Hume: An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals

Seventh Coursework Sheet

Appendix 3 Some Farther Considerations with Regard to Justice

When studying A3, it may be useful to consult EPM 3 and 4 again, and perhaps also EPM 2, especially with a view to the naturalness of justice.

1. Social virtues fall into two broad kinds: humanity and benevolence on the one side, and justice and fidelity on the other. What is the central difference (A3.2–3)?
2. Explain Hume’s metaphor of the wall and the vault (i.e. arch) (A3.5).
3. What is the point about ‘the balance of good’ at A3.6?
4.* Does justice arise from a ‘human convention’ (A3.7)
5. Explain the example of the men pulling the oars (A3.8).
6. Why does Hume think the contrast between ‘natural’ and ‘artificial’ is ‘merely verbal’ (A3.9 and note 64)?
7.* In A3.10, Hume draws distinctions between natural justice, positive laws, precedents, analogies—what is his main thought?
8.* In what sense depend private harms on public wrongs (A3.11)?

Appendix 4 Of Some Verbal Disputes

Hume added this section to the 1764 edition of EPM. There are two appeals to verbal disputes earlier in the text, at EPM 9.19 (SBN 281) and A3 note 64 (SBN 308).

9. What is the verbal dispute that Hume describes and aims to defuse (A4.1)?
10. Hume offers four ‘reflections’ to support his view. What is the first one (A4.2)?
11. What is a ‘sentiment of conscious worth’, and why does it matter (A4.3–6)?
12. What is Hume’s third reflection (A4.11–20)?
13.* The fourth reflection invokes the distinction between voluntary and involuntary virtue and vice. Explain Hume’s main thought (A4.20–2).
14. In your opinion, what does A4 add to the Enquiry?

A Dialogue

The key theme in the Dialogue is the apparent tension or discrepancy between the universal aspirations of morality and its factual diversity or relativity.

15. Sketch the morality of the people in Fourli (D2–12).
16. What is Palamedes’ claim about the basis for moral distinctions (D25)?
17. Explicate the simile of the Rhine and the Rhone (D26).
18. At D37, Hume’s spokesperson repeats the familiar point about utility. How do moral differences or disputes arise (D37–51)?

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19. What is the point that Palamedes aims to make with the contrast between
Diogenes and Pascal (D54–6)?
20. *Hume’s spokesperson has the last word. What is the point he makes (D57)?

**Background Information.** (a) To base justice in ‘human conventions’ (A3.7), and in particular to a *promise*, is a reference to the social contract, or to the idea that justice and allegiance are founded on a contract. In this sense, Hobbes and Locke are contractarians. In the essay *Of the Original Contract*, published three years before *EPM* (in 1748), Hume rejects contract theory. You can download that essay from the course website, or find it at davidhume.org. It is also profitable to read it in conjunction with *Treatise* 3.2.7–9. (b) In the *Treatise*, Hume distinguishes between natural and artificial virtues. Naturally virtuous actions promote the good in ‘every single act’ (*T* 3.3.1.12): they are directly useful to the person involved (e.g., an act of kindness or courage). Artificially virtuous actions promote the good only by being embedded in a ‘general scheme or system of action, which is advantageous’ (*ibid.*): not action is just unless it happens in a conventional (i.e. ‘artificial’) system of justice. For instance, fidelity is conceivable (or possible) only if the institution of promising is established. In the *EPM* Hume has given up on this distinction. (c) Cicero’s *prudentia* renders the Greek *phronēsis*, which can be translated as ‘good sense’ or a sort of practical wisdom. This is why Hume suggests that sustaining or abstaining is the key feature of ancient morality (A4.13). This has close affinities to another central Greek notion, i.e. *sōphrosūnē*, by which is meant a sort of sound-mindedness, self-control, and so also temperance. It is Hume’s point that these distinctions do not matter that much, since these qualities are all part of personal merit—and *that* constitutes virtue insofar as it gives spectators the pleasing sentiment of approbation (see *EPM* A1.10). (d) In 1758, *EPM* became part of *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, and Hume added *The Natural History of Religion*, which was first published in 1757 (as one of *Four Dissertations*), right after the *Dialogue*. Here is how it begins.