume number written in Arabic numerals, then by the chapter number written in small Roman numerals, and lastly by the page numbers of the 1983 Liberty Classics edition.
It is true that in his discussion of 'the sensible knave' Hume maintains that a crucial reason for living a just life is the 'inward peace of mind, consciousness of integrity [and] satisfactory review of our own conduct' that will result (E. 283). But Hume initially says only that a just life will produce these benefits for people with 'ingenuous natures' who already have a strong 'antipathy to treachery and rogucry.' We cannot conclude from this initial claim, therefore, that Hume believes the knave must necessarily fail a test of reflexivity. Indeed, Hume at first suggests that the knave will be able to bear his survey, writing, 'I must confess that, if a man think that this [knavish] reasoning much requires an answer, it will be difficult to find any which will to him appear satisfactory and convincing' (E. 283). Now Hume does go on to conclude that knaves are 'the greatest dupes' because their knavery makes it impossible for them to enjoy 'the peaceful reflection on [their] own conduct' (E. 283-4). They lack this enjoyment because in order to be successful knaves they must always concern themselves with the deception of others, a never-ending task that results in constant worry and precludes the close relationships that afford the greatest pleasures of all. The knaves will thus be less happy than the just.14 But this claim — that even from an egoist perspective knaves are losers — is different from the claim that knavery is a reflexive failure in Baier's sense. I would conclude, then, that the sensible knave passage admits of the same interpretation as that which I offered above of the final pages of the Treatise.15

Now Baier herself, after she has explored the 'awkward question,' tells us that she has 'read into [the Enquiry's] rhetorical hints' views that are only fully developed elsewhere. She writes, 'The longer story about what

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14 To try to convince would-be knaves that even from an egoist perspective injustice is a loser we might tell them the story of Robert Carre (see below), in which someone's successful knavery still made him more miserable than he would have been if he had remained just. (In the concluding paragraph of section V. I return briefly to the question of what to say to those whose hearts do not rebel against unjust maxims.)

15 But compare Gerald J. Postema, 'Hume's RePLY to the Sensible Knave' (History of Philosophy Quarterly 5 [1988] 23-40) for a reading of Hume's conception of the 'enjoyment of character' that is more in line with Baier's view of Humean normativity. I find Postema's discussion illuminating in many ways, but I think he overstates his case when he argues that Hume's knave 'has no character at all' (Postema, 35). It is true, as Postema instructively illustrates, that for Hume one could never develop what we would recognize as human character without being raised in a social setting in which others 'affirmed' one's existence (Postema, 27, 35). But I do not think that this shows that Hume thought one cannot eventually come to develop a character that plans regular deception of others.
is wrong, what is false, what is self-deceived, what is unstable, and what is self-contradictory in the religious moralists’ alternative to Hume’s version of morality is given in Hume’s later works, not in the Treatise or in the second Enquiry (Baier, 217). And it is certainly true that in the History and many other of his non-philosophical writings Hume is concerned to show the evils of ‘superstition and false religion.’ But I believe the reasons he gives for his condemnations in those works, just as at T. 600 and E. 270, are based on negative consequences, and not reflexive failure. Let us look at some examples now.

Throughout the History Hume highlights the evils of religious fanaticism. But he usually does so by showing that such fanaticism breeds violence. He documents how overzealous religion has fueled passions that cause people to hate adherents of other religions and to resist lawful civil authorities, leading to strife and warfare. In a typical passage, Hume explains how religion fueled the 1641 massacre of the English in Ireland.

Amidst all these enormities, the sacred name of Religion resounded on every side; not to stop the hands of these murderers, but to enforce their blows, and to steel their hearts against every movement of human or social sympathy. The English, as heretics, abhorred of God, and detestable to all holy men, were marked out by the priests for slaughter; and, of all actions, to rid the world of these declared enemies to catholic faith and piety, was represented as the most meritorious. Nature, which, in that rude people, was sufficiently inclined to atrocious deeds, was farther stimulated by precept; and national prejudices empoisoned by those aversions more deadly and incurable, which arose from an enraged superstition. (History 5, lv, 343)

Similarly, Hume argues that religious intolerance was the chief cause of the civil wars of the seventeenth century.

So obvious indeed was the king’s present inability to invade the constitution, that the fears and jealousies, which operated on the people, and pushed them so furiously to arms, were undoubtedly not of a civil, but of a religious nature. The distempered imaginations of men were agitated with a continual dread of popery, with a horror against prelacy, with an antipathy to ceremonies and the liturgy, and with a violent affection for whatever was most opposite to these objects of aversion. The fanatical spirit, let loose, confounded all regard to ease, safety, interest; and dissolved every moral and civil obligation. (History 5, lv, 380).

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16 I won’t examine Hume’s essays here, but I believe that in them Hume tends to condemn religious fanaticism for the same type of reasons. See, for instance, ‘Of Parties in General’ (Essays, 59-62) and ‘Superstition and Enthusiasm’ (Essays, 77-8).

17 See History 1, iii, 152 and History 3, xxxvii, 435 for similar comments concerning the Norman invasion of 1066 and Mary’s Catholic persecution, respectively.
In these passages Hume condemns religious fanaticism for the rather obvious reason that it has caused the terrible slaughter of innocent people.

Hume also repeatedly condemns the fanatical self-denying practices (the ‘monkish virtues’) of various religious sects. But so far as I can tell he does not emphasize the reflexive failure of the people who engage in these practices. More often than not, he warns that these practices were ‘dangerous’ because of their tendency to push individuals to the fanaticism that leads to war.18

Hume’s discussion of Thomas à Becket is instructive here. Becket, Hume tells us, possessed all the self-denying monkish virtues on which the Enquiry pours so much scorn.

In his own person he affected the greatest austerity, and most rigid mortification.... He wore sack-cloth next his skin, which, by his affected care to conceal it, was necessarily the more remarked by all the world: He changed it so seldom, that it was filled with dirt and vermin: His usual diet was bread; his drink water, which he even rendered farther unpalatable by the mixture of unsavoury herbs: He tore his back with the frequent discipline which he inflicted on it.... (History 1, viii, 309, see also 316)

But Hume never suggests that Becket suffered from some sort of psychological incoherence or was guilty of an internal contradiction. As Hume describes him, we would expect Becket to be the type of person more satisfied than most with his own survey. Indeed, given the superstitious scientifically backward age in which he lived Becket’s belief in the benefits of bizarre religious practices is understandable.19 Hume condemns Becket, rather, because his vaulting ambition precipitated a quarrel with Henry that threatened to plunge England into civil war.

Hume’s criticisms of Archbishop Laud and the gunpowder conspirators are similar to those leveled at Becket. As Hume characterizes them, these men seem to have lived consistently within their own principles; they all seem to have been the types who can bear their own survey. But although Laud was ‘undoubtedly sincere’ and ‘actuated by pious motives in all his pursuits,’ he hurt the nation because his ‘religious opinions’ did not allow him to ‘entertain ... more enlarged views, and embrace ... principles more favourable to the general happiness of soci-

18 See History 5, xlvii, 68; i, 164; lvii, 442; lix, 493-4. On other sincere but dangerous fanatics, see History 5, xlvii, 27-8; iii, 244 and notes, 575; History 6, bxlii, 142.

19 See for instance History 1, viii, 333-4.
ety' (History 5, lvi, 458). Similarly, the gunpowder conspirators were 'obstinate in their purpose, and confirmed by passion, by principle, and by mutual exhortation' (History 5, xlvi, 27; see also 31). Guy Fawkes in particular was 'much distinguished' by his 'daring and determined courage' (History 5, xlvi, 29). But because it 'nearly proved fatal to their country' (History 5, xlvi, 31), the gunpowder conspiracy must be seen as 'a singular proof both of the strength and weakness of the human mind; its widest departure from morals, and most steady attachment to religious prejudices' (History 5, xlvi, 25). In both cases, Hume criticizes individuals because, although they sought to help the country, their religious principles led them to effect (or almost effect) great harm. We find then that once again Hume seems to base his condemnations on 'dangerous' consequences, not on the reflexive failure of those being condemned.

Baier's reflexivity-as-normativity interpretation of Hume's moral theory relies to a large extent on Hume's belief that one's conception of self develops out of others' affirmations of one. Her idea seems to be that since every person's view of herself depends so fundamentally on others' views of her, it will be impossible for someone to bear her own survey if she regularly acts in ways that harm or distress others. These character sketches from the History, however, show that Hume himself, contrary to Baier's interpretation, saw that one's caring deeply about others' opinions still does not ensure that in order to be successfully reflexive one must act virtuously. For what it takes for someone to be successfully reflexive will depend upon whose opinions she cares so deeply about. And religious fanatics can form confederacies and thus 'confirm ... by mutual exhortation' their own self-denying or politically-explosive tendencies. So while it is true that my ability to bear my own survey will depend upon whether those near me enjoy surveying me, it is also true that I can surround myself with people who enjoy surveying character traits that turn out to be distressing and destructive to humanity as a whole.

Now in his discussion of Robert Carre (later Viscount Rochester and Earl of Somerset), Hume does provide us with an example of someone whose villainy made it impossible for him to bear his own survey. Carre arranged the murder of his friend Overbury, and although his evil deed initially went unsuspected, he soon became miserable. His knowledge of the crime, which he had to conceal from all his fellows, destroyed his inward peace of mind. As Hume writes,

[Carre] had hitherto escaped the enquiry of justice; but he had not escaped that still voice, which can make itself be heard amidst all the hurry and flattery of a court, and astonishes the criminal with a just representation of his most secret enormities. Conscious of the murder of his friend, [Carre] received small consolation from the
enjoyments of love, or the utmost kindness and indulgence of his sovereign. The graces of his youth gradually disappeared, the gaiety of his manners was obscured, his politeness and obliging behaviour were changed into sullenness and silence. (History 5, xlvii, 60-1)

But Hume does not suggest that Carre was vicious (or that we are justified in judging him vicious) because he could not bear his own survey. Hume calls Carre vicious because he betrayed his friend, and Carre himself becomes miserable because he realizes the immorality of his actions. His actions, moreover, would have been immoral even if they had been consistent with his nature, and the judgment that Carre was vicious would be justified regardless of how Carre was constituted.

So what we learn from the story of Carre is that vice can make one miserable, regardless of the riches and influence it may bring. And it is just the teaching of this lesson that Hume must be thinking of when he speaks of the task of ‘the practical philosopher’ and of the opportunity of ‘the writers of history.’ But this is also the lesson that is not appropriate for ‘the Metaphysician’ to teach; it is one that must be taught in ‘a work a-part’ from the Treatise.

Perhaps Baier sought to locate reflexivity in Hume’s moral theory because her reflexive reading of Book I of the Treatise proved to be so illuminating. In her discussions of Hume’s theory of causality and his attitude towards Cartesian reason, Baier assembles a compelling case for the view that Hume endorses or rejects operations of the understanding due to their reflexive success or failure. But, notwithstanding Baier’s salutary insistence that we read all three Books of the Treatise as a whole, there is a crucial difference between operations of the understanding and the practice of morality. Reflexive failure may sink a moral position with as much finality as it will a conception of reason. But while it is plausible to claim that reflexive success is the raison d’être of rationality, it is much less likely to satisfy the demands of the moral life. The principles of a bigot may look just fine to her and her cohorts, but we will still have grounds for condemning them. And even if the bigot can’t bear her own survey, we will, and she should, condemn her principles for other, less reflexive reasons.

Baier writes, ‘Absence of contradiction is reason’s minimal demand. Reflexive self-understanding is the perfection of theoretical reason; reflexive self-approval, that of practical reason. This, in effect, is what Hume at the end of Book Three claims for his version of moral judgment’ (Baier, 277). The problem is that self-approval is too minimal to be the highest demand placed on moralizing. Baier is correct to point out that ‘reflexive self-acceptance’ is one of the great rewards of the moral life. But to the extent that she collapses moral justification into self-acceptance Baier misleads.
IV Korsgaard on Reflexivity

I believe then that Hume’s moral judgments, which occur occasionally and peripherally in his philosophical works but are quite common in the History and elsewhere, tend to be based on consequences in a fairly straightforward way. Korsgaard, however, claims that this type of moralizing on its own runs the risk of normative failure, and that Hume cannot accommodate the extra elements needed for normative success. So according to Korsgaard, my discussion will not have done Hume any favors, for I will have succeeded only in bringing to light the shallowness of his moral judgments and the inadequacy of his moral theory.

Korsgaard herself believes both that reflexivity is the proper test of normativity and that Hume thinks so as well. She argues, however, that Hume’s conception of morality fails the test. I have already indicated why I think Hume does not hold that reflexivity is the essence of moral justification so I will now concentrate on Korsgaard’s claim that Hume’s account is a reflexive failure. For whether or not Hume himself advanced the reflexivity test, Korsgaard will condemn his conception of morality if it does not pass.

The reflexivity test of morality that Korsgaard proposes involves two steps. First, we develop an explanatory account of morality. We determine how our conception of morality has come to be part of our lives and why it issues the judgments that it does. Second, we judge morality in light of the explanatory account of it. We ask whether its judgments are good or bad while attending to the explanation of its development.20

Korsgaard seeks to illustrate that Hume’s account of justice fails this test with the following story.

Now let us consider a slightly more attractive version of Hume’s sensible knave. Our knave is the lawyer for a rich client who has recently died, leaving his money to medical research. In going through the client’s papers the lawyer discovers a will of more recent date, made without the lawyer’s help but in due form, leaving the money instead to the client’s worthless nephew, who will spend it all on beer and comic books. The lawyer could easily suppress this new will, and she is tempted to do so. She is also a student of Hume, and believes the theory of the virtues that we find in the Treatise of Human Nature. So what does she say to herself? (Korsgaard, 74)

20 Korsgaard claims this test is also Hume’s own, citing his remark that ‘the moral sense “must certainly acquire new force, when reflecting on itself, it approves of those principles, from whence it is deriv’d, and finds nothing but what is great and good in its rise and origin”’ (Korsgaard, 60). I have discussed the problems with this reading in section II.
The lawyer realizes that she would disapprove of herself if she suppressed the will since ‘she hates unjust actions and the people who perform them.’ But

she also knows that her distaste for such actions is caused by their general tendency, not their actual effects. As Hume has shown, our moral sentiments are influenced by ‘general rules.’ And our lawyer knows that this particular unjust action will have no actual effects but good ones. It will not bring down the system of justice, and it will bring much needed money to medical research. (Korsgaard, 74)

Because of her sympathy with other people, the lawyer disapproves of injustice, since it harms society. Why then does she disapprove of destroying the will, which would only help others? She disapproves, according to Hume’s account, because her sentiments are subject to the ‘general rules’ principle of association whereby one tends to feel the same about all things that resemble each other, even if some of those things are crucially different. In this case, destroying the will resembles all the unjust acts that are actually harmful to society even though the particular act will in fact benefit society. Her disapproval of destroying the will, in other words, results from her mind’s tendency to overgeneralize, i.e., to lump together cases that bear a surface resemblance but are really disparate.

Once the lawyer comes to believe this explanation of her disapproval, however, the legitimacy of the disapproval will be undermined in her own eyes. It is, Korsgaard says, ‘almost inconceivable’ that Hume’s explanation will not cause the lawyer to think that her disapproval is ‘in this case, poorly grounded, and therefore in a sense irrational’ (Korsgaard, 74).

What will the lawyer do now? One of two things, according to Korsgaard. She will either ignore her disapproval and go ahead and destroy the will, which would be unjust. Or she will find herself compelled to reveal the will’s contents because, her belief in Hume’s explanation notwithstanding, ‘she cannot destroy a valid will without intense feelings of humility or self-hatred’ (Korsgaard, 75). But even in the second case, in which she ends up performing the just act, ‘there will have been normative failure’ (Korsgaard, 75). For the lawyer will no longer believe that the claims her disapproval makes on her are ‘well-grounded.’ As Korsgaard explains, ‘If she could cure herself of [her moral feelings] then that is what she would do’ (Korsgaard, 75).

In her description of the lawyer’s normative crisis, Korsgaard highlights the role of general rules in Hume’s account of justice. But her problems with Hume are actually more pervasive than that. For our addiction to general rules is just one example of Hume’s use of the principles of association, and Korsgaard suggests that if one associative
principle can precipitate a normative crisis, then the other principles are capable of doing so as well. Indeed, Korsgaard is to a large extent using Hume’s account as a stalking horse in her larger criticism of the attempt to restrict moral inquiry to the limits set by what she calls the ‘Scientific World View.’ Korsgaard believes that on its own this World View, in which Hume and many contemporary thinkers operate, cannot ground or account for normativity. I cannot adequately address this larger concern here. But we can, I think, see Hume’s particular associative theory as a good example of the naturalistic non-moral account of morality that Korsgaard finds inadequate. Perhaps once we are working within a naturalistic framework we will find that a sociobiological account, say, is more accurate than Hume’s associative one. But Korsgaard’s worry will apply to them all in pretty much the same way. So although in what follows I will focus on how Hume could respond to Korsgaard’s criticism, I hope my discussion will shed some light on the larger question about normativity that forms the backdrop to the particular problem Korsgaard raises about Humean justice.

We can locate clearly the difference between Korsgaard and Hume through an examination of Hume’s discussion of ‘ultimate ends,’ which is perhaps the passage most revealing of his view of justificatory reasons. We pursue some things, Hume tells us there, because they are means to other things we desire, and we pursue some of those things because they are means to still others. This chain of reasons, however, cannot continue indefinitely. There must be certain ‘ultimate ends’ which we pursue for their own sake, not because they are means to anything else but because they are ‘desirable on [their] own account’ (E. 293). Crucially, moreover, these ultimate ends ‘can never, in any case, be accounted for by reason, but recommend themselves entirely to the sentiments and affections of mankind, without any dependence on the intellectual faculties’ (E. 293). Pleasure and the absence of pain are two such ends. Virtue (for most people) is another, ‘desirable on its own account, without fee or reward’ (E. 293–4).

Does Hume think these sentimentally-grounded ultimate ends are normative? Are actions justified, on Hume’s view, if motivated by the pursuit of something ‘desirable on its own account?’ I believe Hume would doubt whether we can even make sense of a negative answer to this question. For ultimate ends, as he conceives of them, are those that are so in ‘accord or agreement with human sentiment and affection’ that it is an ‘absurdity’ to think that perhaps we ought not to act on them (E. 293). There are, moreover, no ends that we care about more than those that ultimate, and so there is nothing else that could add normative force to them.

But although Hume does not think we can or need to justify our ultimate ends in terms of anything else, he does think we can explain
them in terms of our psychology and our upbringing. Hume's ultimate ends are the points beyond which justification cannot go, but they are not the end-points of explanation as well.

An important consequence of this view is that all justification is contingent on our sentimental nature being the way that it is, since if we had different sentiments (as a result of a different upbringing or psychology) we would have different ultimate ends. And this points to Korsgaard's fundamental problem with Hume's associative account of morality, namely, that it cannot accommodate a rationally necessary end.

According to the Kantian view that seems to underlie Korsgaard's criticism of Hume, to have normative confidence in morality we must believe that it is grounded in an end that is rationally inescapable, an end whose hold on us is distinct from the sentiments we happen to have. But the existence of a rationally necessary end is incompatible with Hume's conception of human nature, according to which all our ends are contingent on our sentiments. If we thought of ourselves in the way Hume describes us, therefore, our normative confidence in morality would crumble since we believe that morality is justified only if it is grounded in just the kind of end that Hume says we cannot possess. The Humean conception of human nature would thus lead ineluctably to normative skepticism.

It is not entirely clear how this putative implication of skepticism constitutes a criticism of Hume and not of our conception of morality.

21 Kant writes, 'Do we not think it a matter of the utmost necessity to work out for once a pure moral philosophy completely cleansed of everything that can only be empirical and appropriate to anthropology? That there must be such a philosophy is already obvious from the common Idea of duty and from the laws of morality' (Immanuel Kant, The Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals, H.J. Paton, trans. [New York: Harper Torchbooks 1964], 57). The Humean will deny the accuracy of Kant's analysis of the 'common Idea' of morality, maintaining that for many people the legitimacy of morality does not depend upon its holding 'not merely for men, but for all rational beings as such — not merely subject to contingent conditions and exceptions, but with absolute necessity' (Kant, 76; see also 79, 92-4).

22 There is one passage in the Enquiries in which Hume seems to say that an account of morality, however true, should be rejected if it has the harmful consequence of causing people to lose confidence in the obligatory nature of morality. He writes, 'And though the philosophical truth of any proposition by no means depends on its tendency to promote the interests of society; yet a man has but a bad grace, who delivers a theory, however, true, which, he must confess, leads to a practice dangerous and pernicious. Why rake into those corners of nature which spread a nuisance all around? Why dig up the pestilence from the pit in which it is buried? The ingenuity of your researches may be admired, but your systems will be
But what I think Korsgaard would argue is that the implication reveals the inaccuracy or perhaps incompleteness of Hume’s account. We are not all suffering normative crises, this criticism might go, so I Hume’s account must not tell the whole story of our moral lives. Hume fails to realize, perhaps, that when we deliberate we engage in an activity that defies his view that all motives originate in sentiment; Hume’s naturalistic framework cannot accommodate the first-person perspective that we undeniably adopt when we are deciding what we ought to do. But a full account of morality and human nature must include this deliberative perspective (from which non-sentimentally-based motives are possible), else it cannot explain our normative confidence in morality. For if Hume’s account were the whole story, then either morality would never have developed or there would now be an epidemic of moral crises, at least among Hume’s readers. But morality has developed, and Humeans suffer normative despair at a rate no higher than the general populace.

Addressing this criticism in full would require a detailed examination of naturalistic moral explanations and of Korsgaard’s Kantian view of motivation, which is something I cannot provide. I think, however, that we can instructively isolate one crucial point on which the disagreement between Hume and Korsgaard will turn. Korsgaard maintains that ‘the reflective structure of human consciousness’ is such that if we were to think of all our ends as grounded in sentiment we would find that there is some normative thing missing from our lives as moral beings. We do not take ‘the fact that [we are] inclined to be moved’ to be a good ultimate reason for action, she argues, because our reflective nature leads us inexorably to seek out a rationally necessary end for morality (Korsgaard, 75-6). Hume, however, would deny the accuracy of this aspect of Korsgaard’s description of ‘human consciousness.’ For according to

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detested; and mankind will agree, if they cannot refuse them, to sink them, at least, in eternal silence and oblivion. Truths which are pernicious to society, if any such there be, will yield to errors which are salutary and advantageous (E. 278-9). One could, I suppose, make heavy weather out of this passage, contending that it embodies Hume’s views on the relationship between explanation and justification. In response, I would question how seriously Hume took the possibility that there could be some truth that ought to yield to error. I would, that is, want to place emphasis on the phrase ‘if any such there be’ in the last sentence. I would also point to his statement that ‘the philosophical truth of any proposition by no means depends on its tendency to promote the interests of society.’ Lastly, I would say that if I Hume really did think that there could be a truth so pernicious that we ought to prefer error, then I wish he hadn’t. But even if that were the case, I still do not think it would be appropriate to foist onto Hume a justificatory position on the basis of this one comment.
Hume, (ultimate) ends reflecting our sentimental make-up can constitute the kind of reasons for action the normativity of morality requires.

As Korsgaard sees it, the Humean lawyer would come to think her disapproval ought not to influence her because 'it is almost inconceivable that believing one's disapproval is caused by general rules will have 'no effect' on one's attitude toward the disapproval. The Humean, in contrast, will maintain that it is quite plausible that becoming convinced of Hume's account will not affect in any significant way the lawyer's attitude toward her disapproval. The lawyer might accept that Hume's explanation is correct and still be just as convinced that she ought not to destroy the will. She might give reasons such as: destroying the will would be a betrayal of my client; or, destroying the will would be a violation of my duties as a lawyer; or, destroying the will would cause me to hate myself. And if someone pointed out that all these reasons can be explained by various associative principles of the mind, she might very well respond, 'Yes, that's all very interesting. But it doesn't change anything. They are still reasons for not destroying the will.'

I do not mean to suggest that explanations of our responses never do or never should affect our attitude toward those responses. An explanation of why I find something funny, beautiful, or virtuous may result in my eventually deciding that the thing in question is not in fact funny, beautiful, or virtuous. But then again it might not. An explaining is not always an explaining away.23

In response, Korsgaard might claim that if the lawyer really is convinced of Hume's account but doesn't feel any differently about her disapproval, then it would have to be the case that she is not engaging in honest philosophical reflection. The lawyer, so this charge might go, must be guilty of a kind of split-personality thinking. Even though she believes I Hume's account, she does not attend to it when she is considering what she ought to do. It is as though she thinks with one mind about the Humean account of morality and with another when deciding what to do. But for how long and on what basis could Korsgaard insist on this charge? What if the lawyer assured us that she was considering both

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23 Simon Blackburn has pointed out that an umpire who knows that the underlying justification of the rules is to make the sport more competitive will still have no compunction about making a call that ruins the competitive edge of a particular game, even if only good consequences will result from making another, less accurate call. The lawyer of Korsgaard's story is in a position similar to that of the umpire, and it seems to me that she is just as likely as the umpire to make the right call. See Blackburn's 'Kant versus Hume on Practical Reasoning' (unpublished ms.).
things at once but still thought she ought to expose the will? Korsgaard's view of 'the reflective structure of human consciousness' implies that such a reaction on the part of the lawyer is 'inconceivable.' On this point, however, I think 'a cautious observation of human life' gives more support to Hume than to Korsgaard. Some people, it is true, may lose normative confidence in morality if they come to believe there can be no rationally necessary end. But others, I believe, will not. And if some people who believe the Humean account (or some naturalistic descendent of it) do not lost confidence in morality, then Korsgaard's claim about the need for a rationally necessary end will begin to look less like a universal truth about 'human consciousness' and more like a description of one of the many ways in which some humans have come to feel about morality.24

Now if in fact the Humean lawyer became absolutely convinced that the consequences of destroying the will truly would be wholly beneficial, then it's possible (but not necessary) that Hume's explanation might lead her to think she ought to destroy it. But it's not entirely clear to me that this result is a bad one, let alone that it constitutes a criticism of anything in Hume. Judgments that are overturned in the light of true explanations and a perfect knowledge of relevant future events are probably ones that ought to be overturned. In real life cases, however, one is rarely absolutely certain of all the future consequences of one's actions. And this inescapable everyday uncertainty, I think, would tend to bolster a Humean's confidence in moral habits born of general rules, not weaken it.

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24 Hume himself addresses the claim that his explanations will undermine our practice of moralizing. He points out that this is as implausible as the claim that 'modern philosophy' should or could threaten our practice of judging secondary properties. He writes, 'Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compared to sound, colours, heat, and cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind: and this discovery in morals, like that other in physics, is to be regarded as a considerable advancement of the speculative sciences; though, like that too, it has little or no influence on practice. Nothing can be more real, or concern us more, than our own sentiments of pleasure and uneasiness, and if these be favourable to virtue, and unfavourable to vice, no more can be requisite to the regulation of our conduct and behaviour' (T. 469; see also E. 297 and Essays, 166). Someone who thought that the colors of a beautiful painting were mind independent might be shaken by the findings of 'modern philosophy.' But the problem would lie not in her judgment that the painting is beautiful but in her meta-theory about what color is. And while modern philosophy might demolish her aesthetic meta-theory, the painting will almost certainly still look beautiful to her. Likewise, if the lawyer thinks morality is mind-independent, then Hume's account will undermine her meta-ethical theory. But her first-order moral judgment may not be affected.
It is also possible, of course, that the Humean lawyer will be thrown into a kind of crisis by her discovery of the will, that she will find herself forced to choose between two courses of action without having any confidence that she ought to follow one rather than the other. But this crisis will not cause her to lose confidence in morality as a whole. The decision about what to do with the will, the Humean lawyer will think, is one of those isolated wrenching problems with no satisfactory solution. That there is one insoluble problem, however, does not imply that all problems are insoluble or that all solutions are illusory. Most of the time, the lawyer has found satisfactory solutions; she has been confident about what she ought to do. The judgment that she ought to execute her other clients’ last wills, for instance, will not be undermined by her doubts about the will of the one rich client with a comic-loving beer-swilling nephew. Now it is true that if someone believed that the validity of all his morally significant decisions depended upon the existence of a rationally necessary end determinate enough to pick out one course of action in every case, then that person, if faced with an insoluble dilemma, might begin to doubt the normativity of morality in general.25 The Humean lawyer, however, never believed in the existence of such a determinate rationally necessary end in the first place. She thought all along that moral character develops in a manner that leaves open the possibility that in certain unusual cases one will be insolubly stuck, impaled on the horns of a painful dilemma. But reflecting on this fact about (her) moral character will not lead the Humean lawyer to conclude that (her) moral judgments in general never make legitimate practical demands.

Korsgaard is right to emphasize that when we are deciding what we ought to do we seek a reason for action that will survive sustained thought or conscious attention; a motive we would wish to be free of were we to think carefully about it will not satisfy the demands of moral deliberation. She is also right to point out that when we are engaged in moral deliberation we ought to think about how we’ve come to possess our motives; we should no more ignore the relevant facts about the origins of our character traits than we should ignore the facts about the consequences of the actions we might perform. But she is wrong, the

25 Someone who believes that morality depends upon the existence of a rationally necessary end bears more than a surface resemblance to one who believes that if there is no God everything is permitted. If this latter person comes to believe that God does not exist, then he might very well suffer a crisis about the normativity of morality in general. But that does not prove that either God exists or morality is a normative failure.
Humean will maintain, to suggest that motives will survive moral deliberation only if they are grounded in rational necessity. For thinking of something as naturalistically explicable and contingent, according to the Humean, does not preclude thinking of it as an overriding reason as well.

V Conclusion

Although Baier and Korsgaard deliver different verdicts on Hume’s moral theory (Baier thinks it succeeds while Korsgaard thinks it fails), they both contend that Hume believed that morality is justified if it is successfully reflexive or can bear its own survey. I have tried to show that Hume does not place as much emphasis on reflexivity as Baier and Korsgaard would have us believe, and that he has good reason not to do so.

I have argued, specifically, that according to Hume’s conception of human nature, what a person needs to do in order to be able to bear her own survey depends upon which sentimentally-grounded ends she happens to have. So while a person with many admirable ends may need to act virtuously in order to be successfully reflexive, someone with detestable ends may act viciously and still be a reflexive success. What is crucial for virtue, consequently, is possessing certain ends, not simply the ability to bear one’s own survey.

Korsgaard argues that these sentimentally-grounded ends, which lie at the heart of Hume’s moral theory, cannot fund a sense of normativity robust enough to account for the role morality plays in our lives. I have maintained, in contrast, that Hume makes plausible the claim that ultimate ends, although grounded in our contingent sentimental make-up, can provide all the normative force morality requires. Hume thinks, moreover, that for most people virtue is an ultimate end, i.e., that virtue is something most people are already convinced they ought to pursue. And if this is true, then the practical purchase of the problem of whether morality as a whole is justified is far less than Korsgaard’s focus might suggest.

This still leaves the question, however, of what reasons for being moral we can give to those for whom virtue is not an ultimate end. I believe what Hume would say is that the only way to try to convince such people

26 More practically gripping than the problem of whether we ought to act morally, I would think, are the problems of determining which course of action is moral and of steeling ourselves to act as we already know we ought to.
they ought to act morally is by appealing to the ultimate ends they do have, of which self-interest will probably be the most important. This appeal may not always be successful, but that it is all Hume can accommodate only bolsters, I think, the plausibility of his view. For it seems to me that Hume is right in thinking that one's convictions about what ought to be done depend, at a fundamental level, less on one's rationality and more on one's sentimental character.28

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27 This kind of appeal to self-interest, I think, is all Hume believes we can make to 'the sensible knave'; nothing else 'will to him appear satisfactory and convincing' (E. 283).

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