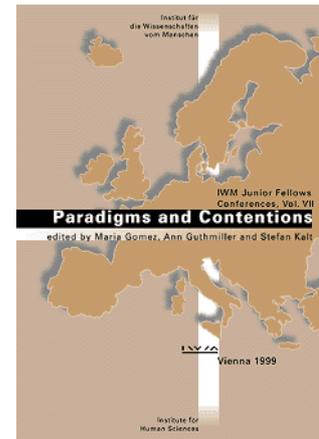


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Obligation and Action in Hume's Moral Psychology

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In the following paper, I will present an interpretation of Hume's account of the motive force of "conscience, or a sense of morals;"¹ that is, of our tendency to act because we "feel" that we ought to. I will introduce this topic with some general remarks about Humean sentimentalism. I will then focus on Hume's cognitive psychology to prepare the ground for an examination of the virtue of benevolence, the virtue which best illustrates the nature of moral motivation as Hume conceives it. After reconstructing the specifically Humean "sense" of obligation, I will draw a brief comparison between Hume's ethical views and those of Kant and Aristotle.

For Hume, morality is not divinely revealed. Neither is it determined by reason. Reason is, as Hume famously puts it, the "slave of passion."² Our passions - in particular, our desires - posit ends to which reason discovers only the means: Humean reason is thus purely instrumental. Desire neither responds to the

¹ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 458.

² *Ibid.*, p. 415.

authoritative dictates of a distinctively rational part of the soul nor sublimates into an erotic longing for a Good which exists independently of man. In so far as it accords with a specifically moral purpose, desire takes its direction from certain sentiments which, by the arbitrary constitution of our nature, arise in us when we observe human behavior. These sentiments are the offspring of a sympathy which we extend to those who act for the benefit of either themselves or others. For example: someone who displays a concern for the plight of his fellows is said to possess the virtue of humanity (or what in the second *Enquiry* Hume calls "general benevolence"), just as someone who conducts his own affairs with attention and foresight is said to be prudent. What leads us to affix these excellences to certain people when neither reason nor intuition suffices? Hume believes that sympathy brings us to do this. By a delicate sympathy with the gratitude of the beneficiary, we approve of the actions of the benefactor. Hume calls this feeling of approval a "moral sentiment;" its projected "worldly" correlate, a "virtue."

Not every instance of sympathy generates moral sentiments. Only the sympathy of one who occupies a "general point of view" - or, at least, of one who makes an effort to occupy it - produces them. Hume devotes considerable space to discussing the "general view" and the "judicious spectator" who stands there.³ Later in this paper, I will also discuss this at some length. Hume raises the issue of a privileged spectator because it is evident to him that when we assess a person's character, we claim to have assumed a general standpoint, to have set aside views which are peculiar to ourselves or influenced by our natural partiality. Under no other circumstances, thinks Hume, would we feel entitled to use the moral language of "virtue and vice" rather than the self-interested language of "friend and enemy."

Hume admits to the rank of virtue not only certain character traits, but various intellectual qualities as well. He even includes bodily strength and agility. Clearly, many of these virtues have no intentional component. Thus, Hume's remarks about the nature of moral obligation are not relevant to all virtues. In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, it is only in connection with the social virtues of benevolence and justice that Hume discusses the feeling of obligation which the "sense" of virtue produces. What he says about justice and about the "artificial" virtues in general presents problems which, if taken into account, would unnecessarily complicate the analysis of obligation I propose to make. For this reason, I will examine only the "natural" virtue of benevolence. To better understand how the "sense" of its virtue

³ *Treatise*, p. 581.

can incite action, we must attend to its motivational structure. To do this, it will be necessary to dip into Hume's psychology of the passions.

In Book Two of the *Treatise*, Hume links benevolence to the passion of love and anger to that of hatred. Love or hatred arises in response to the pleasure or pain which another "thinking being" causes us.⁴ When we feel love or hatred for someone, it is not long before this passion excites either benevolence or anger. In the *Treatise*, Hume defines benevolence as "a desire for the happiness of the person belov'd."⁵ This is important because it introduces an altruistic component into Hume's passional psychology. The pleasure which another gives us is the efficient cause of our desire for his well-being. We do not wish for his happiness on account of any pleasure which we expect to receive from him in the future; rather, it is the pleasure which we have already received which gives rise to this wish. Thus, the fact that pleasure prompts benevolence in no way reduces the latter to a species of self-interest. The relationship between the pleasure which a person gives us and the benevolent regard which we extend to him in return is an irreducibly mechanical one.

There are two circumstances which might appear to upset this doctrine. Like anyone who has not remained a child his whole life, Hume is aware that, more often than not, we return favors for the good that others do us only for the sake of obtaining some additional good for ourselves. Furthermore, in *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, the *Treatise*, and an essay entitled "Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature," Hume notes that actions which spring from benevolence are themselves often pleasurable and that, to a cynical mind, the experience of this pleasure might seem to be the basis of their performance. Do these observations undermine Hume's account of benevolence? In the above-mentioned essay, Hume brushes aside any troubles which the first observation might raise: "I feel pleasure in doing good to my friend because I love him; but do not love him for the sake of that pleasure."⁶ The pleasure of benevolence is merely incidental to it; it is not the end which it seeks. In response to the first objection, Hume has this to say:

Is gratitude no affection of the human breast, or is that a word merely, without meaning or reality? Have we no satisfaction in one man's company above another's, and no desire of the welfare of our friend, even

⁴ *Treatise*, p. 331.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 367.

⁶ David Hume, "Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature," in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1985), pp. 85 - 86.

*though absence or death should prevent us from all participation in it? Or what is it commonly, that gives us any participation in it, even while alive and present, but our affection and regard to him.*⁷

For Hume, benevolence is a fact of ordinary experience, assumed without further proof.

As previously stated, we are benevolently disposed towards our friends and towards strangers who are a regular source of pleasure to us. There exists, however, another cause of benevolence: sympathy. When we sympathize with the misfortunes of others, we feel compassion for them; when we sympathize with their joy, we "congratulate" them. Humean sympathy is not itself a passion; it is a principle of the "interpersonal" communication of passions and is, therefore, more akin to what today we would call "empathy." If the feelings which we receive from another are sufficiently strong, we enter, so to speak, into his emotional life. If he is in need, we want to come to his aid; if he is well off, we want to celebrate his good fortune. Sympathy is thus not only the source of moral sentiments; it also generates a desire to seek the happiness of others. Both partial and impartial sympathy produces this desire (although impartial sympathy usually imparts less vivacity to it).

Finally, Hume believes that a parent is instinctively driven to care for his or her young. Hume does not elaborate on the nature of parental instinct; he draws attention to it for the sole purpose of refuting those who deny the existence of benevolence altogether. Nevertheless, Hume does not believe that there exists anyone who possesses an innate desire to promote the well-being of his fellow humans, considered simply as such. Instinctual benevolence is very confined. The benevolence which originates in the pleasure which we take in others is also limited in scope, if for no other reason than that such persons tend to be few in number. We take a sincere interest in the welfare of people who are not well known to us only through sympathetic engagement. This alone enables us to concern ourselves directly with their fate.

So far, I have presented a concise summary of Hume's concept of benevolence (straightforward as it is) and mentioned three of its causes. These causes may readily oppose one another. For example, my compassion for a stranger who lives in poverty could tax my financial resources and prevent me from returning a favor to a friend, just as the concern which a parent has towards his offspring might, in a

⁷ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. J. B. Schneewind (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), p. 92.

given instance, prevent him from attending an awards ceremony honoring those who fought in a foreign war. Frequently, these competing inclinations can be balanced - if at all - only through careful deliberation. Even then, the strictest impartiality may furnish only a weak motive.

Let us now see how benevolence operates in Hume's moral theory. It is Hume's view that motives alone are truly virtuous. An action is said to be virtuous only because of the motive which, in part, causes it. When is a motive virtuous? It is virtuous when it would be approved of by an impartial spectator. Although an unwillingness to perform a virtuous action is not always a sign of vice, it sometimes is.⁸ Hume observes that a person who fails to perform actions the neglect of which signifies vice would bring an impartial spectator to "feel" that these actions ought to be performed. To be more precise, however, it should be said that the spectator's feeling is not so much directed towards the virtuous or vicious actions as it is towards their underlying motives: "'Tis evident, that when we praise any actions, we regard only the underlying motives that produced them, and consider the actions as signs or indications of certain principles in the mind and temper".⁹ Thus, our belief that a person ought to perform a certain action is rooted in the belief that he ought to possess a certain motive. When he possesses this motive, it adds itself to the complex of motives which form his character.

Usually, the motives which we praise in others are ones which we would like to possess ourselves. Frequently, we lack them. This has the effect of degrading ourselves in our own eyes. It may, thinks Hume, lead some of us to fool ourselves into thinking that by acting in a way which is usually associated with the desired motive, we have suddenly acquired it. Those who are less inclined to self-deception will hope that, through practice, they may eventually acquire it. These hopes may not be disappointed since, in the *Treatise*, Hume observes that "custom not only gives a facility to perform any action, but likewise an inclination and a tendency towards it."¹⁰ Because custom can instill motives, we see that it is a fourth source of benevolence.

To illustrate all that has been said, I will modify Hume's example of a man who feels little or no gratitude towards someone who does him a favor. Such a man may, nevertheless, come to feel that he "ought" to behave gratefully. When would he feel

⁸ For example, one need not endanger his life for the well-being of another (with the exception of war), even if there are many instances in which it may be virtuous to do so. But it is always (or almost always) vicious to behave unjustly.

⁹ *Treatise*, p. 477.

¹⁰ *Treatise*, p. 424.

this way? Perhaps after he catches a glimpse of his character, an event which is not unlikely since we are all in the habit of surveying ourselves. For Hume, it would, in this instance, mean that he sympathizes with the resentment (or, technically, the hate) of his benefactor. For the purposes of my analysis, I will assume that, when doing this, he achieves the requisite degree of impartiality. As a consequence, the sympathetically transmitted hate would provoke in him a feeling of disapproval, directed against himself. Secondly, his benefactor's unease would prompt his compassion. In accordance with what has been said above, compassion is a form of benevolence, i.e., the desire to benefit another person. This benevolence would add itself to the amount (if any) that our imagined ingrate had prior to his exercise in self-evaluation. Their combined force would thus furnish him with a greater motive for being genuinely grateful than he would have had had he not examined his character at all. Hume is quick to point out that there is no guarantee that a proper degree of sympathy for the victim of vice (in this case, ingratitude) will generate, even in an impartial spectator, enough benevolence to meet with this spectator's self-approbation. But if, in the example we are considering, we allow that it does, then after a second view of his character, our ingrate would approve of himself since, *ex hypothesi*, he would have ceased to be ungrateful. Of course, he might be vicious in other ways (e.g., he may be cowardly, stubborn, intemperate, etc.) such that, taken together, his vices outweigh his virtues, rendering him a despicable figure.

I have elaborated a scenario, highly artificial as it was, in which moral sentiments themselves lead someone to virtue because they furnish him with a proper motive. If such a person acts beneficently towards his benefactor, it is simply because he wishes him to flourish and not because he thinks that he "ought" to return a kindness. But as I have already said, Hume recognizes that people frequently act a certain way because they believe that they ought to - because they think that it is the right thing to do - and not for any other reason. Why does this happen? I have already mentioned the possibility that even if a person were to regard his benefactors in as neutral a way as one can, the sympathy which he would feel for them might still be unable to generate in him enough benevolence to meet with his own impartial approval. In other words, there could be a gap between the amount of sympathetically sparked benevolence that he actually comes to feel (due to his effort at self-appraisal) and the amount which he still feels that he ought to possess. The poor opinion which he forms of himself will depend, of course, on the extent of this discrepancy. In short: knowing what is right and doing what is right are two different things. The dispute Hume has with some other thinkers (e.g., Locke) is

over the nature of the connection between knowing and doing. Hume thinks that if we know what is right, we have a motive for doing it (thanks to sympathy): unfortunately, this motive may not be strong enough to win our own impartial approval.

When a virtuous motive fails to appear, the sight of our flawed character may, by itself, move us to act. I quote Hume in full:

When any virtuous motive or principle is common in human nature, a person, who feels his heart devoid of that principle, may hate himself upon that account, and may perform the action without the motive, from a certain sense of duty, in order to acquire by practice, that virtuous principle, or at least, to disguise to himself, as much as possible, his want of it. A man that really feels no gratitude in his temper, is still pleas'd to perform grateful actions, and thinks he has, by that means, fulfill'd his duty. Actions are at first only consider'd as signs of motives: but 'tis usual, in this case, as in all others, to fix our attention on the signs, and neglect, in some measure, the thing signify'd.¹¹

The passage calls for commentary. It is clear from his remarks that Hume believes that the ubiquity or scarcity of a virtuous motive determines the degree to which we feel obliged to cultivate it. When we lack it, we appear ugly to ourselves, we "hate" ourselves (to quote Hume) and imagine that, by repeating an action which is normally associated with the motive which we would like to possess, we will either finally succeed in possessing it or dupe ourselves into thinking that we already do. The man who returns a favor to his benefactor so as to repair or to hide from himself his defective character acts, not for the sake of his benefactor, but for his own sake: he seeks to avoid the pain which the sight of his soul brings him. In the best case, he hopes to forge a new character and imagines that force of habit will implant in him a benevolent motive and make it a permanent principle of his behavior.

I believe, it is of some significance that Hume says that we "hate" ourselves for lacking certain virtues. According to the definition which he gives in Book Two of the *Treatise*, hate is a passion which takes, as its subject (in the Humean sense), another person: "We may be mortified by our own faults and follies; but never feel any anger or hatred, except from the injuries of others."¹² To avoid the manifest contradictoriness of this statement, I suggest that self-judgment be understood as a

¹¹ *Treatise*, p. 479.

¹² *Treatise*, p. 330.

process of self-transcendence: we step outside of ourselves and see ourselves as another person would see us. But if we allow this, we must also allow that consequences other than the ones which Hume mentions may be deduced from it. According to the description given in Book Two, hate is always attended by anger, "a desire of the misery and an aversion to the happiness of the person hated."¹³ A vicious person who is conscious of his vice could as easily turn into a masochist as into a pretender of virtue. He might even refuse to look at himself again; he could simply remain inert. But let us accept Hume's inference. What does it mean? It means that those who act for the sake of duty (i.e., who exhibit a certain kind of behavior only because they think that such behavior is virtuous) do not act according to duty: they engage in a subtle form of hedonism. To be sure, it is a "negative" hedonism, in so far as the avoidance of pain and not the pursuit of pleasure is its primary aim. However this may be, it can hardly be denied that a concern with our own happiness animates us when we fly from pain of whatever kind. This concern is one with self-interest as Hume defines the latter in Appendix Three of the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*.¹⁴

When placed in the context of the history of philosophy, Hume's account of obligation forms an interesting contrast to that of Kant. Kant shares Hume's view that intentions alone can have an irreducible value. But here their similarities end. Kant insists that our intentions are morally worthy only when we act from a sense of duty. An action which accords with the requirements of the categorical imperative but which arises from a natural inclination has no moral value whatsoever. When it does have moral worth, it is because of the spontaneous action of reason which determines the will from a noumenal ground. Most importantly, the moral law must be known to the agent who acts for its sake; he must know that what he is doing is right if he is to carry out the imperatives of pure practical reason. Hume's agent, by contrast, need never be aware that his motives and his actions are virtuous. So long as an impartial spectator would approve of them, he is dutiful. In sum: the Humean man - at least when he is behaving benevolently - does not act virtuously for the sake of virtue: when he acts for the sake of virtue, he pursues only his own happiness; when he acts virtuously, he pursues only another's. This latter pursuit may be the mechanical effect of his having assumed an impartial perspective, but it need not be. Gratitude, unadjusted sympathy, instinct - each of these could be the source of benevolence.

¹³ Ibid., p. 367.

¹⁴ See *Enquiry II*, p. 92.

In certain respects, Hume's ethical thought is closer to Aristotle's than it is to Kant's. Like Aristotle, Hume believes that many virtues are a function of a person's character. Similarly, Hume does not hesitate to include intellectual virtues in the list of qualities which constitute personal merit, although for him the distinction between the virtues of character and intellectual virtues is not fundamental. Hume himself points to another similarity: "The ancient philosophers, though they often affirm, that virtue is nothing but conformity to reason, yet, in general, seem to consider morals as deriving their existence from taste and sentiment."¹⁵ Because Aristotle frequently insists upon the beauty (*kalos*) of virtuous actions, Hume thinks that, like himself, his ancient predecessor takes virtue to be an "aesthetic" phenomenon. However, Hume would disagree with Aristotle over its motivational function, as when the latter, speaking of the generous man, says: "Now excellent actions are noble and done for the sake of the noble. Therefore the liberal man will give for the sake of the noble...".¹⁶ Although Hume would join company with Aristotle in maintaining the opinion that a virtuous person is one who likes to perform virtuous actions, he would dispute Aristotle's contention that such a person performs them for the sake of their virtue (or nobility). An example will illustrate this: a man is prompted to give someone a gift of money after an impartial consideration of the latter's circumstances. According to Hume, his desire to bestow the gift is not a desire to be virtuous, but a desire to contribute to the recipient's happiness. Our agent-spectator may catch sight of himself at the moment when his desire for the other's happiness comes into being and after this experience the moral sentiment of self-approval grows. He may recognize that he is virtuous - i.e., that his intentions (and, by extension, his actions) are virtuous - and be proud of this fact. But clearly, this would be the effect, and not the cause, of his intention to assist the other person.

Perhaps it will be said that we make the ascent to the general standpoint for the sake of virtue. For Hume, this cannot be so. To see why, we must look to the reason which he gives for this ascent. In the *Treatise*, Hume insists that if self-interest alone colored our judgments of character at all times, it would be difficult for us to speak with one another on account of

¹⁵ *Enquiry II*, p. 14.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Ethics*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 1768 (lines 1120a23-24).

*the perpetual contradictions, we [would] meet with in society and conversation, from persons that are not plac'd in the same situation, and have not the same interest with ourselves.*¹⁷

And in the same connection:

*indeed 'twere impossible we cou'd ever make use of language, or communicate our sentiments to one another, did we not correct the momentary appearances of things, and overlook our present situation.*¹⁸

On the basis of these statements, the contradictions which Hume mentions would appear to express themselves propositionally, at least in part. But there is reason to doubt this. In the second *Enquiry*, Hume writes:

*When a man denominates another his enemy, his rival, his antagonist, his adversary, he is understood to speak the language of self-interest, and to express the sentiments peculiar to himself, and arising from his particular circumstances and situation. But when he bestows on any man the epithets of vicious or odious or depraved, he then speaks another language, and expresses sentiments, in which, he expects, all his audience are to concur with him.*¹⁹

Hume's concluding remark is rather confident. When we call someone "virtuous" or "vicious," we do not, invariably, expect all others to agree with us. Let us put this objection to one side. I wish to interpret the first part of this last passage in the light of a previous citation from the *Treatise*. What sort of contradictions does the language of competing self-interest generate? If I like someone because he has done me a favor and you dislike him because he has harmed you, you and I do not contradict each other when we express our feelings of gratitude or resentment, respectively. The statement, "I love him," in the mouth of one person does not contradict the statement, "I hate him," in the mouth of another, any more than "He is my friend" contradicts "He is my enemy." There is certainly no reason to think that two such people would be unable to communicate with each other - to "make use of language", as Hume puts it in the *Treatise*. As we have seen above, Hume admits that self-interested language is universally intelligible. Let us assume, however, that somehow it did bring us into discursive conflict. Why would we abandon it? Would we do it solely for the purpose of avoiding each other's contradicting utterances, as Hume seems to suggest? At this point in his discussion,

¹⁷ *Treatise*, p. 603.

¹⁸ *Treatise*, p. 582.

¹⁹ *Enquiry II*, p. 75.

Hume does not tell us why we would care to harmonize our discourse. How desperately do we need another person's conversation?

Perhaps the contradictions which we are examining arise, not between self-interested judgments, but between moral judgments. If this is so, a general point of view cannot resolve them. In "On the Standard of Taste," Hume writes:

The admirers and followers of the Alcoran insist on the excellent moral precepts interspersed throughout that wild and absurd performance... But would we know, whether the pretended prophet had really attained a just sentiment of morals? Let us attend to his arration, and we shall soon find, that he bestows praise on such instances of treachery, inhumanity, cruelty, revenge, bigotry, as are utterly incompatible with civilized society... Every action is blamed or praised, so far only as it is beneficial or hurtful to the true believers.²⁰

Obviously, Hume has a low opinion of Islam, although I suspect that he is actually taking a stab at Christianity in the passage above. However this may be, I call attention to it, not for the purpose of recording or interpreting Hume's attitude towards any particular religion, but to point to the fact that, even if the view expressed here were entirely correct, a Muslim could never be reconciled to it by means of an appeal to the general view as such. When someone opposes our moral outlook, it is because he thinks that he already occupies the general view; that is why he feels "moral sentiments."

In his article "On Why Hume's General Point of View Isn't Ideal, and Shouldn't Be," Geoffrey Sayre-McCord asserts that for Hume the general standpoint serves a clear purpose: "our ability to introduce, adopt, and pass on, a shared standard for regulating our evaluations"²¹ resolves practical disputes. According to Sayre-McCord, the contradictions which Hume mentions are not narrowly linguistic, but rather nascently political; they point to oppositional attitudes and ultimately to the possibility of real conflict. The Hobbesian nightmare, in which unregulated self-interest leads to a war of all against all, is put to an end, not through a compact which installs an absolute sovereign, but through the harmonizing effects of a shared moral perspective. This "civilizing effect comes with the mollifications provided by sympathy's softening of self-interest."²²

²⁰ David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste", in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), p. 229.

²¹ Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, "On Why Hume's General Point of View Isn't Ideal, and Shouldn't be", *Social Philosophy and Policy* 11 (1994), p. 217.

²² Sayre-McCord, p. 217.

Sayre-McCord's interpretation is, in my opinion, faithful to the genuine sense of Hume's thought. However, Sayre-McCord inflates the importance which even Hume attaches to the "mollifying" effects of morality. The artificial virtues of justice and obedience keep us out of the state of nature: neither the "agreement" to adhere to a common standpoint for assessing people's character nor the motives which arise from impartial sympathy itself are strong enough to prevent a "lapse". Even so, Sayre-McCord rightly emphasizes Hume's contention that we project a general point of view to meet the exigencies of social friction. It is my opinion that here Hume stands on shaky ground; while it cannot be denied that a shared moral sense lubricates the grooves of society, there is something paradoxical in saying that we "invent" a moral standpoint for the sake of the social harmony which it brings. To say this would be, in effect, to turn our ascent to the general standpoint into an artificial virtue: that is, into a premeditated means of securing a peaceful association with others for the purpose of protecting our own interests. As just stated, this association is contrived under the auspices of self-interest, not benevolence or sympathy. More disturbingly, it means that the strength of our adherence to the general point of view is as vulnerable to the cunning of self-interest as is our practice of the artificial virtues in general.

It is distinctive of the artificial virtues that they specify a rule of behavior the observance of which brings disadvantages to some, which at times outweigh the advantages which it brings to others. Only a fidelity to the rule itself is, in the long run, beneficial to all (or so Hume believes). For example: it is unjust for a poor person to steal a loaf of bread from a rich person, even if the one would hardly miss an item which, given the narrowness of his circumstances, might have to serve as the other's daily meal. Hume thinks that if a respect for the possessions of others is not inflexibly maintained by all members of society, chaos will be the inevitable outcome, and chaos is detrimental to everyone's interest. Although he does not broach the matter in the *Treatise*, in the second *Enquiry*, Hume admits that, to a "sensible knave," it might appear to be in one's interest to take exception to the rules of justice, on the condition that most others continue to follow them. When this happens, duty and self-interest part ways; which is not to say that duty vanishes:

*We have found instances, in which private interest was separate from public; in which it was even contrary: And yet we observed the moral sentiments to continue, notwithstanding this disjunction of interests.*²³

²³ *Enquiry II*, p. 43.

But might moral sentiments themselves cease to arise in a self-spectating agent if, for some reason, it were in his interest either to leave or to feign a membership in the interpretive community which establishes the general standpoint? For assuming that it were in a person's interest to steal, the sting of self-reproach would - or could - be quite an inconvenience to him. To make the crime all that much easier to commit (or to live with), it would be prudent of him to withdraw from the general view - in effect, to reject morality when its "sense" is painful to him. In such a case, no tribunal could decide the controversy between the general and the particular point of view. Since the reason for the agent's deciding on behalf of the general view - the belief that that bare minimum of peace which is in his interest depends on his dissolving his partial perspective in a common view - has disappeared. One who condemns him for abandoning this view expresses no more than the interests (or the prejudices) of those who remain in it. Thus, if self-interest determines us to elect a general point of view as our moral compass, then when it is in our interest to escape the long arm of the moral law, it might be equally convenient for us to leave our conscience behind.