A compleat chain of reasoning:
Hume's project in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Books One and Two

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1. *A Treatise of Human Nature* was published in two instalments. The first two books, on the understanding and the passions, appeared in January 1739. The third book, on morals, came out almost two years later, in November 1740. In 1739 Hume had further books in mind, on politics and on criticism, but these never materialized. The Advertisement to Books One and Two, printed between the title page and the Introduction, called attention to the fact that '*The subjects of the* understanding *and* passions *make a compleat chain of reasoning by themselves*.'[1] '*I was willing*', Hume continued, '*to take advantage of this natural division, in order to try the taste of the public*.' The purpose of this paper is to consider what Hume might have meant by calling the subject of the understanding and passions 'a compleat chain of reasoning' and a 'natural division'. We are of course used to seeing the *Treatise* as comprising three Books, and as concluding with an Appendix containing critical reflections on arguments advanced in Books One and Two. I want to return to the *Treatise* as it first came before the public, without Book Three and Appendix, and to try to determine what this book might have been meant by its anonymous author to do. That is, I want to make explicit the questions that a book on the understanding and the passions might have been intended to answer, and to say something about what was new and provocative in the answers that Hume gave them.

One thing that Hume might have meant by claiming that the subjects of Books One and Two of the *Treatise* 'make a compleat chain of reasoning by themselves' is that the understanding and passions can be shown, and have been shown, to be susceptible of the same kind of philosophical analysis. Hume's point might in the Advertisement have been to draw attention to the explanatory strategy that he deploys in both books, and to the fact *both* the understanding *and*

[1] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, second edition revised by Peter Nidditch (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1978), p. xii. For reasons to continue to use this edition instead of the new Clarendon Edition, edited by David Fate Norton and Mary Norton (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 2007), see James A. Harris, 'Editing Hume's *Treatise*', *Modern Intellectual History* 5 (2008): 633-41.

the passions have been successfully brought under the rubric of the 'experimental method of reasoning' defined as the attempt to explain the operations of the mind in as parsimonious and elegant manner as possible. Those few who have said anything at all about what might unify Books One and Two have intimated that this is how Hume's remarks in the Advertisement are to be interpreted. John Laird describes the Advertisement as a further explanation of the project Hume intended to prosecute to the end of becoming 'the Newton of the Human Mind'.[2] John Passmore suggests that 'what in particular distinguishes [the subjects of the understanding and passions] as a single topic is the fact that in both cases association is the source of order and complexity'.[3] Having asserted that 'Book II of the *Treatise* is in many respects the most important for exemplifying the major themes of Hume's philosophy', Nicholas Capaldi says that 'By its discussion of the mechanism of association [Book Two] serves as a confirmation of Hume's explanation of mechanics of causal belief'.[4] Capaldi says, in addition, that Book Two 'serves as explanation for the concept of the self which proved so problematic in Book I' and that 'by outlining his theory of motivation Hume completes his project of undermining both the rationalist model in general and rationalist moral theories'.[5] This last point, about the relation between Book Two's treatment of the role of reason in action and Book One's assault on the role of reason in the formation of belief, points towards a different way of interpreting the remarks made by Hume in the Advertisement. Capaldi's thought here is that there is more than a merely methodological connection to be drawn between Hume's treatment of the understanding and the passions. And this seems right to me. It is certainly true that Hume frequently draws attention in Book Two to continuities between the mode of philosophical analysis employed there and that used in Book One; but there is in addition the possibility that Hume might have meant in the Advertisement to intimate that the understanding and the passions constitute by themselves a distinct *subject matter* and *philosophical topic*. I believe that, in fact, the nature of the *relation* between understanding and passion is the question that Books One and Two are principally intended to answer. I shall argue here that that relation is the concern not only of Section Three of Part Three of Book Two, 'Of the influencing motives of the will', but is the larger theme of the first instalment of the *Treatise* taken as a whole.

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[2] John Laird, *Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature* (London: Methuen, 1932), pp. 20-21.

[3] John Passmore, *Hume's Intentions*, revised edition (London: Duckworth, 1968), p. 106.

[4] Nicholas Capaldi, *David Hume: The Newtonian Philosopher* (Boston: Twayne, 1975), p. 130.

[5] Capaldi, *David Hume*, p. 130. Capaldi also points to connections between Books Two and Three. Still the most comprehensive account of these connections is Páll S. Árdal, *Passion and Value in Hume's Treatise* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966).

What little evidence we have of Hume's philosophical activity before the publication of the *Treatise* gives reason to believe that from an early date his reading and thinking had been taken up with the ability, or lack thereof, of philosophical reasoning to restrain and impose order upon the passions. The so-called 'Letter to a Physician' recounts the young Hume's disappointment at his failure to improve his temper and will by means of 'Reflections against Death, & Poverty, & Shame, & Pain, & all the other Calamities of Life'.[6] That Hume had had such expectations of his philosophical reading does not mark him out as in any sense out of touch with the concerns of modern moral philosophy. On the contrary, the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries saw the publication of a large number of books devoted to showing how philosophy could help with living a happier and more virtuous life, by showing the way to better regulation of the passions. With a small number of exceptions, including Hutcheson's *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions*, this literature goes almost completely unread today, but it is nevertheless an important part of the background against which Books One and Two of the *Treatise* should be read.[7] It is likely that this literature shaped the expectations of Hume's first readers, and that Hume knew that it would do so. The theme of these books was that the passions needed to be, not utterly suppressed, but rather governed and controlled by reason, and in particular by a reasoned grasp of what is really good and what is really evil. The first instalment of the *Treatise* presented, by contrast, a sustained argument purporting to show to be mistaken the whole idea that human nature is the site of conflict between reason and passion.

Hume's point was not merely that reason is unable to conquer and subdue the passions: that was a familiar theme, and had recently been played out in a series of brilliant variations by Mandeville in *The Fable of the Bees*. On Hume's view the very idea of a conflict between reason and passion is mistaken. Feeling, or affect, drives the cogitative side of our nature just as it does the passionate side. What had always been taken to be a contest between reason and desire is in fact the interaction of a panoply of feelings, some vivid and pressing, others more elusive and reticent. The task for analyst of human nature was now to register and explore this economy of feelings, and to bring out the ways in which it is able to regulate itself without either the superintendence of a faculty of reason or the various forms of external control exercised by Mandevillean 'politicians'. In this paper my concern is with the character, and limits, of self-

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[6] *The Letters of David Hume*, edited by J. Y. T. Greig (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), vol. i, p. 14.

[7] Here I draw upon Jane L. McIntyre, 'Hume's "New and Extraordinary" Account of the Passions", in Saul Traiger (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Hume's Treatise* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 199-215.

regulation in the system of human nature as Hume described it in Books One and Two of the *Treatise*.

2. Self-regulation is the particular subject-matter of Book Two, 'Of the passions'. When one looks at Book One, 'Of the understanding', from the point of view of an inquiry into what might have prompted Hume to publish the *Treatise* in its 1739 form, what is salient is the extent to which Hume is concerned to demolish reason conceived as a faculty of governance and control. The *Abstract* of Books One and Two published in March 1740 makes it plain that, so far as Hume himself was concerned, the principal topic of Book One is a theory of belief, its nature, and causes. What a belief is, and how it differs from a simple conception, is, Hume says in the *Abstract*, 'a new question unthought of by philosophers'.[8] The answer to the question is that what distinguishes belief from conception is a matter of *feeling*. The character of the feeling is hard to put into words – Hume experiments with strength, liveliness, forcefulness, vivacity, firmness, and intensity – but the important point is that belief is not, as had been imagined by both Descartes and Locke, the result of an autonomous act of judgment, but rather the product of idea-enlivening processes over which we have very little control. Part Three of Book One describes those processes in some detail, and its message is that what we might have fondly imagined to be the work of a special faculty of reason is in fact no more than a mechanistic associative process driven by habit and custom, a process that is in no significant way different in human beings than it is in animals. The concern of Part Four is the shredding of the illusion that, even if this is how it is in ordinary life, still, it is possible at least for philosophers to counter the influence of habit and custom, and to restrain the belief-producing mechanism where its results are obviously absurd and untenable. Hume details the ways in which philosophy is overcome by what he often calls 'nature', but, contrary to what has been a popular belief among Hume scholars ever since the work of Norman Kemp Smith, the conclusion is not that natural belief can save us from the scepticism into which philosophical reason plunges itself. As Wayne Waxman shows in a book that merits more attention than it has received, there is conflict and contradiction within the realm of natural belief itself.[9] The feelings constitutive of natural belief do not constitute a harmonious whole. When, in the Conclusion, a rush of despair prompts Hume to exclaim that 'We have, therefore, no choice left but betwixt a false reason and none at

[8] [David Hume], *An Abstract of a Book lately Published; entituled A Treatise of Human Nature, &c.*, included in the *Treatise*, ed. Selby-Bigge, rev. Nidditch, pp. 641-662, p. 652.

[9] Wayne Waxman, *Hume's Theory of Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

all', he means it.[10] He means it no less when he says of himself that he is as result 'ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another'.[11]

Annette Baier has argued that Book One of the *Treatise* performs an elaborate *reductio* upon a particular conception of rationality, which she calls the 'Cartesian' conception.[12] Cartesian reason is solipsistic in the sense that it seeks to validate itself on its own, in silence, shut up by itself in the philosopher's study. What Hume in effect shows in Book One, according to Baier, is that a move outside of the study, into the social realm, is necessary if we are to find a way out of the sceptical predicament. We fail to understand ourselves, and find ourselves 'utterly depriv'd of the use of every member and faculty', while we restrict ourselves to the resources offered by 'thought or imagination'; perhaps we will have more success when we take into account 'our passions or the concern we take in ourselves'.[13] Our passions take us out of ourselves. They may be largely a matter of the concern we take in ourselves, but they lead us into concern for others, as they make us aware of the beliefs and passions of others, and of the combination of threat and resource that those beliefs and passions represent. What Hume knew, though, and what his readers knew, was that the passions were usually taken to be a problem that required reason for its solution. How, without governance by reason, could the passions supply anything other than distraction and disturbance? Was the upshot of the destruction of reason described in Book One not bound to be, when combined with the unruliness of the passions, that we require to be governed as Mandeville had described, by those in positions of political and social power? Hume's project in Book Two of the *Treatise* is to outline a third way. It is to show ways in which the passions may be seen to be self-regulating, without need of governance either by reason or by politicians. And the crucial means to that end, as we will see, is the mechanism of sympathy.

3. Hume's treatment of the passions begins where Hobbes's treatment had begun in *Human Nature*, with pride.[14] Paul Russell has drawn attention to what he takes to be important respects

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[10] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 268.

[11] Hume, *Treatise*, pp. 268-9.

[12] Annette Baier, *A Progresss of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume's Treatise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

[13] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 253, p. 269.

[14] Strictly speaking, Hobbes begins Chapter IX of *Human Nature* with 'Glory, or internal gloriation or triumph of the mind', that passion which 'by them whom it displeaseth, is called

in which Hume's account of human nature in the *Treatise* as a whole is Hobbesian in inspiration, and one of those respects is the fact that 'Both Hobbes and Hume held that moral and political philosophy, if they are to advance beyond mere rhetoric, must employ the same methodology as that which is appropriate to the natural sciences'.[15] The differences between Hume and Hobbes are, however, as significant as the similarities. Hobbes's entire political philosophy is built upon the idea that the passions, especially but not only the passion of fear, are so strong and so dangerous that self-government is impossible, so that they can only be controlled when all rights, except the bare right to refuse to do what will lead to one's own destruction, have been ceded to a sovereign power. In the *History of England* Hume remarks that 'Hobbes's politics are fitted only to promote tyranny',[16] and it may be presumed that he was able to see how Hobbes's theory of human nature had been designed to support his theory of sovereignty. Susan James has noted another respect in which Hume and Hobbes share a starting point: Hume's book on the passions begins in a version of the state of nature, in so far as it is a state without an authoritative power, in the form of a substantial sovereign self, able to impose order by exercise of the power of reason.[17] But where Hobbes looks immediately to political authority for a solution to the problems endemic to a state of nature, Hume outlines how the passions are forced by the ineluctable dynamics of social life to regulate themselves.

Properly speaking, of course, for Hume the very idea of a state of nature as imagined by Hobbes is a nonsense – a '*philosophical* fiction', as he put it in the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*.[18] Human life begins for Hume not in solitude, but in the family and in the tribe; politics is an invention to make it possible for collections of tribes to band together to fight common enemies. In the close proximities of family and tribal life it is difficult to be in any doubt as to the existence of other people and their opinions and feelings about oneself, and this fact lead Hume to what I take to be his principal insight as regards the economy of the passions, which is to say, his recognition of the ways in which passions are modified by the sense we each have of how we

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pride: by them whom it pleaseth, it is termed a just valuation of himself' (*Human Nature and De Corpore Politico*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 50).

[15] Paul Russell, *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise: Skepticism, Naturalism, and Irreligion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 68.

[16] David Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to The Revolution in 1688*, ed. William B. Todd (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983), vol. vi, p. 153.

[17] Susan James, 'Imagination and the Self in the Science of Man', unpublished MS.

[18] David Hume, *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd edition revised by Peter Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 189.

are viewed by others. Hume introduces this line of thought in his account of the love of fame, which he begins by noting that

> beside these original causes of pride and humility, there is a secondary one in the opinions of others, which has an equal influence on the affections. Our reputation, our character, our name are considerations of vast weight and importance; and even the other causes of pride; virtue, beauty and riches; have little influence when not seconded by the opinions and sentiments of others.[19]

Pride and humility are responsive to and moderated by our sense of how we are seen by others, a fact that prompts Hume to introduce into his theory of human nature 'that propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own'.[20] Much of Book Two is given over to how sympathy alters the nature and effects of our passions. Sympathy, Hume says, is the 'animating principle' of all our passions; 'nor wou'd they have any force, were we to abstract entirely from the thoughts and sentiments of others'.[21] 'We can form no wish, which has not a reference to society': our pleasures languish when we are forced to enjoy them alone, and our pains are all the more cruel and intolerable when they cannot be shared.[22] The intense sociability of human beings both enables and necessitates the regulation of the passions. Our passions do not exactly regulate themselves, then: the regulation happens in the context of a social system, in which my passions are regulated by yours, and yours by mine.

Hume's claim that 'the minds of men are mirrors to one another' takes us to the heart of his theory of the passions.[23] The emotions of others are reflected in our minds; the minds of others reflect this reflection; we in turn reflect the reflection of the reflection; and so on. Thus 'those rays of passions, sentiments and opinions may be often reverberated, and may decay away by insensible degrees'.[24] Humean sociability is rather more than a desire for the company of others. It is a concern for how others see us, a desire for their love and admiration, an aversion to their hatred and contempt. Hume works this through when he turns to our esteem for the

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[19] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 316.

[20] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 316.

[21] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 363.

[22] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 363.

[23] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 365.

[24] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 365.

rich and powerful. Riches are of course the source of a very basic satisfaction, in the form of the ability to enjoy the pleasures of life. But the rich man has 'secondary satisfaction' in the form of the 'love and esteem' of others; and this secondary satisfaction then becomes something further that is desired by those who are not rich but would like to be. That Hume chose the pleasures of wealth as his entry point into the social hall of mirrors is surely significant. For so long the desire of riches, or of luxury, had been portrayed as a socially disruptive force, something that corrupts virtue and leads inevitably to the weakening of the social bonds that give a state autonomy and the capacity for self-respect. Hume presents it instead as a means by which we are bound together into a community of aspiration. This is an example of the way the passions, as Hume understands them, bind us into the societal realm, by giving emotional reality to social relations, and especially to those relations that place us along the axis of 'superiority' and 'inferiority'.

Hume's account of passions appears to have been designed to reduce the extent to which the self must be seen as inevitably at variance with the demands of social life. On Hume's view, the self is riven by conflict, requiring control either by reason, along the lines described in the literature on the government of the passions, or by Mandevillean politicians. Instead, the self is a thoroughly social artefact, the product of the ways in which we are seen by others. Adam Smith would later portray other people as the mirrors in which we see ourselves: just as we cannot see what our faces look like without a mirror, so also we can form no conception of our characters without their reflection in the countenance and behaviour of those we live with.[25] This image of Smith's builds on a mirroring process already outlined in Book Two of the *Treatise*. As Donald Ainslie has shown, what is presented in Book Two is the social basis of the very possibility of self-conception.[26] The 'indirect' passions of pride, humility, love and hatred are mechanisms by which connections are forged between a person and those things that make him who he is: his virtues, his physical appearance, his possessions. We are proud of ourselves, and are loved by others, for some of these things; we are ashamed of ourselves, and are hated by others, for others of these things. In this way we acquire the solidity that we lacked in the Book One account of personal identity, restricted as it was to considerations provided by thought and imagination, the perspective given by the passions and affections put to one side. In Book Two Hume talks repeatedly of our 'intimate consciousness' of the self, and it is inconceivable that he has somehow simply forgotten the opening moves of 'Of personal identity'. Better to see him as

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[25] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), p. 110.

[26] Donald Ainslie, 'Scepticism about persons in Book II of Hume's *Treatise*', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 37 (1999): 469-92.

talking in Book Two of a different person, not the person who so successfully eludes the grasp of introspection, but the person there upon stage of society, who is modest and has an upright bearing and owns fine suits of clothes, and who is proud of all of these things, and pleased by the approval he sees in the ways others treat him. Our grasp of who we are, Hume is saying, in the form of the kinds and degrees of pride and humility that we feel, is always determined in large part by our responsiveness to the sentiments of others. It might even be said that, for Hume, the truth is that we do not really know who we are until we know how others see us.

My suggestion, then, is that in Book Two of the *Treatise* Hume is outlining a new theory of sociability, what might be termed *sympathetic sociability*. Having gone to great lengths to undermine all confidence in the authority and power of reason in Book One, Hume turned immediately to the passions, that huge tract of human nature generally taken to be a site of disorder and disruption and, as a result, to be in need of control and regulation by, precisely, the faculty of reason. Book Two, when seen in the context provided by the literature on the government of the passions, is striking principally in so far as there is no mention made of techniques by means of which the passions can be ordered and subdued. It seems to me almost certain that this is what would have been expected of a book on the understanding and the passions published in 1739. Hume was self-consciously refusing to tell his readers how to manage their emotions. His posture was that of the anatomist of human nature, openly and provocatively uninterested in the questions that almost all writers on such topics had taken it upon themselves to answer. This purely analytical tone is, indeed, as Paul Russell has suggested, reminiscent of the voice adopted by Hobbes in his treatments of the passions. But the substance of Hume's account of the passions could not be less Hobbesian. Hume's passions, far from making social life impossible, weave us into the web of social relations, so tightly that the self itself is, not prior to, but rather a product of life in society. This being so, the catastrophe visited upon the faculty of reason in Book One of the *Treatise* does not require a Hobbesian remedy: not Hobbes's own remedy, nor the updated Hobbesianism, Hobbesianism for a commercial world, spelled out by Mandeville in *The Fable of the Bees*. Means of government are provided by the passions themselves – which is to say, by the passions of others, of which we are always, through sympathy, very intimately aware.

4. There is good reason to think that the greatest single influence on Hume's theory of sympathetic sociability was the treatment of the passions in Malebranche's *De la recherche de la vérité*. Certainly sympathy is a notable element of Malebranche's account: he talks of a

'communication of the soul's passions' that works 'to join men together in relation to good and evil and to make them exactly like one another … in their mental disposition', though he adds to this a series of physiological investigations entirely lacking in Hume.[27] Malebranche adds that 'God has made us capable of all the passions that move us mainly in order to link us to all sensible things for the preservation of society and of our sensible being'.[28] Moreover, Hume shares Malebranche's scepticism as to the capacity of Stoicism or Epicureanism to cure the errors and disorders that our passions make us subject to; though, needless to say, he does not join Malebranche in looking to God's grace as the only true way of living in peace with the passionate side of human nature. There is a sense in which Hume on the passions is, as has been said of the treatment of causal power given in Book One of the *Treatise*, Malebranche without God. Certainly Hume shares Malebranche's interest in the alteration, alternation, and contrariety of the emotional domain. This becomes especially obvious in Part Two of Book Two, where to sympathy is added another important mental principle, the principle of comparison. This principle is introduced in the first instance in order to explain the contrary of pity, malice, 'joy in the sufferings and miseries of others, without any offence or injury on their part'.[29] We have a tendency to judge of objects not from their intrinsic value – whatever that might be on the Humean scheme of things – but from comparisons with other objects, most notably ourselves. And it follows that the happiness or misery of other people makes us reflect on our own happiness and misery, and to feel pain or pleasure as a result. 'The misery of another gives us a more lively idea of our happiness', Hume says, 'and his happiness of our misery. The former, therefore, produces delight; and the latter uneasiness'.[30] This is exactly the opposite of what would be expected from the principle of sympathy. Hume proceeds to use comparison to explain the passion of envy, and also the fact that civil wars are peculiarly intractable conflicts, in that, as Hume puts it, 'any party in a civil war always choose to call in a foreign enemy at any hazard rather than submit to their fellow-citizens'.[31] The superiority of one party to another is much more difficult to bear where there is an obvious relation between the parties – in this case, shared nationality – that facilitates comparison. Having introduced the principle of comparison,

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[27] Nicolas Malebranche, *The Search after Truth*, edited and translated by Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 377.

[28] Malebranche, *Search*, p. 377.

[29] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 372.

[30] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 375.

[31] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 379.

Hume focuses closely on the ways in which comparison and sympathy alternate in influencing the course of the passions.

Contrariety remains Hume's main concern when he turns, finally, to an explicit treatment of the relation between reason and passion in Part Three of Book Two. We have been well prepared for what is, on the reading I am proposing here, the climax of the story that Hume is telling in the first published version of the *Treatise*. It is no surprise to be told that reason is the slave of the passions – what else could it be, given what reason had turned out to be in Book One, and given the centrality of the passions to self-conception as such in Book Two? Much more surprising is the way in which Hume characterises the servitude of reason. His main point is not the manifold ways, already documented comprehensively by Mandeville and a host of other moralists, including Malebranche, in which the passions fail to submit to governance by reason. It is, rather, that what had, almost since the beginning of philosophy itself, been described as the conflict between reason and passion is in fact no such thing. As Hume says, 'Nothing is more usual in philosophy, and even in common life, than to talk of the combat of passion and reason, to give the preference to reason, and to assert that men are only so far virtuous as they conform themselves to its dictates'.[32] The truth, however, is the supposed combat of passion and reason is really a combat between passions. Reason is not the loser in the combat; it never entered the fray. What has been called the conflict between reason and passion is a conflict between passions that are 'calm', in the sense that they 'produce little emotion in the mind', and are as a result easily mistaken for determinations of reason, and passions that are 'violent'.[33] This reconstruction of what had usually been taken to be the central problematic of human nature is a remarkable moment in the history of moral philosophy. Hume's topic for the rest of Book Two is the ways in which calm and violent passions succeed each other in the mind, both incited and abetted by reason, and never directly at odds with it.

There are two kinds of calm passion, Hume says: 'either certain instincts originally implanted in our natures, such as benevolence and resentment, the love of life, and kindness to children; or the general appetites to good, and aversion to evil, consider'd merely as such'.[34] Among the violent passions are resentment, such as makes me desire someone's harm and punishment, independent of all considerations of pleasure and advantage to myself', sexual desire, and a variety of other bodily appetites. Hume says he will consider 'some of those

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[32] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 413.

[33] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 417.

[34] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 417.

circumstances and situations of objects, which render a passion either calm or violent',[35] but fails to make it clear whether particular passions are calm or violent as a matter of their nature, or whether particular passions can sometimes be calm, and sometimes violent. Neither resentment nor sexual desire are intrinsically violent; and yet neither seems to be among the calm passions as Hume has defined them. It makes most sense, I believe, to take Hume to be interested in the ways in which passions are violent at one time and calm at another. Naturally, reason plays little or no role in the transitions from calmness to violence and back to calmness described in remarkable detail in the middle sections of Book Two, Part Three, as details the influence of custom and imagination on the passions, and explains how distances weakens passions, why distance in time has a greater weakening effect than distance in space, and why distance in past time has a greater weakening effect than distance in future time, before going on to explain why a *very large* increase in distance has the effect of *intensifying* passions, why a *very large* distance in time intensifies passion more effectively than a *very large* distance in space, and why a *very large* distance in past time intensifies passion more effectively than a *very large* distance in future time. What Hume calls 'greatness of mind' 'implies the prevalence of the calm passions above the violent', but it appears that there is nothing to be said about how one might ensure such a prevalence, given that, as Hume says himself, 'there is no man so constantly possess'd of this virtue, as never on any occasion to yield to the sollicitations of passion and desire'[36] – which is to say, more properly, the solicitations of *violent* passions and desires. At the end of his account of the calm and violent passions, Hume admits that there is a certain mysteriousness to the whole business. There are so many things that can turn a calm passion into a violent one that men differ in respect of how they settle the supposed struggle of passion and 'reason' not only from each other, 'but also from themselves in different times': 'Philosophy can only account for a few of the greater and more sensible events of this war; but must leave all the smaller and more delicate revolutions, as dependent on principles too fine and minute for her comprehension'.[37]

This sense of the ultimate inscrutability of the ways in which the passions succeed and alter each other is another respect in which Hume's text displays the influence of Malebranche and the Augustinian tradition. The vocabulary of 'calm' and 'violent' passions is taken from Hutcheson, but the use Hume puts it to is very different. As I have mentioned, the usual recommendation as to how to manage the passions, explicitly endorsed by Hutcheson, was to concentrate on acquiring a secure and definite grasp of what is genuinely, as opposed to merely

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[35] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 419.

[36] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 418.

[37] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 438.

apparently, good for human beings. Hume depicts us as permanently liable to being distracted by comparison – evidence, as he puts it at one point, that men are not much governed by reason, and 'that they always judge more of objects by comparison than from their intrinsic worth and value'.[38] Yet Hume has followed the Augustinians in also dismissing the very idea of 'intrinsic worth and value' from his philosophy. Where the Augustinians define the good in terms of the arbitrary will of God, Hume defines it in terms of our sentimental reactions, and allows that, were our sentiments different, so also would be the distinction between good and evil. I have concentrated here on the ways in which Hume seeks to show the passions to be able to regulate themselves without government by reason in the form of insight into the good in itself. But it needs to be admitted that the acquisition of 'greatness of mind', the temper of one in whom the calm passions prevail over the violent, is presented by Hume as more or less a matter of luck. There are those in whom the violent passions will prevail, and the problems such people create lead Hume beyond the realm of the passions, through the conventions and institutions of justice, and ultimately into the domain of politics. Thus while there is a completeness to Books One and Two as regards both philosophical method and subject matter, the chain of reasoning described there is *not* complete in the sense that it describes a perfectly self-contained and self-regulating system.

5. I have suggested that a book comprising accounts of the understanding and the passions published in the first half of the eighteenth century must have been read, and must have been intended to be read, in the context of a large literature on the government of the passions. Sometimes what is not said in a text is as significant as what is said. When one takes into account what books on the reason and the passions normally looked like, there is in the *Treatise* a startling silence as to how the passions can be controlled. In his adoption of the pose of an anatomist of the mind, a scientist of man determined to leave to one side the practical concerns of the moralist, Hume would have seemed little short of irresponsible, as if he were consciously and perhaps even maliciously abandoning his readers to the bullying wiles of the passions. Hume further violates the expectations that literature would have generated by assaulting the standing of reason in Book One, leaving the reader at the end of that book in the Pyrrhonist predicament, unable to find reasons to believe anything rather than its contrary. All of this, I believe, was meant to draw attention to the innovations contained in Book Two, and, in particular, to the means by which the mechanism of sympathy allows the passions to be presented as able to

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[38] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 372.

control themselves. More precisely, it was meant to draw attention to the ways in which Hume drew upon the dynamics of social in order show each of us as so caught up in the web of the passions of others that what we feel is to a significant extent determined by what we feel others feel about us.

Knud Haakonssen has reminded us that we have lost the ability to understand how in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries 'a concern with the possibility of social living and its political implications could be *the* fundamental problem in philosophy'.[39] There is a sense in which any book about human nature written in the early eighteenth century was at the same time a book about sociability, its basis and its limits. The first version of *A Treatise of Human Nature* was no exception. Its significant antecedents were the philosophies of Hobbes, Malebranche, and Mandeville. Like all of these writers, Hume was sceptical of the capacity of reason to solve the problems that need to be solved if human beings are to live peacefully and prosperously. But unlike Hobbes, Malebranche, and Mandeville, Hume proposed ways in which human nature can be seen as containing resources for self-regulation, rather than needing regulation imposed upon it from outside. Of course, a book on morals followed the books on the passions and the understanding, and it would be an exaggeration to claim that the systems of self-government described in Book Two were to be understood to be completely sufficient for a solution to the problem of sociability. Nevertheless, I hope I have made it plausible that Books One and Two could have appeared to their first readers, as Hume claimed in the Advertisement they were, 'a compleat chain of reasoning by themselves'.

[39] Knud Haakonssen, 'The history of eighteenth-century philosophy: history or philosophy?', in Haakonssen, ed., *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 14.