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Craig Beam

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Hume and Nietzsche: Naturalists, Ethicists, Anti-Christians

CRAIG BEAM

Hume and Nietzsche have a remarkable number of things in common. Most notably, both can be characterized as philosophers of human nature. They share a turn of mind that is naturalistic, skeptical, and anti-metaphysical. As is well-known, both are critics of religion. However, this point of affinity goes deeper than many would suspect. Hume and Nietzsche both mount *radical moral critiques* of the Christian religious tradition, which make use of many of the same arguments. The moral bases of these critiques are also quite similar. Both vehemently maintain that Christian theology and morality are not conducive to human flourishing. Hume rejects such elements of Christian morality as the "monkish virtues" not only because they are not useful and agreeable, but (like Nietzsche) because they stand in the way of pride and greatness of mind. Even when it comes to the issue of benevolence, Hume and Nietzsche are much less far apart than is generally acknowledged. Both try in their own ways to strip virtue of its "dismal dress."

Remarkably little has been written about these resemblances, largely because Hume and Nietzsche have been appropriated by radically different philosophical traditions. Nietzsche has been read as a precursor of such Continental movements as existentialism and postmodernism, while Hume has been claimed as a precursor by Anglo-American analysts and logical positivists. There is little to be gained in comparing an analytic or positivist "Hume" with a Heideggerian or post-structuralist "Nietzsche," for they exist in alien intellectual universes. However, once we can get beyond these conventional interpretations, a number of interesting affinities emerge.¹

Philosophers of Human Nature

Probably the most basic affinity between Hume and Nietzsche is their skeptical attitude towards metaphysics and their focus on human nature. Much recent Hume scholarship has moved towards such an understanding of Hume, and away from the sort of analytic reading which Nicholas Capaldi has called "the canonic misreading of Hume."² For instance, Annette Baier argues that the conclusion of Book I of the *Treatise* is the key to Hume's thought.³ It shows how solitary, foundationalist intellectualism comes to grief, replacing it with a reformed philosophy that is tempered by the "gross earthy mixture" of common life, and that hopes only

to establish a system or set of opinions, which if not true (for that, perhaps, is too much to be hop'd for) might at least be satisfactory to the human mind, and might stand the test of the most critical examination. (T 272)

The central focus of this new mode of philosophy is human nature. Hume thought that by turning philosophy away from metaphysical speculations and towards human beings he was giving philosophy a revolutionary new turn: "Human Nature is the only science of man; and yet has been hitherto the most neglected" (T 272). This "science of man" (which is the theme of the "Introduction" to the *Treatise*) is a *humanistic* study which gathers its "experiments" from a "cautious observation of human life" (T xix). The true laboratory of this science is *history*:⁴

These records of wars, intrigues, factions, and revolutions are so many collections of experiments, by which the politician or moral philosopher fixes the principles of his science, in the same manner as the physician or natural philosopher becomes acquainted with the nature of plants, minerals, and other external objects, by the experiments which he forms concerning them. (EHU 83–84)

When we return to Nietzsche with such an image of Hume in mind, we find a surprising resemblance. Nietzsche is well-known as a critic of metaphysics, but what is less widely recognized, his thought is centred on human nature or philosophical anthropology. As Richard Schacht has observed:

it is above all upon 'man'—upon human nature, human life, and human possibility—that his attention focuses. His interest in other matters and the extensiveness of his treatment of them are for the most part almost directly proportional to the significance he takes them to have for philosophical anthropology so conceived.⁵

Nietzsche's thinking is firmly rooted in the "gross earthy mixture"—the concrete, psychological, and historical. He is suspicious of the "sophistry and illusion" of abstract moral reasonings and philosophical systems. In reading him, as in reading Hume, we are always aware of a human being thinking boldly and concretely about issues of human concern. For instance, regarding truth Nietzsche asks: "Why do humans seek truth?" and "How does knowledge serve life?" and "What are the motivations behind faith or skepticism?" He thereby puts human nature and life in the forefront, much as Hume does.

Just as Hume wanted to break with abstract metaphysics and inaugurate a new science of human nature, Nietzsche saw himself as the first philosopher to give proper attention to historical and psychological factors:

You ask me which of the philosophers' traits are really idiosyncrasies? For example, their lack of historical sense, their hatred of the very idea of becoming, their Egypticism? They think that they show their *respect* for a subject when they de-historicize it, *sub specie aeterni*—when they turn it into a mummy. All that philosophers have handled for thousands of years have been concept mummies; nothing real escaped their grasp alive. (TI III:1, "'Reason' in Philosophy")

Nietzsche also describes psychology as "the queen of the sciences" and "the path to the fundamental problems" (BGE 23), and asks "Who among philosophers was a *psychologist* at all before me?" (EH IV:6). Evidently, Nietzsche did not recognize any affinity with Hume in this regard. This is not surprising, given that his knowledge of Hume was rather sketchy and did not go much beyond the conventional image of Hume as an epistemologist and empiricist.⁶ Even if Nietzsche had been better acquainted with Hume's thought, he probably would have taken issue with his claim that "mankind are so much the same, in all times and places," that history's "chief use is only to discover the constant and universal principles of human nature" (EHU 83). Nietzsche was more of a historicist than Hume, and he criticized philosophers who think of "man" as an eternal verity, whose nature remains fixed amid the flux of history (HA 2). He probably also would have regarded Hume's psychology as a bit pedestrian, as not getting at the depths of human motivation or recognizing the "will to power."

However, there is one important parallel between the psychological views of Hume and Nietzsche. Both reject the traditional view of the relation between reason and passion. For Hume, reason alone can never motivate action or oppose passion (T 413). What passes for "reason" is simply a calm passion. It is sentiment, not reason, which is the source of moral distinctions. Nietzsche seems almost to be echoing Hume when he criticizes the prevailing "misunderstanding" and "degradation" of passion:

The whole conception of an order of rank among the passions: as if the right and normal thing were for one to be guided by reason—with the passions as abnormal, dangerous, semi-animal....

Passion is degraded (1) as if it were only in unseemly cases, and not necessarily and always, the motive force; (2) in as much as it has for its object something of no great value, amusement —

The misunderstanding of passion and reason, as if the latter were an independent entity and not rather a system of relations between various passions and desires; and as if every passion did not possess its quantum of reason—(WP 387)

Nietzsche's reversal of the "order of rank" between reason and passion (like Hume's) has important implications for ethics. It cuts off the possibilities of a Kantian-style moral rationalism. For Nietzsche, moralities are "a *sign language of the affects*" (BGE 187) and "reason is merely an instrument" (BGE 191). Thus, the study of moral matters must be centrally concerned with the study of the passions:

All kinds of individual passions have to be thought through and pursued through different ages, peoples, and great and small individuals; all their reason and all their evaluations and perspectives on things have to be brought into the light. So far, all that has given color to existence still lacks a history. Where could you find a history of love, of avarice, of envy, of conscience, of pious respect for tradition, or of cruelty? (GS 7)

The interpretation of Hume and Nietzsche I have been outlining runs counter to another view, which sees one or both of them as radical skeptics. Today, this view is most often defended by postmodernists of various types. Among literary critics, the postmodern reading of Nietzsche has achieved the status of "canonic misreading," while Zuzana Parusnikova has recently argued that Hume is "a postmodernist at heart" and a "negative philosopher," like Richard Rorty, for whom "philosophy makes us aware of the limits and imperfections of our reason, and after that, there is nothing else positive it can say."⁷

However, I think that Hume and Nietzsche have more in common with each other than with any negative, deconstructive philosophy, and that they actually provide us with a good standpoint from which to criticize postmodernism. Both regard themselves as skeptics, but their skepticism is directed primarily against metaphysics. It prompts them to turn away from abstruse speculations and towards questions of history, psychology, ethics, and human life. Both distinguish between good and bad forms of skepticism. Nietzsche contrasts the *skepticism of strength* which questions its own convictions and faces up to uncertainty, with the *skepticism of weakness* which is a

kind of sickness of the will (A 54, BGE 208–209). Hume distinguishes between “mitigated scepticism or *academical philosophy*, which may be both durable and useful,” and the “*excessive*” or *Pyrrhonian* skepticism, which neither has “any constant influence on the mind” nor produces any beneficial effect while it remains in full force (EHU 161,160).

Postmodern skepticism is derived largely from the realm of signs and signifiers, where “meaning is forever escaping being fully grasped because there is no transcendental signified which could provide a foundation for other meanings.”⁸ From a Humean perspective, the “semiotic skepticism” of the postmodernist is vulnerable to the same objections that Hume raises against old-time Pyrrhonism. Like all excessive skepticism, its arguments “*admit of no answer and produce no conviction*” (EHU 155n). It may triumph in the schools, but in the face of the realities and occupations of common life it is bound to “vanish like smoke,” leaving its adherents “in the same condition as other mortals” (EHU 159).

Similarly, Nietzsche criticizes traditional metaphysics and epistemology without allowing his thought to be sidetracked into any abstract skepticism. His doctrine of perspectivism does not imply that all perspectives are equally valuable or valid. It is easy to argue (as Robert Solomon does) that Nietzsche stands more as a critic of postmodernism than as its real precursor, and that he would be the first to reject it as a form of the skepticism of weakness, as “first and foremost an expression of disappointment, a retreat, a purely negative thesis.”⁹

Moral Critics of Christianity

Hume and Nietzsche are both well-known as critics of religion. This affinity goes way beyond the rejection of certain metaphysical doctrines and arguments, and surprisingly (given the size of the secondary literature) it has never been examined and described in any detail. Like Nietzsche, Hume gives us a *radical moral critique* of religion, and of the Christian religion in particular.¹⁰ This is most evident in Hume’s *Natural History of Religion*, a work which anticipates the genealogical approach used by Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *The Antichrist*.¹¹ Hume and Nietzsche both combine historical inquiry into the origins of religion (or religion-based morality) with moral critique. In their particular criticisms, they agree on many points.

Both identify religion with *cruelty* and *destructive sacrifice*. Hume, in a footnote, observes:

Most nations have fallen into the guilt of human sacrifices.... A sacrifice is conceived as a present; and any present is delivered to their deity by destroying it and rendering it useless to men; by burning what is solid, pouring out the liquid, and killing the animate. For

want of a better way of doing him service, we do ourselves an injury; and fancy that we thereby express, at least, the heartiness of our good-will and adoration. (NHR IV 338n)

Such pathologies are not limited to primitive religions. Hume points out that human sacrifice has merely given way to the persecutions of Christianity. The latter are worse, for they have probably spilt more blood and had a more destructive impact on society. While barbarous religions chose their victims by lot or by some external sign, the inquisitor destroys virtue, knowledge, and liberty. Moreover, Christianity carries on the peculiar dialectic of worship and destruction, service to the divine and injury to self. This is most evident in the preference that many of its devotees show for pointless observances and austerities over the practice of ethics. For such believers, genuine virtue is too agreeable, too useful to oneself and to one's fellow man, to really be pleasing to the deity. They seek instead to serve God through sacrifice, selfabasement, and superstition. They neglect to promote human happiness but are willing to take up "any practice...which either serves to no purpose in life, or offers the strongest violence to [their] natural inclinations" (NHR IV 359). Thus, for Hume, pointless cruelty and self-injury remain as hallmarks of Christian religiosity.

Nietzsche sums up this phenomenon in his account of the "great ladder of religious cruelty":

Once one sacrificed human beings to one's god, perhaps precisely those whom one loved most; the sacrifices of the first-born in all prehistoric religions belong here....Then, during the moral epoch of mankind, one sacrificed to one's gods one's strongest instincts, one's "nature": *this* festive joy lights up the cruel eyes of the ascetic, the "anti-natural" enthusiast. (BGE 55)¹²

In other words, asceticism and the monkish virtues are merely an internalization of the religious cruelty of primitive sacrifice, for "the Christian faith is a sacrifice: a sacrifice of all freedom, all pride, all self-confidence of the spirit" (BGE 46).

Hume and Nietzsche also agree in regarding Christian theism as significantly *more harmful than ancient polytheism*. As Hume argues, a traditional, mythological religion is preferable to a scholastic, systematic one, for it tends to sit lighter on people's minds (NHR IV 352). Systematic religions (such as Christianity) are more harmful, because they demand that we believe absurd creeds and have a deeper effect on our affections and understanding. They also insist on co-opting the philosophical spirit. The superstition of the many was able to peacefully co-exist with the philosophy of the wise (with a few exceptions) in the ancient world, but Christianity forces everyone to accept its

speculative creeds and dogmas. This gives rise to furious theological disputes and to the persecution of philosophers (NHR IV 341, EHU 133). Thus, the greater the philosophical pretensions of a religion, the more harmful and absurd it becomes.

By a similar logic, the more theism *elevates the concept of God*, the more it *abases human dignity*:

Where the deity is represented as infinitely superior to mankind, this belief, though altogether just, is apt, when joined with superstitious terrors, to sink the human mind into the lowest submission and abasement, and to represent the monkish virtues of mortification, penance, humility, and passive suffering, as the only qualities which are acceptable to him. But where the gods are conceived to be only a little superior to mankind, and to have been, many of them, advanced from that inferior rank, we are more at ease, in our addresses to them, and may even, without profaneness, aspire sometimes to a rivalry and emulation of them. Hence activity, spirit, courage, magnanimity, love of liberty, and all the virtues which aggrandize a people. (NHR IV 339)

The more God is conceived of as an infinitely supreme Lord, the more we are required to worship and serve him like slaves. Under Christianity, pagan heroism is replaced by the saint's "whippings and fastings, cowardice and humility, abject submission and slavish obedience" (NHR IV 339–340). Hume agrees with Machiavelli that the doctrines of Christianity have "subdued the spirit of mankind" and "fitted them for slavery and subjection" (NHR IV 340). Towards its all-knowing and all-powerful Lord, one dares not form any sentiment of reproach:

All must be applause, ravishment, extacy. And while their gloomy apprehensions make them ascribe to him measures of conduct, which, in human creatures, would be highly blamed, they must still affect to praise and admire that conduct in the object of their devotional addresses. (NHR IV 354)

In much the same way, Nietzsche argues that the ancients had a far healthier and nobler conception of the divine than the Christians. He describes the Greek gods as "reflections of noble and autocratic men, in whom *the animal* in man felt deified and did *not* lacerate itself, did *not* rage against itself" (GM II:23). He credits polytheism with encouraging a plurality of norms and a plurality of sovereign individuals, in comparison with the constraint of one God and one Law (GS 143). Similarly, Nietzsche has a good deal of respect for the Old Testament, believing that Yahweh was originally conceived as an expression of power, joy, and hope, who was trusted to look after his people

(A 25, BGE 52). However, with subsequent religious developments (the Jews becoming a conquered people, the influence of Zoroastrianism and Platonism) which culminated in Christianity, several very unfortunate things occurred. First, the concept of god was *moralized*. He became dualistic, "a god of the good alone" (A 16). He became judgemental, a rewarder-punisher god who peers into every nook of our soul. He became so all-perfect that he could no longer bear any responsibility for evil. As God is so elevated, man is debased into a sinner. Before God, who is "the ultimate antithesis" of our animal instincts, human beings find themselves "reprehensible to a degree that can never be atoned for" (GM II:22). The Christian saviour may take the *punishment* for our sins, but Nietzsche thinks that this only leaves us with a greater sense of *guilty indebtedness*. In contrast, the gods of the Greeks, with their all-too human foibles, took "not the punishment but, what is *nobler*, the guilt" (GM II:23).

Moreover, one does not have to focus exclusively on the *Natural History* to see Hume as a moral critic of religion. The *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* and the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* each conclude with barbed attacks on religion and its effects on morality. In Part XII of the *Dialogues*, Hume turns away from his assault on the design argument to focus on the moral effects of religion. What is especially interesting about this section is that it is *metaphysically conciliatory* but *morally critical* of religion. The former aspect has generated all sorts of critical debate about what Philo means by "true religion" and whether his apparent concessions to the design argument are ironic, politic, or sincere. As long as we remain at the *metaphysical level*, there are sufficient ambiguities to frustrate both (1) those who wish to read Hume as a resolute, but ironic or cautious, opponent of theism and design, and (2) those who wish to see him as a pious upholder of his own brand of "true religion." However, why should we remain at the metaphysical level? Why should we assume that the central questions about Hume's stand on religion are those concerning God and the design argument, rather than those concerning the effects of religion on human life?

Hume's moral opposition to religion, like Nietzsche's, is clear and unambiguous. While Philo may seek to minimize his metaphysical differences with Cleanthes, when he comes to the issue of the effects of popular (i.e., actual, historical) religion on human life, he is uncompromising. He argues that religion has a pernicious effect on politics, giving rise to strife, persecution, and other dismal consequences:

If the religious spirit be ever mentioned in any historical narration, we are sure to meet afterward with a detail of the miseries which attend it. And no period of time can be happier or more prosperous, than those in which it is never regarded, or heard of. (DNR 220)

Religion is also of no real use in promoting personal morality: "the smallest

grain of natural honesty and benevolence has more effect on men's conduct, than the most pompous views suggested by theological theories and systems" (DNR 221). Natural sympathy, and not faith or fear, is the best and surest source of goodness. As a moral motive, religion faces a paradox. It is unnecessary for the wise and philosophical, while it is more likely to lead the vulgar into frivolous observances and bigoted credulity than to bolster their virtue. By turning attention to eternal salvation, it is "apt to extinguish the benevolent affections, and beget a narrow, contracted selfishness" (DNR 222).

The moral critique of religion is also an important theme of the second *Enquiry*, particularly towards the end of the book. Its "Conclusion" contains Hume's famously scathing treatment of the monkish virtues. In "Appendix IV," in almost proto-Nietzschean terms, Hume attributes the difference between ancient and modern ethics to the corrupting and anti-natural effects of Christian theology. Such theology

bends every branch of knowledge to its own purpose, without much regard to the phenomena of nature, or to the unbiassed sentiments of the mind, hence reasoning, and even language, have been warped from their natural course, and distinctions have been endeavoured to be established where the difference of the objects was, in a manner, imperceptible. (EPM 322)

Thus, modern philosophers, "or rather divines under that disguise," have endeavoured to make distinctions between virtues and talents which were not made by the ancients, which have no basis in natural human sentiment, and which cannot coherently be made.¹³

Standards of Judgement: Nature

In the preceding section, I have tried to show that as a radical moral critic of religion and of Christianity, Hume is very close to Nietzsche. The *Natural History* is a very Nietzschean work, in both its genealogical approach and its criticisms of religious cruelty and Christian morality. The fact that both the *Dialogues* and the second *Enquiry* end on an anti-religious moral note is significant, and suggests (in light of the *Natural History*) that this theme is quite central to Hume's thought. Hume does not merely undermine the design argument, develop a naturalistic ethics, and make the usual Enlightenment case against religious intolerance and enthusiasm. For Hume, as for Nietzsche, religion is a *blight on human flourishing*, the product of "sick men's dreams" (NHR IV 362). Christianity is a particularly unholy brand of religion, which is *anti-natural* and *slavish*. While Hume may not attack Christianity explicitly in the manner of Nietzsche (this would have courted persecution), his contrasts between the ancients and the moderns (Christians), his moral attacks on

Christian doctrines and practices, and his many criticisms of "superstition," "enthusiasm," and "popular religion" make his stand quite clear.

By what standard do Hume and Nietzsche presume to pass such a radically negative moral judgement on religion, and on the Christian religion in particular? Hume and Nietzsche both make frequent references to Christian religion as *anti-natural*. Thus, both appear to have a *standard of nature* (that is a standard of *human nature* and *human flourishing*) by which they condemn religion.¹⁴ Of course, this has nothing to do with "nature" in the sense of physical nature, natural law, or any sort of teleological end of man. Hume rejects such notions as "unphilosophical" and points out that virtue and vice are equally in keeping with physical nature (T 475). He criticizes Hutcheson's conception of the natural for relying on final causes.¹⁵ Nietzsche mocks the Stoic ideal of living "according to nature" (BGE 9) and is well aware of human cultural and historical variability (HA 2, Z I:15).

However, Hume does speak of sympathy and some of the virtues as natural. Nietzsche frequently says that "one must become who one is," bidding us to actualize the potentialities of our natures. It is important not to confuse Hume with twentieth-century proponents of the "is-ought distinction," or to confuse Nietzsche with the existentialist view that "man has no nature." Both Hume and Nietzsche are philosophers of human nature; both uphold the importance of the "nature of our nature" to ethical reflection. They insist that some things are very definitely not conducive to human flourishing; and that prominent among these are many of the doctrines and practices of Christianity.

Standards of Judgement: The Useful and Agreeable

To defend Hume's "standard of nature" and show how it is similar to that of Nietzsche, we must examine several more precise forms it takes in his ethics. For Hume, it is natural and proper for us (1) to value what is useful and agreeable to ourselves and to others, (2) to sympathize with other people to some degree, and (3) to have an internal moral sense or sentiment of humanity which we share with all or most of mankind (EPM 268–272). It is easy to understand how the first and second points work against many aspects of traditional religion. For instance, Hume condemns the monkish virtues because they render a person less useful, less agreeable, and less sympathetic—they "stupify the understanding and harden the heart, obscure the fancy and sour the temper" (EPM 270). As a major source of persecution and cruelty, religion can be seen as both destructive of utility and an affront to our sympathy with its victims.

However, Hume's third point is more problematic. His disapprobation of religion seems to place him in conflict with the moral sentiments of most of mankind. On this ground, Mark Webb has claimed that Hume's uni-

versalism concerning the moral sense is incompatible with his moral critique of religion.¹⁶ I think that Hume can respond to such charges fairly adequately. First, not all persons are equally good moral judges. A hard-hearted, stupefied, unimaginative, and sour-tempered monk or puritan will lack the qualities of sympathy that are essential to being a judicious spectator.¹⁷ Second, Hume refuses to accept those who affect "artificial lives" as counterexamples to his claims about human nature, let alone as competent moral judges. Such people are *morally unbalanced*:

When men depart from the maxims of common reason, and affect these *artificial* lives, as you call them, no one can answer for what will please or displease them. They are in a different element from the rest of mankind; and the natural principles of their mind play not with the same regularity, as if left to themselves, free from the illusions of religious superstition or philosophical enthusiasm. ("A Dialogue," 343)

Hume thus disposes of the zealots. On the other hand, when it comes to ordinary, lukewarm, or nominal believers, Hume is not convinced that religion has any significant effect. Such people do value the useful and agreeable. They are moved far more by natural benevolence than by pompous moral preaching; far more by the fear of earthly disapprobation and punishment than by fear of a distant hell. They make no practical distinctions between natural abilities and moral virtues, no matter how the divines may warp moral systems and language. Such people are likely to be quite Humean in practice, no matter how they may define themselves. And through appeals to their pragmatism, sympathy, and common sense, such people may very well come to share Hume's disapprobation of useless austerities and religious persecution. The "false relish" that they have come to have for certain things may be "corrected by argument and reflection" (EPM 173). Hence the success of the Enlightenment; hence many twentieth-century people who call themselves Christians are probably closer in spirit to Hume (and even to Nietzsche) than to the likes of Calvin or St. Augustine.

Unfortunately, Hume's appeal to the useful and agreeable does appear to cut him off from Nietzsche, who vehemently rejects hedonism and utilitarianism (BGE 225, GM I:2). Nietzsche, along with many defenders of religion, would question whether the qualities that naturally win our approbation can be reduced to the useful and agreeable, and whether Hume does not rely on an artificially narrow standard of nature in order to make his case against Christianity. The answer to these challenges, I shall argue, depends on whether we take "*the agreeable*" in a narrow or broad sense. On one hand, many passages suggest an unduly narrow standard of "the useful and agreeable." Thus, Hume says that the monkish virtues "neither advance a man's fortune

in the world [not useful to oneself], nor render him a more valuable member of society [not useful to others]; neither qualify him for the entertainment of company [not agreeable to others], nor increase his power of self-enjoyment [not agreeable to oneself] (EPM 270). Utility is here exemplified by making one's fortune, and the agreeable is equated with amiable, convivial qualities, and with enjoyment. Some of Hume's aesthetic judgements also appear, at least to us post-Romantics, to be vulgarly utilitarian:

When we recommend even an animal or a plant as *useful* and *beneficial*, we give it an applause and recommendation suited to its nature. As, on the other hand, reflection on the baneful influence of any of these inferior beings always inspires us with the sentiment of aversion. The eye is pleased with the prospect of cornfields and loaded vineyards; horses grazing, and flocks pasturing; but flies the view of briars and brambles, affording shelter to wolves and serpents. (EPM 179)

This passage is somewhat wrong-headed. People prefer the Swiss Alps and Niagara Falls to sights of farms and factories, and when they see them they do not usually exclaim "How useful for skiing!" or "What a beneficial source of hydro-electric power!" Dogs and chickens may be useful and amiable creatures, but they lack the mystique of the wolf and will never rival the eagle as a national symbol or inspire a poem like William Blake's "The Tyger."

However, Hume is no vulgar utilitarian. His notion of the agreeable is not strictly limited to the amiable, convivial virtues. As the *Treatise* makes particularly clear, Hume esteems greatness as well as goodness, the "awful" virtue of Cato as well as the "amiable" virtue of Caesar (T 607–608). He admires the "shining virtues" of heroism. Though the glory of such qualities is somewhat tarnished by their disutility and destructive power, Hume says that when we focus on the hero himself:

there is something so dazzling in his character, the mere contemplation of it so elevates the mind, that we cannot refuse it our admiration. The pain, which we receive from its tendency to the prejudice of society, is over-power'd by a stronger and more immediate sympathy. (T 601)

This passage, with its admiration of dazzling and dangerous virtues, is much closer to Nietzsche than to Bentham.¹⁸ Here we have a conception of the agreeable as "awful" and "elevating" which is quite distinct from agreeableness in its sweet and amiable sense. This appears to parallel the well-known eighteenth-century aesthetic distinction between the sublime and the beautiful. Elsewhere Hume praises "greatness of mind," "dignity of character," and "noble pride and spirit" as instances of the sublime (EPM

252).

Because he recognizes that the *agreeable* can also be *awful* or *admirable*, Hume's standard of judgement cannot be dismissed as too narrowly utilitarian. It is actually less un-Nietzschean than one might suppose. Hume's rejection of the monkish virtues is thus not merely a matter of utility. He shares Nietzsche's admiration for the heroic virtues (despite their potential danger), yet does not accord the ascetic monk and his "virtues" even a mitigated respect. The reason for this is that Hume sees the monk as the *opposite* of the hero rather than as another exemplar of awe-inspiring qualities. For Hume, the heroic virtues of courage, ambition, and magnanimity are associated with pride and self-esteem and "derive a great part of their merit from that origin" (T 600). In contrast, the virtues of the Christian monk or puritan represent humility, self-abasement, and self-denial. They are not shining or awful (at least not in the original sense of the term), but merely pointless and dismal.¹⁹

Standards of Judgement: Pride and Ressentiment

The upshot of all this is that Hume's opposition to religion and the monkish virtues goes beyond their lack of utility and their tendency to make people less amiable and sympathetic. If this was the sole basis of his moral critique, Hume would have to treat heroism and asceticism more nearly alike. Yet, like Nietzsche and the ancients, Hume affirms pride, self-esteem, greatness of mind, and courage as admirable traits of character, and despises the Christian religion for its opposition to these virtues.²⁰ For Hume, nothing is more laudable and useful "than a due degree of pride, which makes us sensible of our own merit, and gives us a confidence and assurance in all our projects and enterprizes" (T 596–597); and noble natures have "a certain reverence for themselves as well as others, which is the surest guardian of every virtue" (EPM 276). In almost identical words, Nietzsche agrees: "*The noble soul has reverence for itself*" (BGE 287).

However, if this is the case, one wonders: "How is it that natural or noble values like self-esteem and greatness of mind lost out, under Christianity, to humility and self-abasement? How is it that pride became a sin, and virtue became something dismal and burdensome?" Hume can partly explain such developments in terms of the Christian conception of God, as he does in the *Natural History*. This merely leaves us with another question: "What prompted people to conceive of the deity as such an infinite, moralistic, and tyrannical Lord, who demands cruel austerities, slavish abasement, and blind faith?"

In order to deal with such questions, Hume's position requires recourse to some sort of Nietzschean hypothesis, which can explain how (and why) natural or noble values came to be inverted. According to Nietzsche,

Christianity is a product of *value-inversion*, involving both (1) the *metaphysical* negation of life, nature, the body, and the world, and (2) the *moral* negation of noble, healthy, affirmative values.²¹ This theory has the advantage of economy, in that it provides a unified account of both the condemnation of earthly life in the name of "the beyond," and the condemnation of pride and greatness of soul in favour of "slave morality" and "the monkish virtues."²² For Nietzsche, both sorts of value-inversion are the product of *ressentiment*, or repressed vengefulness, which in turn is a product of the impotent misery of the wretched. Such people are apt to feel bitter towards more fortunate human beings and their values, and towards earthly life in general. They delight in envisioning a God who will punish the proud, the masterful, and the worldly, while rewarding the "sheep" for their meekness and obedience (GM I: 13-15). They are miserable, so they seek meaning for their suffering in ascetic ideals, and dream of finding rest in an afterworldly realm.

Nietzsche's archetypal resenters are not very far removed from Hume's own view of religious pathology. Much like Nietzsche, Hume thinks that religion is usually a product of sorrow, terror, and dejection, rather than a more cheerful disposition. He sees the temper of religion as determined by gloomy and miserable persons, who turn to religion when afflicted and "form a notion of those unknown Beings, suitably to the present gloom and melancholy of their temper" (DNR 225). This idea almost calls out to be developed in a Nietzschean direction. If gods can be fashioned out of the gloom and terror of their devotees, what about other metaphysical and moral doctrines? Why not allow that suffering can turn people against the human condition, and that repressed vengefulness and envy can lead people to invert values?

Hume could have developed a Nietzschean theory of value-inversion, if he had made use of his ideas about malice and envy to explain the origins of the Christian doctrines that he, along with Nietzsche, regarded as slavish and anti-natural. Hume saw that malice and envy are connected, and recognized them as potentially destructive anti-values:

The only difference betwixt these passions lies in this, that envy is excited by some present enjoyment of another, which by comparison diminishes our idea of our own: Whereas malice is the unprovok'd desire of producing evil in another, in order to reap a pleasure from the comparison. (T 377)

Although derived from pride (of a certain warped variety),²³ malice and envy run counter to the normal economy of pride and love. For Hume, pride is an agreeable impression, which arises from the possession (in oneself or one's relations) of such valuable qualities as virtue, knowledge, beauty, wealth, or power (T 279, 297). He further argues that the same qualities that produce

pride when we have them, produce *love* when they are found in others (T 332). Thus, we esteem the rich and powerful, not only (or mainly) from a expectation of advantage, but because their houses and equipages, "being agreeable in themselves, necessarily produce a sentiment of pleasure in every one, that either considers or surveys them" (T 358). The good qualities of an enemy can also command our esteem and respect, even though they may be hurtful to us (T 472).²⁴ Hume's account of pride and love is an example of what Nietzsche would call a healthy or noble mode of valuation, in which positive qualities (whether our own or others) are affirmed without *ressentiment*, and without narrow reference to utility.

Malice and envy stand opposed to this mode of valuation. They lead people to humiliate others or make them suffer, in order to deem themselves superior by comparison. The malicious and envious do not esteem such values as happiness, virtue, knowledge, beauty, and prosperity when they are possessed by others; rather they desire their destruction. Such reactive passions need only become creative and invert the standard of valuation (whether consciously or unconsciously), in order to reach the stage of full-blown Nietzschean *ressentiment*.²⁵

Benevolence, Pity, and "The Dismal Dress"

My preceding line of argument has been pulling Hume very close to Nietzsche, as one who upholds pride and the heroic virtues and whose view of Christianity calls out for a theory of value-inversion. There remains one important disagreement between their ethics that I have yet to address. Hume values benevolence, sympathy, and the tender sentiments more than greatness and heroism; Nietzsche criticizes pity and praises hardness. Hume is well aware of the dark and bloody side of the heroic virtues. He puts more stock in the good qualities that render one "a safe companion, an easy friend, a gentle master, an agreeable husband, or an indulgent father" (T 606). He claims that "the epithets *sociable, good-natured, humane, merciful, grateful, friendly, generous, beneficent*, or their equivalents, are known in all languages, and universally express the highest merit, which *human nature* is capable of attaining" (EPM 176). According to Marie Martin, Hume's conception of benevolence is more Christian than classical, and closer to *The Whole Duty of Man* than to Cicero's *Offices*.²⁶ On the other hand, no one would accuse Nietzsche of being indebted to Christianity in this regard. Nietzsche prefers "greatness of mind" to "goodness and benevolence." He identifies with such critics of pity as Spinoza and the Stoics, and condemns Rousseau and Schopenhauer for (among other things) their emphasis on pity.²⁷

It is easy, and I think a mistake, to make too much of such differences between Hume and Nietzsche. To begin with, there is nothing uniquely Christian about benevolence and sympathy. Hume regards them as natural

virtues, and upholds them against a background of *Christian asceticism* (cruelty to self), *religious intolerance* (cruelty to others), *original sin* (the wickedness of our natural impulses), and *abstract moral systems* (the placing of morality outside of [and usually in opposition to] human nature, in "reason" or "divine law"). Hume sees the virtue of benevolence as coming most to the forefront in modern civilization, for less cultivated nations "have not as yet had full experience of the advantages attending beneficence, justice, and the social virtues" (EPM 255). Charles Taylor also argues that benevolence takes on a new significance in modernity. In particular, he sees this reflected in the ethics of moral sentiment theorists, such as Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Hume. With their inward turn towards human nature, and their affirmation of benevolence and ordinary life, such philosophers are not simply classical or Christian, but are "crucially shaped by a modern, one might say 'post-Christian', mode of thought."²⁸

Moreover, there is an affinity between the ethical projects of Hume and Nietzsche that is far more significant than their disagreements. Both want to strip virtue of its "dismal dress," its "scowl and cowl." As Hume puts it:

But what philosophical truths can be more advantageous to society, than those here delivered, which represent virtue in all her genuine and most engaging charms, and make us approach her with ease, familiarity, and affection? The dismal dress falls off, with which many divines, and some philosophers, have covered her; and nothing appears but gentleness, humanity, beneficence, affability; nay, even at proper intervals, play, frolic, and gaiety....And if any austere pretenders approach her, enemies to joy and pleasure, she either rejects them as hypocrites and deceivers; or, if she admit them to her train, they are ranked, however, among the least favoured of her votaries. (EPM 279–280)

In a couple of less well-known notes from *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche makes a strikingly similar point:

Virtue is no longer believed in, its power of attraction is gone; to restore it, someone would have to know how to take it to market as an unfamiliar form of adventure and excess. (WP 324)...In the end: what have I achieved? Let us not hide from ourselves this most curious result: I have imparted to virtue a new charm—the charm of something forbidden....We have removed its scowl and its cowl, we have rescued it from the importunity of the many, we have taken from it its absurd rigidity, its vacant expression, its stiff false hair, its hieratic muscular system. (WP 328)²⁹

Hume and Nietzsche both want to present virtue as something natural, joyous,

attractive, positive; something that is free of the stigma of sin, guilt, vengefulness, self-denial, and abstract duty. For Hume, there is nothing dismal about sympathy and benevolence. They have nothing to do with threats of eternal damnation (if we do not love our neighbour), or self-sacrifice, or an oppressive sense of pity for everything that suffers. Rather, *sympathy* is just the principle in our nature that fuels our interest in our fellow beings. Through sympathy, we take pleasure in others' pleasure, are pained at their pains, and enjoy a great many social enjoyments. Hume's classic example of its influence is not any dramatic act of altruism, but the fact that a man would not "tread as willingly on another's gouty toes, whom he has no quarrel with, as on the hard flint and pavement" (EPM 226). Moreover, Hume regards *benevolence*, like cheerfulness or courage, as a quality immediately agreeable to its possessor. It is a tender sentiment, delightful in itself, which is of value independently of its utility for others (EPM 257–258).

It would be a mistake to read Nietzsche as opposing such benevolence. Such traits as sympathy (*Mitgefühl*), magnanimity, and courtesy make it onto Nietzsche's various lists of the cardinal virtues (BGE 284, D 556). He speaks in praise of such "neglected and undervalued" things as good-naturedness, friendliness, and politeness of the heart—traits which "have played a far greater role in the construction of culture" than pity or self-sacrifice (HA 49). Moreover, Zarathustra's *gift-giving virtue* bears some resemblance to Hume's conception of benevolence. The gift-giving virtue is "the highest virtue" (Z I:22). Like Hume's benevolence, its value is not merely utilitarian.³⁰ It transcends all dichotomies between egoism and self-sacrifice; rather "you force all things to and into yourself that they may flow back out of your well as the gifts of your love" (Z I:22). In other words, you develop yourself and create so that you may give, and giving becomes inseparable from self-development and creation. The gift-giving virtue is a "whole and holy" selfishness—unlike the all-too-poor and hungry selfishness of the sick that always wants to steal (Z I:22). Like Hume's benevolence, it is not a product of duty or pity. Hume compares the benevolent person to "the sun, an inferior minister of providence [who] cheers, invigorates, and sustains the surrounding world" (EPM 178). Nietzsche characterizes the gift-giving virtue in identical terms. Like the sun (which Zarathustra addresses at the beginning of the book), it is "gleaming and gentle in its splendor" and gives freely out of a sense of its own superabundance (Z I:22).

When Nietzsche criticizes pity or compassion (*Mitleid*),³¹ he is not so much disagreeing with Hume (aside from his emphasis on greatness of mind, courage, and autonomy) as carrying on a quite different debate.³² On the question of pity, Schopenhauer, and to some extent Rousseau, had a powerful negative influence on Nietzsche. In contrast with Hume, Schopenhauer managed to turn an ethics of sympathy and fellow-feeling into something dismal and ascetic. According to him, all actions are done either from egoism,

malice, or compassion; only those done from compassion have any moral worth, for "egoism and the moral worth of an action absolutely exclude one another."³³ Schopenhauer dismisses all perfectionist self-realization as a form of egoism. He dismisses all love except compassion (the desire to alleviate suffering) as a form of egoism. His stand is just a new variation on the old dichotomy of self versus others, and tainted versus pure moral motivation. Nietzsche never tired of criticizing such simple, oppositional dualisms. He thought that good and evil drives are deeply entangled, that no actions are purely unegoistic, and that it is a mistake for moralists to try to give the ego a bad conscience when all actions flow out of the ego (D 148).

Schopenhauer also claims, following Rousseau, that our sympathy with others is restricted to their suffering, while their pleasure and good fortune leave us unmoved and can easily excite envy.³⁴ This is a dismal doctrine indeed, and one which invites suspicion. Is a "compassion" which turns to envy or indifference when other people prosper really benevolent? Or as Nietzsche suspects, could it be a way of elevating ourselves above those whom we resent when they are flourishing? Schopenhauer does not allow his heart to be "forwarded by correspondent movements in his fellow creatures" (EPM 220), sympathizing with their pleasure as well as their sorrow. His interest in human suffering and pity is primarily not practical but metaphysical. He uses misery as an objection against existence, and as a way of negating the will to live. He values compassion as "practical mysticism" because it takes us beyond the phenomenal appearance of individuation, dissolving the distinction between ego and non-ego.³⁵

When Nietzsche reacted against Schopenhauer, he continued to associate pity with metaphysical *ressentiment*:

What was at stake was the value of morality—and over this I had to come to terms almost exclusively with my great teacher Schopenhauer....What was especially at stake was the value of the "unegoistic," the instincts of pity, self-abnegation, self-sacrifice, which Schopenhauer had gilded, deified, and projected into a beyond for so long that at last they became for him "value-in itself," on the basis of which he said *No* to life and himself....It was precisely here that I saw the *great* danger to mankind...a retrospective weariness, the will turning *against* life, the tender and sorrowful signs of the ultimate illness. (GM P:5)

Nietzsche elsewhere says that pity has a "depressing effect" on vitality, "makes suffering contagious," "multiplies misery," and "gives life itself a gloomy and questionable aspect" (A 7). All this makes perfect sense, given that Nietzsche is criticizing an extreme, Schopenhauerian form of pity—a pity which "suffers-with" pain but is indifferent towards prosperity, dwelling impotently

on all the misery in the world. Nietzsche fought against such pity as a threat to our power to affirm life. He feared that if the ability to suffer—with were to greatly increase we would despair of existence (HA 43, D 143), and warned that anyone “whose desire it is to serve mankind as a physician *in any sense whatever*” must guard against being paralyzed by pity (D 134). In such passages Nietzsche clearly seems to speak from experience, as a person susceptible to such pity who struggled to overcome it.³⁶

The *Mitleid* that Nietzsche rejects bears little resemblance to the sympathy that Hume upholds. Such extreme pity does not even appear on Hume’s intellectual horizon. He defends a very modest sympathy against those who would deny other-regarding sentiment any place in human motivation. The spirit of Hume’s ethics is close to that of Zarathustra’s remarks on pity:

Verily, I may have done this and that for sufferers; but always I seemed to have done better when I learned to feel better joys. As long as there have been men, man has felt too little joy: that alone, my brothers, is our original sin. And learning better to feel joy, we learn best not to hurt others or to plan hurts for them.... Believe me, my friends: the bite of conscience teaches men to bite. (Z II:3)

Nietzsche’s point here is that a basic attitude of joy is a surer basis of benevolent conduct than such dismal affects as guilt and pity.³⁷ Such joy plays much the same role as the feeling of power and superabundance which is at the root of the gift-giving virtue. Thus Nietzsche says: “the noble human being, too, helps the unfortunate, but not, or almost not, from pity, but prompted more by an urge begotten by excess of power” (BGE 260). Just as those with a real sense of power and self-affirmation tend to be noble and generous, those who are wretched, frustrated, and impotent are prone to *ressentiment*.³⁸ Hume makes a similar psychological point in terms of the association of impressions:

Grief and disappointment give rise to anger, anger to envy, envy to malice, and malice to grief again, till the whole circle be completed. In like manner our temper, when elevated with joy, naturally throws itself into love, generosity, pity, courage, pride, and the other resembling affections. (T 283)

Conclusion

Hume and Nietzsche thus turn us away from the commands of religious and rationalist morality, and towards a more psychological approach. They hold that the source of good actions is in a healthy psyche; that those who are happy and esteem themselves (or enjoy a feeling of power) are likely to disseminate more joy and kindness than those who feel miserable or guilty.

This has profoundly anti-Kantian implications. It means that the most fruitful guiding question for ethics is not "What is the whole duty of man?" but "Which sentiments are the real source of noble and benevolent action, and how can they best be cultivated?" For Hume and Nietzsche, passions and sentiments are more powerful than abstract moralizing. It is feelings of joy or power, as well as traits like greatness of mind or generosity, which are the most reliable springs of goodness. Gloomy moralism tends to dampen such feelings, and it is more likely to become a tool of the harsh, bitter, judgemental passions, than to actually enable someone to overcome the limits of sympathy or the festering of *ressentiment*.³⁹

Ultimately, despite differences in philosophical culture, time, and temperament, Hume and Nietzsche are more akin to one another than anyone has ever acknowledged. Both are pioneers of a mode of philosophizing that is naturalistic, anti-metaphysical, and focused on human nature. On the subject of religion, their critiques are mutually reinforcing. When we read them together, Hume's moral opposition to Christianity becomes harder to miss, while Nietzsche's theory of value-inversion finds a partial ally. The ethical standards by which they criticize religion are surprisingly similar. They cannot be dismissed for relying on an overly narrow utilitarianism (in the one case), or rejecting all humane and benevolent sentiments (in the other). Both uphold human pride and greatness of mind, and thereby point us back to the virtues of Aristotle and the ancients. Yet equally, with their thoroughgoing naturalism and deep interest in the genealogical and psychological roots of morality, they point us forward, towards the project of developing a non-dismal, post-Christian ethics.

NOTES

1 References to the following works by Hume and Nietzsche are given parenthetically in the text. Citations of Hume are by page number; citations of Nietzsche are by aphorism or section number. Roman numerals are used to designate the Essays of the *Genealogy* and the parts of other works by Nietzsche that are not numbered consecutively, while "P" always refers to a preface or prologue:

Hume:

A Treatise of Human Nature, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); cited as T.

Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd ed. revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975); cited as EHU, EPM, "A Dialogue."

Dialogues concerning Natural Religion, edited by Norman Kemp Smith, 2nd. ed. (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1947); cited as DNR.

The Natural History of Religion, in *The Philosophical Works of David Hume*, edited by T. H. Green and T. H. Gross, 4 vols. (Darmstadt: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1964); cited as NHR.

Nietzsche:

On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life, translated by Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980); cited as ADHL.

Human, All Too Human, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), and containing "Assorted Opinions and Maxims"; cited as HA, AO.

Daybreak, translated by R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); cited as D.

The Gay Science, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974); cited as GS.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra, *The Twilight of the Idols*, *The Antichrist*, and *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Penguin, 1954); cited as Z, TI, A, NCW.

Beyond Good and Evil, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1966); cited as BGE.

On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo, edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1969); cited as GM, EH.

The Will to Power, edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1968); cited as WP.

2 Nicholas Capaldi, "The Dogmatic Slumber of Hume Scholarship," *Hume Studies* 18.2 (1992): 118. The "canonic misreading" tries to make all of Hume's positions follow from his empiricism, and typically regards the "is-ought distinction" as Hume's main contribution to ethics.

3 Annette Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume's Treatise* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991), especially chap. 1.

4 Despite his invocation of "science" and "experiments," Hume's emphasis on history and the observation of human life make it clear that he is no proto-positivist. He probably has more in common with contemporary defenders of a humanistic or hermeneutic conception of the social sciences than with twentieth-century positivists. Nietzsche also valued the scientific spirit, but protested against the reduction of philosophy to a timid abstinence doctrine of "theory of knowledge," and insisted that "*philosophy*," as an inclusive form of inquiry and reflection, should rule over "*science*," that more rigorous (but narrower) enterprise which does not deal with questions of value, or purpose, or the place of knowledge in human life (BGE 204).

5 Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), 267.

6 The only references to Hume in Nietzsche's published writings are in ADHL 1, GS 357, GS 370, BGE 252, and NCW 5. None of these references are substantive (and neither are the ones in Nietzsche's notebooks), and in most cases Hume is merely listed along with other British philosophers or mentioned in connection with Kant.

7 Zuzana Parusnikova, "Against the Spirit of Foundations: Postmodernism and David Hume," *Hume Studies* 19.1 (1993): 10.

8 Parusnikova, 3.

9 Robert Solomon, "Nietzsche, Postmodernism, and Resentment," in *Nietzsche as Postmodernist*, edited by Clayton Koelb (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), 282. For a thorough analysis of Nietzsche's views on truth and perspectivism (which argues that he is not a radical skeptic), see Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

10 On the largely neglected subject of Hume's moral criticism of religion, see Gerhard Streminger, "Religion a Threat to Morality: An Attempt to Throw Some New Light on Hume's Philosophy of Religion," *Hume Studies* 15.2 (1989): 277–293. This fine paper illuminates the most Nietzschean aspect of Hume's philosophy of religion, although it does not make any reference to Nietzsche.

11 On this topic, see David Couzens Hoy, "Nietzsche, Hume, and the Genealogical Method," in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals*, edited by Richard Schacht (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 251–268. Hoy does not really do justice to the similarity between Hume and Nietzsche. He ignores Hume's most genealogical work, *The Natural History of Religion*, and oddly contrasts Nietzsche's approach with "Hume's detached, observational tone" and "the British pretension to neutral, value-free description" (252).

12 Nietzsche takes this idea one step further, and suggests that religion must overcome itself through the ultimate sacrifice of giving up the comfort of faith in God. This follows from his principle that "all great things bring about their own destruction through an act of self-overcoming" (GM III:27).

13 Hume's remarks about divines disguised as philosophers have their analogue in Nietzsche's remarks about German philosophy (especially that of Kant) as insidious theology (A 10–11).

14 I speak here of human flourishing (Greek *eudaimonia*), a term not used by Hume or Nietzsche, partly because it is neutral between Hume's "useful and agreeable" and Nietzsche's "noble, healthy, powerful, and affirmative," and partly because it reminds us that their ethics are rooted in human nature. Nietzsche's most explicit appeals to an ethical standard of flourishing are in his later works; see GM P:6 and TI V:4–5, "Morality as Anti-Nature." The neo-Aristotelian flavour of "human flourishing" is perfectly in keeping with the fact that Hume and Nietzsche both derived significant ethical inspiration from the ancients, and frequently criticize modern Christian morality from such a perspective.

15 "Two Letters to Francis Hutcheson," in *British Moralists 1650–1800*, edited by D. D. Raphael (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), II 109.

16 For this objection, see Mark Webb, "The Argument of the Natural History," *Hume Studies* 17.2 (1991): 154–155. Webb makes no effort to consider how Hume might deal with such a criticism.

17 On this subject see Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, 217.

18 Nietzsche, as is well-known, often expresses his admiration for great, heroic individuals. Most frequently the men he praises are philosophers or artists, but occasionally they are political men of power. In the later case,

Nietzsche is rather like Hume—it is greatness of *character* he admires, and not the social and political consequences of such actions. This point has been made by Lester Hunt, *Nietzsche and the Origin of Virtue* (London: Routledge, 1991), 195, who compares Nietzsche's treatment of Bismarck and of the thirteenth-century Emperor Frederick II. Despite the strong parallels between the two, Nietzsche's references to Bismarck (his contemporary) are all unfavourable and based on his *policies*, while he admired the *character* of Frederick II (who was safely dead). Such a pattern of approbation is not uncommon, and is well in keeping with Hume's remarks on the subject.

19 Nietzsche's opposition to asceticism is more nuanced. He regards the ascetic as an embodiment of the will to power over oneself (BGE 51), and credits the priestly form of existence with making man a more interesting animal and giving depth to the human soul (GM I:6). Nietzsche's emphasis on power, and his belief that human beings need a goal, makes his analysis of "the ascetic ideal" in the Third Essay of the *Genealogy* more convincing than Hume's treatment of the monkish virtues (which is witty, but makes asceticism seem merely bizarre and foolish). The irony here, is that Nietzsche is *only* able to accord asceticism a certain respect (however mitigated), because he shatters its self-conception, unmasking its attempted negation of the will as a peculiar form of *will to power*, and its negation of earthly life as a desperate "artifice for the *preservation of life*" (GM III:13).

20 For a more extensive treatment of the place of pride in Hume's ethics of virtue and character, see Marie Martin, "Hume on Human Excellence," *Hume Studies* 18.2 (1992): 383–399, and Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, chap. 9. Martin argues that Hume valued greatness of mind and benevolence as "immediately agreeable" intrinsic values, "without reference to (and sometimes in *spite of*) their effects on either the possessor or others" (391). Although Hume does not speak of intrinsic values, he does recognize that some qualities acquire their merit (all or in part) and are denominated as virtues because they give pleasure by the mere survey (T 590–591). Such qualities are "*immediately agreeable*"—a concept that bears some resemblance to that of "the admirable" in the virtue ethics of Michael Slote. For Slote's position, see *From Morality to Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), chap. 5.

21 My interpretation of Nietzsche's theory of value-inversion is based on his discussion of noble and slave modes of valuation in *Genealogy* I, of the ascetic ideal in *Genealogy* III, and of historical Christianity in *The Antichrist*, where he says that the "morality of *ressentiment*" of *Genealogy* I is "Judaean-Christian morality pure and simple" (A 24).

22 There is a large, although imperfect, overlap between the Christian virtues that Hume and Nietzsche reject. Both are vehement in their condemnation of humility, mortification, and self-denial, although Nietzsche dissents from Hume by praising solitude and counting it as a genuine virtue.

23 Hume thought that there is something wretched and second-rate about a pride that can only achieve self-affirmation in comparison with the infirmities of other people: "A man of sense and merit is pleas'd with himself, independent of all foreign considerations: But a fool must always find some person, that is more foolish, in order to keep himself in good humour with his

own parts and understanding" (T 596).

24 For Nietzsche, the capacity to feel reverence for one's enemies is a trait of noble morality, while the resentful look upon their enemies as evil (GM I:10).

25 If Hume never developed such a theory, it is because he did not take envy and malice as seriously as Nietzsche did. They play a minor role in his account of the passions, and an even more marginal role in Book III of the *Treatise*, where envy and revenge are dismissed in one sentence on the grounds that they "operate only by intervals, and are directed against particular persons, whom we consider as our superiors or enemies" (T 491). In the second *Enquiry*, he observes: "where interest or revenge or envy perverts not our disposition, we are always inclined...to virtue above its opposite. Absolute, unprovoked, disinterested malice has never perhaps place in any human breast; or if it had, must there pervert all the sentiments of morals" (EPM 227). For more on this subject, see Annette Baier, "Hume on Resentment," *Hume Studies* 6.2 (1980): 133–149. Baier discusses Hume's view that "the ability to make us feel the effects of their resentment" (EPM 190) is a prerequisite of the need for establishing relations of justice. She correctly points out that Hume's concept of "resentment" is quite different from that of Nietzsche. It is active and involves the ability to return injuries, in contrast to the reactive malice and repressed vengefulness of Nietzsche's "*ressentiment*."

26 Martin, 390.

27 On this subject, see Martha Nussbaum, "Pity and Mercy: Nietzsche's Stoicism," in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, 139–167. She argues that Nietzsche is essentially Stoic in his opposition to pity, and that he wants to "bring about a revival of Stoic values of self-command and self-formation within a post-Christian and post-Romantic context" (140).

28 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 255.

29 Variations on this theme can be found throughout Nietzsche's writings. See especially (D 330), (GS 292), (Z I:5), and (BGE 216).

30 Nietzsche rejects all merely instrumental "virtues" (like industriousness and obedience) which disadvantage or harm their possessor in the name of the general utility (GS 21). Likewise, Hume may praise qualities for being useful, but he does not demand (or expect) the sacrifice of the individual to the general utility. He rhetorically asks: "what theory of morals can ever serve any useful purpose, unless it can show, by a particular detail, that all the duties which it recommends, are also the true interest of each individual?" (T 280). Thus, both benevolence and greatness of mind are celebrated by Hume as part of individual flourishing, and (as David Gauthier argues) Hume's account of justice is founded, not in utilitarian "total utility," but in the "mutual advantage" of each person. For Gauthier's position, see "David Hume, Contractarian," in *Moral Dealing: Contract, Ethics, and Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 57.

31 The German word (literally *Mit* [with] *Leid* [sorrow, pain] or "suffering with") can be rendered as either pity or compassion. Since *compassion* has more positive connotations than *pity*, in English translations Schopenhauer bases ethics on "compassion" while Nietzsche criticizes "pity."

32 Many of the virtue-ethical differences between Hume and Nietzsche reflect changes in the intellectual climate between the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and nineteenth-century Romanticism (the latter influenced Nietzsche significantly, even though he criticized it). Nietzsche's affirmation of the independent, exceptional individual is close to the spirit of John Stuart Mill's chapter "Of Individuality" in *On Liberty*, or Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay on "Self-Reliance," but has very few pre-Romantic analogues. Emerson was one of Nietzsche's favourite authors, while Mill's defence of individuality was partly inspired by the German Romantic Wilhelm von Humboldt (interesting cases of Anglo-German cross-influence). Even the most notorious aspect of Nietzsche's teaching—his invocation of hardness, war, and danger—is not so much a new "immoralism" as a protest, with Romantic overtones, against some of the tendencies of his age and of modernity. Thus, Zarathustra warns of the coming of the "last man"—a complacent creature, lacking any sense of wonder or longing, who leads a life of comfort, consumption, and conformity (Z P:5). Such aspects of Nietzsche's thought are analogous to William James' call for "The Moral Equivalent of War," and to the message of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*.

33 Arthur Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of Morality*, translated by E.F.J. Payne (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), chap. 16, 141.

34 Schopenhauer, 145–146. He cites Rousseau's first maxim: "It is not in the human heart to put ourselves in the place of people who are happier than we, but only in that of those who are more pitiable." For Rousseau's views see *Emile*, translated by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 223. In response, Nietzsche remarks that "fellow rejoicing [*Mitfreude*], not fellow suffering [*Mitleiden*], makes the friend" (HA 499), and that "joying with" is higher than "suffering-with" (AO 62).

35 Schopenhauer, chap. 22.

36 The personal (as well as the anti-Schopenhauerian) context of Nietzsche's anti-pity views is important. One must understand that he approached the subject with a quite different set of concerns than those who simply associate compassion with kindness or welfare liberalism (supporting a "compassionate society"). Nietzsche cannot be dismissed as hard-hearted—if anything his writings, letters, and biography reveal a man who was overly sensitive to pity and suffering. It is no wonder that he felt the need to tell himself to "become hard." He can, however, be faulted for letting his own concerns with the dangers of extreme pity cloud his judgement of humane and reformist causes.

37 Compare with Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 212, and his criticism of Peter Singer: "Some utilitarian writers aim to increase an indeterminate sense of guilt in their readers.... As moral persuasion, this kind of tactic is likely to be counter-productive and to lead to a defensive and resentful contraction of concern. This can be seen in research, and, at the present time, all around us."

38 Many of Nietzsche's texts support the idea that those with a genuine and healthy sense of power will conduct themselves nobly. See especially D 348,

GS 13, Z I:22, Z II:13, and GM II:10–11. The masters of the First Essay of the *Genealogy* do not really represent a counterexample. Although they behave like “beasts of prey” towards weaker, alien peoples, among themselves they are “resourceful in consideration, self-control, delicacy, loyalty, pride, and friendship” (GM I:11). Their predation is not malicious, but is done innocently and thoughtlessly, much as children perform pranks or human beings exploit and kill other animals. Because they are unreflective, these archaic masters do not embody Nietzsche’s full ideal.

39 One might ask: “Where does such an ethic leave us with those who are frustrated, unhappy, and lacking in all noble and generous sentiments?” Hume and Nietzsche are both tough-minded enough to have an answer to this question, and their answers are essentially contractarian (although both reject the idea of an original contract). For Hume, backing up the natural virtues and sentiments is the artifice of justice. We ultimately must respect the property of those who are roughly equal to ourselves, or else suffer the effects of their resentment (EPM 190–191). In much the same way, Nietzsche defines justice (in its most basic form) as “the good will among parties of approximately equal power to come to terms with one another, to reach an ‘understanding’ by means of a settlement—and to *compel* parties of lesser power to reach a settlement among themselves” (GM II:8; also HA 92, D 112). Thus, whether from nobler motives, or from the fear and memory of punishment, all must come to respect the basic five or six “I will not’s” on which the advantages of society depend (GM II:3).

For an interpretation of Nietzsche as a contractarian, as well as a good analysis of the *Genealogy* as a unified ethical work, see Maudemarie Clark, “Nietzsche’s Immoralism and the Concept of Morality,” in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, 15–34. Clark sees the First Essay as upholding a *nonmoral mode of evaluating persons* (the *aretaic* “noble mode of valuation”), while opposing the moralization of “good and bad” into “good and evil.” She sees the Second Essay as upholding a *nonmoral version of the social contract*, while opposing the moralization of “debt” into guilt and bad conscience.

In contrast, Philip Kain has tried to interpret the *Genealogy* as taking a more positive view of slave morality, guilt, bad conscience, and the ascetic ideal; see “Nietzschean Genealogy and Hegelian History in *The Genealogy of Morals*,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 26:1 (1996):123–148. But Kain fails to appreciate the extent to which Nietzsche’s concept of *ressentiment* separates his account of masters and slaves from that of Hegel, and he makes too much of Nietzsche’s brief aside crediting bad conscience and self-torture with deepening and spiritualizing man (GM II:18). This aside is best understood as “giving the devil his due”—a generous, non-resentful admission that even his priestly and ascetic “enemies” have contributed something to human existence. Overall, Nietzsche is quite unequivocal in his opposition to moralistic cruelty, guilt, and the rest of the “dismal dress” (D 77, D 202, Z II:3–5, and GM II:22–24). He wants to replace the ascetic ideal with a new, life-affirming ideal (as Clark argues in *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, chap. 6).

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