

HUME AND THE BAUHAUS THEORY OF ETHICS¹

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Introduction

Appeals to utility permeate Hume's account of morality. He maintains, for instance, that "In all determinations of morality... public utility is ever principally in view" (E. 180); that "In common life... utility is always appealed to; nor is it supposed, that a greater eulogy can be given to any man, than to display his usefulness to the public..." (E. 212); that "justice is certainly approv'd of for no other reason, than because it has a tendency to the public good" (T. 619); that "Common interest and utility beget infallibly a standard of right and wrong" (E. 211); and that "Meekness, beneficence, charity, generosity, clemency, moderation, equity, bear the greatest figure among the moral qualities, and are commonly denominated the social virtues, to mark their tendency to the good of society" (T. 578).² Hume puts so much emphasis on utility (especially in the Enquiry) and on virtue's 'tendency to the public good' (in the Treatise) that he is often counted as one of the first in a long and distinguished line of British Utilitarians.³ That he has had a great influence on

that tradition is beyond question: Bentham himself credits Hume with having shown him "That the foundations of all *virtue* are laid in *utility*..."⁴

Yet no version of utilitarianism -- neither act, nor rule, nor motive utilitarianism -- sits comfortably as an interpretation of Hume. Hume, after all, shies away from talk of maximizing utility, endorses nothing like a calculus for determining the public good⁵, and, in accounting for justice, appeals primarily to the interests of each, rather than to the interests of all. Moreover, Hume describes virtue as "desirable on its own account" (E. 293-294) and explicitly acknowledges (for instance) that "there are other virtues and vices beside those which have this tendency to the public advantage and loss" (T. 578-79).⁶ Finally, having defined virtue as "a quality of the mind agreeable to or approved of by every one who considers or contemplates it," he goes on to observe that while "some qualities produce [this] pleasure, because they are useful to society, or useful or agreeable to the person himself... others produce it more immediately" (E. 261).

Needless to say, none of this augurs well for a utilitarian interpretation of Hume. In fact, attempts to force Hume into one utilitarian mold or another seem inevitably to do an injustice to the complexity of his view. According to many, this is because Hume simply failed to work out consistently the implications of his own insights; the uncapturable complexity (they say) is the complexity of confusion. Lapses aside, they maintain, Hume identified and defended the basic tenets of (at least some form of) utilitarianism.⁷ On the contrary, I'll argue,

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². Morality, according to Hume, "declares that her sole purpose is to make her votaries and all mankind, during every instant of their existence, if possible, cheerful and happy; nor does she ever willingly part with any pleasure but in hopes of ample compensation in some other period of their lives. The sole trouble which she demands, is that of just calculation, and a steady preference of the greater happiness" (E. 279). And, he argues, "It appears to be a matter of fact, that the circumstances of *utility*, in all subjects, is a source of praise and approbation: That it is constantly appealed to in all moral decisions concerning the merit and demerit of actions: that it is the *sole* source of that high regard paid to justice, fidelity, honour, allegiance, and chastity: That it is inseparable from all the other social virtues, humanity, generosity, charity, affability, leniency, mercy, and moderation: And in a word, that it is the foundation of the chief part of morals, which has a reference to mankind and our fellow creatures" (E. 231).

³. See, for instance, John Rawls's A Theory of Justice (Cambridge, MA, 1971), 22, fn. 9; Ronald Glossop's "The Nature of Hume's Ethics," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research XXVII (1967): 527-36; History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, vol. II by Leslie Stephen (London, 1881), (who wrote that in Hume's work "the essential doctrines of Utilitarianism are stated with a clearness and consistency not to be found in any other writer of the century" [87]); and A History of English Utilitarianism (London, 1901), by Ernest Albee (who wrote "the Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, with all its defects and shortcomings, is the classic statement

of English Utilitarianism" [112]); and The English Utilitarians (Oxford, 1949), by John Plamenatz (who wrote "David Hume is rightly regarded as the founder of utilitarianism" [22] and treated as absurd the suggestion that Hume might not be a utilitarian, on the strange grounds that it would commit one to holding "that the founder of utilitarianism is not a utilitarian" [28]).

⁴. Jeremy Bentham, A Fragment on Government, edited by J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart (London, 1977), Chapter 1, sec. 36, note 1, p. 440. In the following note, Bentham describes feeling, when he read Book III of the Treatise, "as if the scales had fallen from my eyes."

⁵. And he avoids the Hutchesonian phrase 'the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers.' The closest Hume comes is at E. 228, quoted above. Hutcheson offered both the famous phrase and a calculus in Inquiry concerning the original of our Ideas of Virtue or Moral Good, selections reprinted in British Moralists, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge (New York, 1965), on 107 and 110-13, respectively.

⁶. Virtually the same thing is said in the Enquiry: "...there is another set of mental qualities which, *without any utility* or any tendency to farther good, either of the community or of the possessors, diffuse a satisfaction on the beholders and procure friendship and regard" (E. 86-87). See too the Treatise, 588 and 590.

⁷. As Albee laments, if only Hume had shown, "what certainly was implicit in his system, that all the virtues are such because they conduce to 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number,' he would have stated the Utilitarian principle practically in its modern form" (A History of English Utilitarianism, 112). Bentham expresses a similar sentiment when he endorses Helvetius' judgment that the exceptions Hume makes to the utilitarian principle are made without reason (A Fragment on Government).

Hume developed a distinctive and decidedly non-utilitarian theory -- the Bauhaus Theory of ethics (I'll call it) -- that gives a central place to utility, but does so without making either actual or expected utility of acts, or rules, or motives, or character traits, the measure or ground of virtue.⁸

Seeing Hume as a Bauhausian helps make sense of why a certain version of indirect utilitarianism fits fairly well with Hume's account of some of the virtues (those that are useful to others). At the same time, though, it makes sense of why indirect utilitarianism isn't fully adequate even in this limited domain and why Hume's account of justice, property, and promises has the contractarian overtones it has.⁹ In short, seeing Hume as a Bauhausian will let us explain why he so often sounds like a utilitarian but is not, and why he, perhaps less often, sounds like a contractarian but (again) is not. In each case, the features of Hume's account that recommend one or the other of these interpretations, are just the features the Bauhausian theory would highlight as relevant in the particular context (say, when accounting for benevolence or, alternatively, for justice) even as it precluded seeing their relevance as all-encompassing or all-important in the way utilitarianism or contractarianism does.

Not surprisingly, the Bauhausian view does have affinities with utilitarianism -- otherwise it could hardly accommodate all the strains in Hume that do so vividly suggest utilitarianism. But the affinities do not induce identity and the differences are crucial. Among other things, the Bauhaus Theory avoids utilitarianism's commitment to a single overarching measure of utility, and it resists treating utility for all as the final arbitrator of moral questions. Not surprisingly, too, the Bauhausian view has affinities with contractarianism. But the differences here are crucial as well. Among other things, the Bauhaus Theory steadfastly avoids contractarianism's characteristic insistence that morality's demands appeal in some way to self-interest¹⁰ and in any case sees mutual benefit (however broadly construed) as a relevant consideration in only a few specially circumscribed arenas.

These differences make for a wholly different, under-explored, and under-appreciated, theory; one that portrays morality's demands as grounded in the expansive interests and affections, generous and not, of real people looking for

⁸. This theory gets its name, of course, from the Bauhaus School of Design, founded by Walter Gropius in Weimar, Germany. I have taken certain liberties with the view they advocated, stripping it, for instance, of its original quasi-socialist emphasis on the worker and its high-handed attitude concerning the *real* functions of things. For an unsympathetic portrayal of the Bauhaus School of architecture, see Tom Wolfe's From Bauhaus to Our House (New York, 1981).

⁹. See David Gauthier's "David Hume, Contractarian," *Philosophical Review* 88 (1979): 3-38; and J. L. Mackie's Hume's Moral Theory (New York, 1980).

¹⁰. I do not think an appeal to self-interest is a necessary component of contractarianism, but it is characteristic, I believe, of contractarian accounts, going back to Glaucon and running through Hobbes to contemporary contractarians as different as Harsanyi, Buchanan, Rawls and Gauthier.

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respectable and effective solutions to problems they face. The Bauhaus Theory offers a picture of morality as both setting the standards for the solutions we might adopt for the problems we face and as itself a solution to the problems we would face in the absence of standards. It treats morality as the natural, reasonable, and indispensable product of problem-solving beings.

The Bauhaus Theory

The guiding idea of the Bauhaus Theory is that something (a chair, a house, or when it comes to ethics, a durable feature of mind or character) commands approbation, when it does, in virtue of its being *well suited* for the achieving of certain ends or the solving of certain problems. According to the Bauhaus Theory, particular evaluations are driven by a concern for specific problems and are determined by what is well-suited to solve the problems in question.¹¹ Of course, just which problems are the appropriate ones to focus upon depends on what is being evaluated; and different problems may demand dramatically different --sometimes incompatible -- solutions. Something can be *well suited* for the solving of certain problems, in the appropriate way, even if it is never actually used to solve those problems and even if people know that it will never be so used. And it can be well suited to the achieving of the relevant ends even if using it to secure those ends will frustrate others (as sometimes justice frustrates benevolence [E. 304], or building a beautiful house gets in the way of preserving nature). As the Bauhaus Theory would have it, for instance, a chair on permanent display in a museum will count as a good chair if it is well suited for certain human uses, even though (being in a museum) we know it will never actually be put to these uses; and even if, from a broader perspective, the resources used in manufacturing the chair might have been put to better use.¹²

¹¹. Not new to Hume, Socrates explicitly advances this theory in Xenophon's *Memoirs*, Book III, chapter 8: "Everything else that we use" Socrates says, "is considered to be fine and good in accordance with the same standard -- namely, the end for which it is serviceable." Along the same lines, he maintains that "Everything is good and fine in so far as it's well adapted for its purpose, and bad and contemptible in so far as it is ill adapted." Socrates explicitly applies this theory to, among other things, architecture, arguing that we should judge houses by their function and dispense with frescoes and decorations (Conversations of Socrates, translated by Hugh Tredennick and Robin Waterfield [New York, 1990], 159).

¹². Since throughout the paper I will be drawing analogies between the evaluation of objects and the evaluation of character, I should note just how appropriate Hume believed the analogy to be. In the Treatise, in the Enquiry, and in "Of the Standard of Taste," (Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary [Indianapolis, 1987], edited by Eugene F. Miller, 226-49) Hume moves frequently and easily between observations concerning beauty and those concerning virtue. His theory will be "still more evident," he suggests, "if we compare moral beauty with natural, to which in many particulars it bears so near a resemblance" (E. 291). And he says "It will naturally be expected, that the beauty of the body... will be similar, in some respects, to that of the mind; and that every kind of esteem, which is paid to a man, will have something similar in its origin, whether it arise from his mental endowments, or from the situation of his exterior circumstances" (E. 244). Hume does acknowledge that, although they are similar in many respects, "a convenient house, and a virtuous character, cause not the same feeling of approbation..." Yet this difference in feeling does not undermine the fact that "the source of our approbation be the same, and flow from sympathy

Hume articulates the Bauhausian view this way:

where any object, in all its parts, is fitted to attain any agreeable end, it... is esteem'd beautiful, even tho' some external circumstances be wanting to render it altogether effectual. (T. 584)

This holds true, Hume believes, when it comes to evaluating *houses* (about which he writes: "A house, that is contriv'd with great judgment for all commodities of life, pleases us upon that account; tho' perhaps we are sensible, that no-one will ever dwell in it"), and *landscapes* (about which he writes: "A fertile soil, and a happy climate, delight us by a reflexion on the happiness which they wou'd afford the inhabitants, tho' at present the country be desert and uninhabited"), and *physiques* (about which he writes: "A man, whose limbs and shape promise strength and activity, is esteem'd handsome, tho' condemn'd to perpetual imprisonment"). It holds true as well and no less, Hume thinks, when it comes to evaluating *characters*. "Where a person is possess'd of a character, that in its natural tendency is beneficial to society," Hume observes, "we esteem him virtuous, and are delighted with the view of his character, even tho' particular accidents prevent its operation, and incapacitate him from being serviceable to his friends and country." As Hume would have it, "Virtue in rags is still virtue," not because it is still useful (it isn't), not because we expect it to be useful (we don't), and not even because thinking of it as a virtue is useful (Hume gives us no reason to think it is)¹³, but because it would be useful were it not for accidental features of the situation.¹⁴ "[T]he tendencies of actions and

and an idea of their utility" nor does it tell against thinking we approve of them all thanks to "sympathy and an idea of their utility" (T. 617).

¹³. This is Mackie's suggestion in *Hume's Moral Theory*, 124. Hume does think our system of moral evaluation, with its appeal to what would be approved of from a general point of view, is useful, in that it allows us to avoid the 'continual *contradictions*' (T. 581, see also T. 602) that would arise were we to rely on our particular point of view and more limited affections. But Hume's explanation of why we approve of those characters well suited to be useful, that are not actually useful to anyone, appeals not to the utility of doing so but to the imagination: "Where a character is, in every respect, fitted to be beneficial to society, the imagination passes easily from the cause to the effect, without considering that there are still some circumstances wanting to render the cause a compleat one" (T. 585).

¹⁴. Not counting the last, all the quotes in this paragraph are from the *Treatise*, 584-85. Corresponding passages are easy to find in the *Enquiry*. For instance: "A machine, a piece of furniture, a vestment, a house well contrived for use and conveniency, is so far beautiful, and is contemplated with pleasure and approbation." (E. 179); "A building, whose doors and windows were exact squares, would hurt the eye by that very proportion; as ill adapted to the figure of a human creature, for whose service the fabric was intended" (E. 212-13); "Why is this peach-tree said to be better than that other; but because it produces more or better fruit? And would not the same praise be given it, though snails or vermin had destroyed the peaches, before they came to full maturity? In morals too, is not *the tree known by the fruit*? And cannot we easily distinguish between nature and accident, in the one case as well as in the other?" (E. 228 fn). See also pages 220, 244, and 245.

⁵ characters," Hume argues, "not their real accidental consequences, are alone regarded in our moral determinations..." (E. 228).¹⁵

The Bauhaus view shows up most clearly in Hume's account of particular artificial virtues (not least because he views these as artifices whose origin is explicable, in part, by appeal to the purposes we see they will serve). Consider Hume's discussion of justice. He argues that moderate scarcity, limited benevolence, insecure possession, and mutual dependence, taken together, generate a problem that having a system of justice solves. And then he argues that we approve of justice because it is well suited to solving the problem. Were people not in these conditions justice would lose its point and, he thinks, our approval. A similar story, with the same structure, is explicit throughout Hume's discussion of, for instance, fidelity, honour, allegiance, and chastity, as well as justice.

Despite the Bauhausian structure's being most evident in Hume's discussion of the artificial virtues, the same account of approbation runs through Hume's theory of the natural virtues as well -- prudence, temperance, frugality, industry, assiduity, enterprise, dexterity (all of which render people "serviceable to themselves"), as well as generosity and humanity (which allow people to "perform their part in society"¹⁶). Over and over he identifies some particular problem people would face without the virtue, argues that the virtue is well suited to alleviating the problem, and then holds that it commands approval for that reason. Some virtues, the artificial ones, "produce... approbation by means of an artifice... which arises from the circumstances and necessities of mankind" (T. 477). The others, the natural virtues, produce pleasure and approbation without the mediation of artifice though the pleasure and approbation still depends, Hume believes, on the circumstances and necessities of mankind. The difference between the artificial and natural virtues lies not with why we approve of them but with whether some artifice must serve to establish what in turn produces the pleasure and approbation. While there is not the same need to explain the origin of natural virtues, there is still a need to explain why we approve of them -- and Hume's explanation turns out to be that the natural as well as the artificial virtues are each well suited to solving some problem, or serving some end, with which we have a sympathetic (even if not a personal)

¹⁵. In a letter to Francis Hutcheson (dated September 17, 1739), Hume emphasizes the difference, writing: "I desire you wou'd only consider the Tendency of Qualities, not their actual Operation, which depend on Chance. Brutus riveted the Chains of Rome faster by his Opposition; but the natural Tendency of his noble Dispositions, his public Spirit & Magnanimity, was to establish her Liberty." Hutcheson in fact seems actually to share Hume's sense that the actual consequences are not what govern our evaluations: "[T]he actions which in fact are exceedingly useful," he observes, "shall appear void of moral beauty, if we know they proceeded from no kind intentions towards others; and yet an unsuccessful attempt at kindness, or of promoting *public good*, shall appear as amiable as the most successful, if it flow'd from as *strong benevolence*" (*Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil*, 5th ed. [London, 1753], 169).

¹⁶. *Treatise*, 587

interest.

When discussing the artificial virtues, Hume identifies (more explicitly in the Treatise than in the Enquiry) two distinct tasks: one is to explain the origin of the institutions that define a virtue, the other is to account for our moral approval of the virtue so defined.¹⁷ These tasks are especially worth keeping separate when discussing the Bauhaus Theory, for it is tempting, but wrong, to see the theory as an answer to the first sort of question -- as an attempt to explain why we have the institutions we do. It is tempting since the Bauhaus Theory focuses attention on the fact that virtues solve problems, and it is easy to slip from seeing that something solves a problem to thinking that it exists *because* it solves the problem. It is wrong not just because the slip is unjustified (though it is, as Hume is well aware¹⁸) but also because the Bauhaus Theory is offered as an account of moral approbation, not social invention. According to the Bauhaus Theory, we *approve* of the virtues because they are well suited to solve some problem, regardless of whether they *exist* because they solve the problem (and regardless of whether our approval of them helps to strengthen their hold on us).

Before trying to disentangle the Bauhaus Theory from utilitarianism, let me first locate, within Hume's overall account of morality, the place where the Bauhaus Theory enters -- and competes with utilitarianism -- as an interpretation of what Hume had in mind.

Virtues and Vices: Dispositional Twice Over

Put in the most general terms, Hume's methods and results are fairly easy to characterize. Collecting together first virtues and then vices, Hume tries "to discover the circumstances on both sides, which are common to these qualities; to observe that particular in which the estimable qualities agree on the one hand, and the blamable on the other; and thence to reach the foundation of ethics, and find those universal principles, from which all censure or approbation is ultimately derived" (E. 174).¹⁹ What he discovers, famously, is that "every

17. When discussing justice, for example, he distinguishes questions "concerning the manner, in which the rules of justice are establish'd by the artifice of men," from those "concerning the reasons, which determine us to attribute to the observance or neglect of these rules a moral beauty and deformity" (T. 484).

18. After pointing out the advantages of justice to society, for example, he notes that, when explaining the origin of justice, "'tis requisite not only that it be advantageous, but also that men be sensible of its advantages" (T. 486).

19. Hume is concerned to establish the principles that govern our judgments of virtue, not to explain the origin of our idea of virtue. This contrasts intriguingly both with Hume's own discussion of causation and with Hutcheson, who seems especially concerned to show that our idea of virtue arises from a moral sense. Hume "proposed simply to collect, on the one hand, a list of those mental qualities which are the object of love or esteem, and form a part of personal merit; and on the other hand, a catalogue of those qualities which are the object of censure or reproach, and which detract from the character of the person possessed of them" (E. 312); "we shall," he says,

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thing, which gives uneasiness in human actions, upon the general survey, is call'd Vice, and whatever produces satisfaction, in the same manner, is denominated Virtue" (T. 499).²⁰ Although Hume sometimes leaves out the stipulation that the relevant sentiments are those felt "upon the general survey" (saying, for instance, that virtue is "*whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation; and vice the contrary*"²¹), that stipulation plays a crucial role in his theory of moral thought. Taking notice of this role is especially important, for our purposes, since it reveals the extent to which Hume saw morality itself as a valuable solution to a problem we would otherwise face.

The problem that threatens is traced by Hume to the fact that, like all sentiments, "sentiments of blame or praise are variable, according to our situation of nearness or remoteness, with regard to the person blam'd or prais'd, and according to the present disposition of our mind."²² The effects of these fluctuations become especially problematic when other people are brought into the picture. "We are quickly oblig'd to forget our own interest in our judgments of this kind," he argues, "by reason of the perpetual contradictions, we 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" (T. 602).²³ As Hume understands the situation, if we each judged of others without taking into account the effects of perspective, we would be frequently frustrated by those 'contradictions' that come of each speaking, judging, and most importantly, acting on the basis of her own (as we might say, 'uncalibrated') point of view. "In order, therefore, to prevent those continual *contradictions*, and arrive at a more *stable* judgment of things, we fix on some *steady* and *general* points of view; and always, in our thoughts, place ourselves in them, whatever may be our

"analyse that complication of mental qualities, which form what, in common life, we call Personal Merit: we shall consider every attribute of the mind, which renders a man an object either of esteem and affection, or of hatred and contempt; every habit or sentiment or faculty, which, if ascribed to any person, implies either praise or blame, and may enter into any panegyric or satire of his character and manners" (E. 173-4). See also Treatise 473, where Hume asks what "distinguishes moral good and evil, *From what principles is it derived, and whence does it arise in the human mind?*"

20. "When any action, or quality of the mind, pleases us *after a certain manner*, we say it is virtuous" (T. 517).

21. Enquiry, 289. "It is the nature and, indeed, the definition of virtue, that it is a *quality of the mind agreeable to or approved of by every one who considers or contemplates it*" (E. 261).

22. Treatise, 582.

23. "Besides, that we ourselves often change our situation..., we every day often meet with persons, who are in a different situation from ourselves, and who cou'd never converse with us on any reasonable terms, were we to remain constantly in that situation and point of view, which is peculiar to us" (T. 603).

present situation" (T. 581-2).²⁴

When it comes to moral judgments, Hume believes that nature, reason, and imagination, have together conspired to take care of the problem -- by inclining us all to a common standard of moral taste set by what we would feel from a general and disinterested survey of the objects of our evaluation. As Hume acknowledges, this will not actually lead us to feel approval for everything towards which we would feel approval from that common point of view but it at least sets a shared standard and vocabulary with which we can converse about moral matters (while avoiding what would otherwise be an onslaught of contradictions and fluctuations). "The judgement here corrects the inequalities of our internal emotions and perceptions; in like manner, as it preserves us from error, in the several variations of images, presented to our external senses" (E. 227).²⁵

The detailed account Hume gives of how we apply the standard of moral taste is, predictably, complex. When Hume talks about the process of correction to which we subject our sentiments he emphasizes three distinct points -- first, that the *moral* sentiments of approbation and blame (as distinct from other sentiments) will arise at all only if we take (what he calls) the 'general survey', that is, only if we abstract from our particular interests²⁶; second, that we must take into account the effects distance and contiguity have both on sympathy and on our moral sentiments of approbation and blame even after we have abstracted from our interests²⁷; and third, that to the extent these corrections fail to have a

²⁴. As Hume sees it, "The only point of view, in which our sentiments concur with those of others, is, when we consider the tendency of any passion to the advantage or harm of those, who have any immediate connexion or intercourse with the person possess'd of it" (T. 603). In addition to arguing that the corrections are necessary in order to eliminate all the "contradictions" that differing perspectives would cause, Hume defends the corrections on the grounds that "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" (T. 582). (The same arguments can be found in the Enquiry on 228.) The two arguments are obviously related, the first extolling the importance of finding a common language for evaluation, the second purporting to find a necessary condition for having any language. I doubt the plausibility of the second argument. It seems clear, for instance, that on Hume's account passing pains are just the sort of 'momentary appearances' he is talking about, yet it seems equally clear that Hume thinks we can use language to talk about our pains and even, in a sense, communicate our sentiments of pain to one another.

²⁵. "[B]y reflection [on how something would look from a certain perspective]" he maintains, "we correct its momentary appearance" (T. 582).

²⁶. The relevant moral feeling (of approbation or blame) comes, Hume maintains, "only when a character is considered in general, without reference to our particular interest..." (T. 472; see also T. 517).

²⁷. This second step, which involves taking into account the effects of distance and contiguity, is not a necessary condition for our having the sentiments of approbation and blame, but only for achieving a point of view that our own sentiments approve of as proper for deciding issues of morality.

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fully effective influence on what we actually feel (which he acknowledges as inevitable), we must abstract from how we do feel when it comes to what we *say*, when it comes to the pronouncements and admonishments we make.²⁸ Only if we make this last correction and guide our moral judgments by *what we would feel from a certain mutually accessible point of view*, will we succeed in establishing a common ground for evaluation.²⁹ We need to distinguish moral reactions (which are passions and arise only upon the presence of other feelings of pleasure or pain that we feel on the general survey) from moral judgments (or, more accurately, moral pronouncements, or what we say), which are subject to the standard of taste which imposes corrections for distortion of perspective in the name of reaching a common ground -- or at least a common language. This standard of moral taste is "what we would feel from a general position" and it provides a "general unalterable standard" (E. 229; see also T. 603). What all virtues have in common is that, upon the general survey (and when corrected for differences in perspective), they would cause the peculiar sentiment of moral approbation.³⁰

²⁸. According to Hume, both the pleasure some object gives to us on the general survey (primarily by way of sympathy), and the moral approbation we feel, will vary in intensity as our perspectives change. "There is no necessity, that a generous action, barely mentioned in an old history or remote gazetter, should communicate any strong feelings of applause and admiration. ...Bring this virtue nearer, by our acquaintance or connexion with the persons, or even by an eloquent recital of the case; our hearts are immediately caught, our sympathy enlivened, and our cool approbation converted into the warmest sentiments of friendship and regard" (E. 230). Thus we need to correct for the distortions of perspective but our passions do not always oblige: "The passions do not always follow our correction; but these corrections serve sufficiently to regulate our abstract notions, and are alone regarded, when we pronounce in general concerning the degrees of vice and virtue" (T. 585). And "reason requires such an impartial conduct" -- because reason informs us that we will be unable to establish a shared language of evaluation unless we regulate what we say by what we would feel under certain conditions, while sentiment and interest combine to make establishing such a language attractive.

²⁹. The first constraint, or correction, on sentiment, constitutes a necessary condition for the possibility of feeling a moral sentiment; the second and third constraints, in contrast, are apparently constraints on accepting, expressing, and acting on the sentiment made possible by the first. Thus there appear to be three 'filters' that operate when it comes to morality, the first being a filter on the conditions under which we *will feel* moral sentiments, the second being a filter on what moral sentiments we *should feel*, the third being a filter on what moral pronouncements we *should make*. These latter constraints are themselves imposed by sentiment, but by a sentiment supposed to be common and universal in a way that the sentiments that are constrained are not. See Treatise p. 583, but especially "Of the Standard of Taste" in Hume's Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary.

³⁰. Hume, I should add, is extraordinarily (and uncharacteristically) careful about respecting the difference between what we would feel upon the general survey and what we would say. "Tho' the *heart* does not always take part with those general notions [governed by some general and unalterable standard for moral taste], or regulate its love and hatred by them, yet are they sufficient for *discourse*," he writes, "and serve all our purposes in company, in the pulpit, in the theatre, and in the schools" (T. 603); similarly he claims that "Experience soon teaches us this method of correcting our sentiments, or at least, of correcting our language, where the sentiments are more stubborn and inalterable." (T. 582); or again, of a good disposition favored by good fortune, he

As complex as this answer ends up being, it is only one side of the story Hume offers.³¹ For so far it has been left completely open both what else (if anything) the virtues and vices might each have in common and how their having it explains our being disposed to approve of them. It might be, of course, that the virtues have nothing in common save for their disposition to give rise to approval in those properly situated and that there is no general explanation of why we approve of the things we do. But this is not Hume's view.³² According to him, everything that we count as a virtue (because we would approve of it...) falls into one of four categories neatly reflected in the structure of the Enquiry (but explicit as well in the Treatise³³): either it is useful to others or to the possessor, or it is immediately agreeable to others or to the possessor. "When any quality, or character, has a tendency to the good of mankind we are pleas'd with it, and approve of it; because it presents the lively *idea* of pleasure..." (T. 580, my emphasis).³⁴ And our ability to be moved by our idea of others' benefit, through the workings of sympathy, explains why traits that fall within the categories would secure our moral approbation (upon the general survey).³⁵

It is at this point -- when it comes to giving an account of what ties these four categories together (other than their effect, through sympathy, on what we would feel) -- that the Bauhaus Theory competes directly with utilitarianism as an interpretation of Hume.

As the utilitarian interpretation would have it, Hume's view is that the qualities we would approve of are, or are thought to be, those that some version of utilitarianism would endorse. It might be, for instance, that the qualities

writes "We are more affected by it; and yet we do not *say* [my emphasis] that it is more virtuous, or that we esteem it more" (T. 585).

³¹. What I have sketched here is only a part of this side of the story. For more on the role of the general point of view in Hume's theory see my "On Why Hume's 'General Point of View' Isn't Ideal -- and Shouldn't Be," *Social Philosophy & Policy*, vol. 11 (January, 1994), 202-28.

³². He rejects it explicitly at T. 473.

³³. "Every quality of the mind is denominated virtuous, which gives pleasure by the mere survey; as every quality, which produces pain, is call'd vicious. This pleasure and this pain may arise from four different sources. For we reap a pleasure from the view of a character, which is naturally fitted to be useful to others, or to the person himself, or which is agreeable to others, or to the person himself" (T. 591).

³⁴. The context makes clear, incidentally, that when Hume refers here to having "a tendency to the good of mankind" he means 'a tendency to the good of some particular human or other', not to the good of all mankind or mankind in general. At least here he is clearly not appealing to the greatest good for the greatest number.

³⁵. See also, for instance, E. 267, where, speaking of qualities immediately agreeable to others, Hume writes: "The idea, which we form of their effect on his acquaintance, has an agreeable influence on our imagination, and gives us the sentiment of approbation" thanks to sympathy -- even though we don't know him and haven't had any contact with him ourselves.

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themselves maximize actual or expected utility, or it might be that they are, in some less direct way, picked out by a utilitarian standard. Either way, the idea is that utilitarianism in some guise or other properly accounts for why we approve of the qualities we do. On the utilitarian interpretation, what the four categories have in common, over and above their all giving rise to approbation thanks to sympathy, is their subsumability under a utilitarian principle.

As the Bauhaus interpretation would have it, Hume's view is that these qualities are, or are thought to be, those that are well suited to serving certain purposes people have (or to solving certain problems people face) under standard conditions. On the Bauhaus interpretation, Hume's theory is dispositional twice over: virtues are those traits people have that are disposed to give rise to a feeling of approbation in observers properly situated; and, it turns out, what has that disposition are traits that have another dispositional property: they are well suited to the solving of certain problems posed by the circumstances and necessities of humankind.³⁶

Thought of in this way, the Bauhaus Theory faces two crucial questions: which of the countless problems (actual and possible) are the morally relevant ones? and what standards are we to use in evaluating whether traits are well suited to solving the relevant problems?

Hume's answer to the first is that the morally relevant problems are those that are framed by purposes or needs with which we actually sympathize when taking up the general point of view. Which these are depends partly on the nature of sympathy, but partly too on the distinctive focus our actual interests give to the general point of view. What focus this is will be, more than anything else, a reflection of what sort of problems have become collectively salient, where a problem will count as collectively salient if we each recognize it as a problem we have reason to come to terms with together. Various features of the human frame and condition virtually guarantee that a core set of problems will always be collectively salient, even as differing circumstances may recommend one or another way of solving them. Yet differing circumstances may also serve to highlight, or to shield us from, other problems, so that the very conditions that give good sense to a concern with certain virtues may simply disappear. Figuring out just which problems are in fact collectively salient can be

³⁶. As nice as it sounds, 'form follows functions' serves as a distracting slogan for the Bauhausian view if it suggests that (according to Hume) all the things we evaluate -- not just houses or chairs or human artifices like institutions of justice that may well have been designed with a function in mind, but also character traits and people -- have specific functions (some of them independent of the purposes and values of people). Hume pretty clearly thought nothing of the sort. And fortunately, the Bauhaus Theory, properly understood, is committed to nothing of the sort either. As long as there are real and fairly well-defined problems to be solved the Bauhaus Theory can comfortably eschew appeal to functions. (We could refer to what is needed as 'design-problems' if we are careful to avoid thinking good solutions must be consciously designed. According to Hume, most of the virtues, including artificial virtues, are not consciously introduced as solutions to given problems even though we approve of them because they are solutions.)

accomplished by working backwards from the character traits we do approve of to the problems we see them as being suited to solve.

Hume's answer to the second is, I think, simple: we determine whether something is well suited to the solving of a specific problem not by appealing to a general, context-independent measure of utility, but by seeing whether it would alleviate the particular problem (as much as possible, under specific conditions). This doesn't mean we cannot or will not subject competing solutions to standards other than effectiveness. But when we do, the standards will themselves be seen by the Bauhausian as more or less acceptable solutions to the (presumably collectively salient) problem of evaluating solutions to problems of the first kind. Nothing in the Bauhaus view precludes the successive embedding of problems; so it may well be that among the morally relevant problems is the problem of settling on standards for the evaluation of competing solutions to some other problems. What the theory avoids, though, is any commitment to there being a single overarching standard for the evaluating all solutions. The Bauhausian can, at least in principle, rest comfortably with the discovery that moral commensuration is not always possible.³⁷

The Contrast With (all sorts of) Utilitarianism

That Hume was not a hedonistic act utilitarian is pretty clear not least of all because he evidently rejects hedonism and explicitly maintains that actions are not the primary objects of appraisal, but are only relevant as "a sign of some quality or character" (T. 575).³⁸ Yet, if we free ourselves of the prejudice that the only form of utilitarianism that deserves the name is hedonistic act utilitarianism, the suspicion arises that Hume was some sort of utilitarian, a Bauhausian one perhaps, but a utilitarian all the same. So the question remains, is the Bauhaus Theory really distinct from utilitarianism or is it just another variation on a familiar theme?

Once hedonistic act utilitarianism's grip on the title 'utilitarianism' is loosened, we may ask: what more general characterization might be offered that will still mark off a distinctive and interesting group of theories? Here is a rough but ready, and I think serviceable, suggestion: to count as a utilitarian view, a theory must hold that whatever the primary objects of evaluation are taken to be (acts, rules, motives, character traits), they are to be evaluated according to (whether they maximize) actual or expected utility, taking into account everyone who might be affected, where utility is a single measure of interpersonal (though perhaps heterogeneous) value. This last clause -- that utility be a single measure of interpersonal value -- imposes two distinct but

³⁷. Whether in a particular sort of case our inability to commensurate itself raises a problem may, of course, change with circumstances, technology, etc.

³⁸. He says the same thing at T. 477: "... when we praise any actions, we regard only the motives that produced them, and consider the actions as signs or indications of certain principles in the mind and temper."

related constraints.¹³ That utility constitutes a *single measure* is important for capturing the utilitarian commitment to the commensurability of consequences. That the value is interpersonal is important for distinguishing utilitarian views that appeal to the utility for *all* from egoistic and contractarian conceptions that rely only on the value for *one* or *each* (respectively). The two constraints are related because there will be a single measure of value across people only if the value in question is interpersonal³⁹; but the connection does not go the other way around -- there might be interpersonal values but no single measure for comparing them.

Hedonistic act utilitarianism, of course, falls within the scope of this characterization; but so do act utilitarian views with different theories of value, as well as utilitarian views that identify objects of evaluation other than acts. (So, for instance, a view will count as utilitarian if it holds that the right *motives* to have are those the having of which provide the highest actual or expected *utility*.) Closely related to, but importantly different from, these unadulterated utilitarian views are various versions of indirect utilitarianism. Indeed, among the advantages of this characterization is that it helps make clear why rule utilitarianism (as standardly offered), for instance, is both aptly named and still a kind of hybrid. It is aptly named since, when it comes to evaluating *rules*, it makes decisive the actual or expected consequences for all who might be affected. It is nonetheless a hybrid theory since its utilitarianism with regard to rules is usually mitigated by a non-utilitarian theory of the evaluation of actions (since they are to be evaluated by appeal to the rules rather than to their consequences).⁴⁰

This characterization leaves at least three distinct ways for a theory that puts an emphasis on usefulness to fail to be utilitarian: (i) a theory might rely on neither actual nor expected utility as the determinants of evaluation; or (ii) it might not take into account all the consequences for everyone affected; or (iii) it might not take utility to be a single measure of interpersonal value. The Bauhaus Theory, at least in Hume's hands, fails to qualify as utilitarian on all three counts.

In the first place, when it comes to evaluating characters and motives neither actual nor expected utility sets the standard even though characters and motives count as virtuous, when they do, because of their utility (or better: usefulness).

³⁹. Agent-relative value, for instance, would generate multiple measures of value -- one for each agent.

⁴⁰. A rule or motive utilitarian, of course, need not take the hybrid route. Someone might even argue that each potential object of evaluation -- an act, rule, motive, or character, should be judged by its consequences. In various ways the theoretical simplicity of this view will generate a striking amount of complexity; those acts that have the best consequences may well be the ones that violate the rules that have the best consequences that, in turn, undermine the character traits that have the best consequences, etc. See R. M. Adams's "Motive Utilitarianism," *Journal of Philosophy* (1978): 467-81.

This may well sound paradoxical: how can something count as a virtue because it is useful and yet be admittedly not useful? Conversely, if utility is the measure of vice and virtue, beauty and deformity, how can it be that some traits that are known to be useful are not virtues or do not constitute beauty? In confronting this worry, Hume relays "a vulgar story" of a humpbacked man who rented himself out as a mobile desk for the signing of contracts. Hume asks, "Would the fortune, which he raised by this expedient make him a handsome fellow...?" Clearly not, Hume thinks, despite the fact that "personal beauty arises very much from ideas of utility." Why not? Because it is the disutility of physical traits, *under standard conditions*, that explains why we disapprove of them. Just the same is true, he suggests, of character traits: "We know, that an alteration of fortune may render the benevolent disposition entirely impotent; and therefore we separate, as much as possible, the fortune from the disposition."⁴¹ We rely not on actual or expected utility in evaluating characters (whether a specific character of some person or a character type), but primarily on an appeal to their usual consequences under standard conditions.⁴² Significantly, because standard conditions may not be the statistically most frequent conditions, what would be useful under standard conditions may well not coincide with what is, or is expected to be, useful under actual conditions.

The picture here is nicely complicated. Hume will, as I say, allow that something (whether a kind of thing or a particular thing) that commands approbation might neither be nor be expected to be useful under actual conditions. Yet if the standard conditions differ too much from the actual ones, our interest in the standard conditions will dissipate, as will our inclination to approve of things because they are useful under those conditions. Our ability to remain engaged by and concerned with the standard conditions sets a natural if elastic limit on the extent to which such conditions can diverge from actual conditions. At the same time, our interest in settling on a common view with others requires that we work with a shared picture of the relevant circumstances, and this puts pressure on us to rely on fairly stable stereotypes (of, say, the circumstance of justice, or the nature of our affective limitations) that capture the actual circumstances only imperfectly. As a result, neither actual utility, nor expected utility, but instead usual utility under standard conditions determines

41. *Treatise*, 585. Just before this, Hume notes that "...where any object, in all its parts, is fitted to attain any agreeable end, it naturally gives us pleasure, and is esteem'd beautiful, even tho' some external circumstances be wanting to render it altogether effectual. 'Tis sufficient if every thing be compleat in the object itself" (T. 584). In the *Enquiry*, Hume puts the point this way: "...the tendencies of actions and characters, not their real accidental consequences, are alone regarded in our moral determinations or general judgments" (E. 228 fn).

42. Sometimes, though, we rely (Hume says) simply on what is normal and common ("[W]here the limbs and features observe that proportion, which is common to the species, we pronounce them handsome and beautiful. In like manner we always consider the *natural* and *usual* force of the passions, when we determine concerning, vice and virtue; and if the passions depart very much from the common measures on either side, they are always disapprov'd as vicious." [T. 483] -- this without regard to whether what is unusual is in fact useful).

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our evaluations of character (according to Hume).

In the second place, to the extent utility does come into play when evaluating a character trait (under standard conditions), Hume believes our attention to usefulness is properly limited to those who might normally come into contact with the person having the trait -- and not because this is our best means of determining the overall consequences that sort of trait has.⁴³ When utility matters, it is not utility for *all* who might be affected but only for those within a more limited group. We "confine our view to that narrow circle, in which any person moves, in order to form a judgment of his moral character. When the natural tendency of his passions leads him to be serviceable and useful within his sphere, we approve of his character, and love his person, by a sympathy with the sentiments of those, who have a more particular connexion with him" (T. 602). What matters, Hume says, is not whether, all told and for everyone affected, a person's character actually proves useful, but whether (under standard conditions) it would be serviceable or agreeable to a more "narrow circle."⁴⁴ Exactly how narrow a narrow circle is to be considered depends upon the trait in question. If considering, for instance, whether someone is a good friend, the circle relevant to this evaluation is quite tightly circumscribed, whereas if we are asking whether someone is a good statesman we consult "the good or ill, which results to his own country from his measures and councils," and we do this "without regard to the prejudice which he brings on its enemies and rivals" (E. fn 225).⁴⁵ The idea, then, is that one will count as having one virtue or another in light of how the trait one has would affect a smaller or wider group of people (as appropriate) under standard conditions.

Finally, in the third place, Hume quite clearly does without appeals to interpersonal value when giving his account of justice and consistently avoids being committed to there being a single measure of utility that can be used across problem contexts.

When it comes to questions of justice, Hume explains both the origin of, and the obligation to, justice by appeal to the interests of each rather than the interests of all -- relying not at all on an appeal to an overarching measure of

43. Hume observes, for instance, "that the generosity of men is very limited, and that it seldom extends beyond their friends and family, or, at most, beyond their native country. Being thus acquainted with the nature of man, we expect not any impossibilities from him; but confine our view to that narrow circle, in which any person moves, in order to form a judgment of his moral character" (T. 602).

44. For other passages that suggest the same limited horizon, when it comes to considering the utility of a person's character, see E. 269, 276, 278 as well as T. 584 and 606.

45. Hume does go on to explain this by appeal to the interests of a person's countrymen lying closer to the eye. He notes too (shades of the invisible hand here) that everyone does better thanks to people consulting only the good of their own community, but he does not suggest that this is why we do or should limit our view, although it is a benefit he thinks we might expect.

interpersonal value.⁴⁶ Justice finds its place in circumstances of limited generosity, insecure possession, moderate scarcity, and mutual dependence -- circumstances that set the problem that justice solves -- and it arises because having the institutions that constitute justice is in the interest of each (taken *seriatim*), not *all* (taken collectively). Hume does think that, being in the interest of each, justice is in the common interest of those who establish and uphold it, but the origin of justice (he argues) is to be found in the prospect of mutual advantage not benevolence. And he does think that once established, justice secures our moral approbation largely because of the benefits other people receive from it, but even here his explanation of our approval self-consciously avoids making an appeal to the benefits received by *all* who might be affected. The extent to which, according to Hume, justice is generated and bounded by mutual advantage emerges clearly in his discussion of the strong's obligation of justice to the weak -- there isn't one, he says; if the weak cannot make their resentment felt, the strong have no (self-interested) reason to constrain themselves and so "do not properly speaking lie under any restraint of justice with regard to them" (E. 190).

When it comes to the virtues other than justice, Hume's account of them likewise consistently resists appealing to their maximizing overall utility.⁴⁷ In fact, nothing in Hume's view suggests that there is *always* a way of comparing (let alone maximizing) the value of one solution to one problem with the value of another solution to another problem -- even if there is often a way of determining which virtue properly engages more approbation. For instance, our approbation of those traits that are useful to those who have them is explained by Hume not with some argument purporting to show that they have (or that we think they have) better consequences for all than any alternative does, but by appeal to the fact that the benefits they bring (or at least would bring under standard circumstances) to the possessor engage our approbation (thanks to sympathy). The same can be said of those qualities that are useful to others as well as those that are immediately agreeable to the possessor or others. In each case, it is the fact that these qualities bring (or at least would standardly bring)

⁴⁶. Although the argument Hume offers for having some system of justice rather than none appeals to utility (albeit, again, the utility of each rather than all or most), the particular rules that make up that system are not determined, and should not be determined, Hume thinks, by appeal to utility considering each of the rules singly, or sets of possible rules together. Rather which rules we ought to adopt is to be settled largely by the imagination and so, in part, by history and tradition -- hence Hume's (in)famous conservatism. On a Bauhausian view this appeal to and reliance upon imagination makes perfect sense to the extent our imagination shapes the problems we face and works out the solutions we might have available. No solution to the problems we face in the circumstances of justice can begin to work unless they can capture our imagination and so our allegiance. At the same time, though, our capacity, indeed our proclivity, to govern our thought and action by general rules (thanks to our imagination) makes possible a relatively stable solution not otherwise available.

⁴⁷. He resists doing so not just because we are to limit our attention to those within a narrow sphere. Even within that sphere the notion of maximizing overall value plays no role.

certain specific (and by and large identifiable) benefits either mediately or immediately to the relevant people that makes the difference to our approbation.

Significantly, whether Hume is talking about artificial or natural virtues, about traits that are immediately agreeable (to the possessor or others), or about those that are useful (to the possessor or others), there is no one problem nor any single end with reference to which various virtues are all evaluated. Instead, different particular problems and different specific ends frame different contexts of evaluation and fix (for the most part) the standards of evaluation that are relevant. Our being social, reflective beings who are largely but not solely selfish means that we are faced with a whole series of different and incommensurable problems concerning how we might live well with ourselves and others.

Moreover, just as some of the problems are incommensurable, so too will be some of the solutions to a particular problem. In fact, one virtue of the Bauhaus Theory is its ability to acknowledge several incommensurable solutions to a single problem (such as that set by the circumstances of justice), each with advantages and disadvantages but none better overall than the others. In the same way as there are different, apparently equally good, automotive designs, the values of which turn on various different ways they balance considerations of performance, economy, comfort, style, and reliability, so too there might be a number of different and incommensurable dimensions along which we evaluate competing character traits, even as we recognize that their value ultimately turns on how well they solve a certain design problem.

There are, I think, two different ways one might still hope to show that Hume's theory, properly understood, supports a kind of utilitarianism. One might argue that there are good utilitarian reasons for our approving and disapproving in the way we do (with an eye to the narrow circle and a concern for the usefulness of a character trait in standard conditions), and this is Hume's reason for endorsing the practice. Or one might argue that, whatever actually recommends the practice, once it is in place -- once we regulate our judgments by appeal to what would be approved of from the general point of view -- we'll be relying on a practice that offers the functional equivalent of utilitarianism.

The first approach runs into difficulties as soon as we turn to Hume's account of the general point of view. For there it becomes clear that, as with his account of justice, appeal is made not to a single interpersonal measure of utility but to the interests we each have in establishing a common, mutually accessible, standard that we can use to regulate, and in a sense correct, our otherwise variable and conflict-inducing sentiments of praise and blame.⁴⁸ "When we form our judgments of persons, merely from the tendency of their characters to our own benefit, or to that of our friends," he suggests, "we find so many

⁴⁸. See my "On Why Hume's 'General Point of View' Isn't Ideal -- and Shouldn't Be," for a discussion of these considerations.

contradictions to our sentiments in society and conversation, and such an uncertainty from the incessant changes of our situation, that we seek some other standard of merit and demerit, which may not admit of so great variation."⁴⁹ And the general point of view provides this standard and earns our allegiance by working to eliminate, or at least attenuate, the problems that come from our each evaluating things from our own point of view.⁵⁰ As Hume sees it, "[w]e are quickly oblig'd to forget our own interest in our judgments of this kind, by reason of the perpetual contradictions, we 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."⁵¹ Of course, the practice is, on Hume's view, useful; but the argument offered on its behalf works much more like Hobbes' argument for the *Leviathan* -- which depends on mutual interest -- than like Mill's defense of actions "intended not for the benefit of the world, but for that of individuals..." -- which depends, in the end, on considerations of overall utility.⁵²

The second approach gains what plausibility it has from supposing that the general point of view is that of an Ideal Observer who, being fully knowledgeable and proportionately responsive to the interests of all, will approve or disapprove in just the pattern recommended by utilitarianism. Thus the Ideal Observer's role might be justified on non-utilitarian grounds even as, in that role, the standard he sets for our judgments is a utilitarian one. This picture is tempting, I think, only to the extent we forget the kind of practical considerations that recommend introducing the general point of view in the first place. For these are considerations that can be met effectively only if the standard of judgment we adopt is, at least in standard conditions, accessible in a way that will allow us to use it in regulating our judgments. Yet any standard that requires anticipating how a fully knowledgeable and proportionately responsive Ideal Observer would respond will fail on precisely this count. Now it may be, I grant, that simply attempting to regulate our judgments by such a standard will be adequate. But I see no reason to think this is true and no reason either to think Hume thought it was.

⁴⁹. *Treatise*, 583, see also pages 228 and 272 of the *Enquiry*.

⁵⁰. "In order, therefore, to prevent those continual *contradictions*, and arrive at a more *stable* judgment of things," Hume suggests, "we fix on some *steady* and *general* points of view; and always, in our thoughts, place ourselves in them, whatever may be our present situation" (T. 581-82).

⁵¹. *Treatise*, 602. Hume suggests that "every particular person's pleasure and interest being different, 'tis impossible men cou'd ever agree in their sentiments and judgments, unless they chose some common point of view, from which they might survey their object, and which might cause it to appear the same to all of them" (T. 591). He makes the same point on page 272 of the *Enquiry*.

⁵². John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Indianapolis, 1979), 18.

Coda

It is one thing to argue, as I have, that the Bauhaus Theory accurately captures the view Hume was advancing. It is quite another to argue that Hume was right in advancing it. We might well wonder how good the theory itself is. As any respectable Bauhausian will respond, it depends on the purposes of the theory.

As a descriptive account of the patterns our approbation exhibits, the Bauhaus Theory is quite good indeed. When it comes to mapping what it is we actually do approve of, it is much better, I think, than either utilitarianism or contractarianism. As things stand, we do approve of actions and characters without regard to their overall consequences (actual or expected) and we do think morality (and even, contra Hume, justice) extends its protection to those who offer us no advantage. At the same time, though, the Bauhaus Theory accommodates the appeal of both utilitarianism and contractarianism. If limited by and invoked for specific sorts of problems (say contractarianism for problems generated by our selfish nature) the concerns recommended by both accurately identify what would be (on Hume's view) good solutions.

Yet when it comes to justifying -- as opposed to explaining -- our approving of the things we do, the Bauhaus Theory may seem to fare less well. Consider one of the most distinctive features of the Bauhaus Theory: according to it, we approve of certain character traits because they are useful, yet approve of them not only when they are useful but when we know they will not be (so long as they would be under the relevant standard conditions). Hume has a fairly simple explanation to offer: we do this because the mind, being easily swayed by general rules, is moved to treat all cases of a (standardly useful) character trait as virtuous even though only some are useful. This is an unsurprising Humean sort of explanation. Nevertheless, when it comes to *justifying*, not explaining, this particular aspect of our approbation, Hume apparently has nothing to say. When we ask, "*should* we approve of the character trait even in those cases where it is not useful?" he seems to have no answer. Given Hume's central aims -- to catalogue, systematize, and explain our approbation, not to justify it -- this is not really an objection he is obliged to meet. Even so, it certainly is tempting to want an answer and disturbing if there is no good one. After all, it is *our* patterns of approbation he is explaining and it would be disconcerting, to say the least, if on reflection we thought there was no good reason for us to approve of the things we do. As Hume says: "Not only virtue must be approv'd of, but also the sense of virtue: And not only that sense, but also the principles, from whence it is deriv'd."⁵³ Yet this suggests an intriguing Humean style answer, one that becomes especially plausible once we recognize the benefits that accrue to each of us thanks to our regulating our evaluative judgments by a shared standard.

⁵³. *Treatise*, 619.

As that answer would have it, our moral sense, and our practice of regulating it by appeal to the general point of view, enjoys a crucial kind of self-ratification: we approve of those (ourselves included) who engage in this practice and consequently exhibit this pattern of approval -- and we do this, not least of all, because that practice and that pattern of approval themselves are well suited to the circumstances and necessities of humankind.⁵⁴

⁵⁴. Of course, in order to defend the Bauhaus Theory as a normative account of morality much more would need to be said and done. I've attempted some of the argument in "On Why Hume's 'General Point of View' Isn't Ideal -- and Shouldn't Be."