

Table of Contents

1. Introduction:

The nature and scope of the study : Hume's theory of the Passions is his moral psychology, i.e., the psychological side of ethical inquiry. It is a conceptual map of human inclinations, feelings, actions and choices as relevant to a theory of ethics. It is also a description of morally significant phenomena as well as a description of the way to talk about the subject.

For Hume the human characteristics relevant to moral worth are always empirical, hence his moral psychology is an investigation into human nature. There is, he says, an original fabric of human nature consisting of propensities and dispositions.

Hume's moral psychology is thus affiliated to his philosophical anthropology. Much of his account of the passions, their relationship to reason, etc. presuppose his image of man, his view of human nature as something given. Hume's rejection of reason as a creative force is characteristic of his way of looking at human nature. Reason, for him, is attested information; it has nothing to do with the choice of ends. The passions, on the other hand, are the most personal part of us, the best as well as the worst.

The problem of admitting moral value to emotionally motivated conduct arises in this context. On Hume's lines it should be possible to show that moral worth could be admitted to emotions, as in Patanjali and Buddhist ethics, the special value of Hume's moral psychology lies in calling us to revise the naive and unsophisticated concept of emotion given by the rationalists.

Hume's theory of the passions is intended to be the systematic study of the concepts involved in the description and explanation of those human actions which it is the function of morals to approve or disapprove. Emotion-words form a part of the vocabulary of moral judgements.

Some misunderstanding of Hume's account of the passional phenomena are noted and discussed : Gilbert Ryle and Anthony Kenny, in particular.

2. Hume's Theory of the Passions:

In Book II of the Treatise Hume has given his theory of the passions in accordance with the categories of his theory of knowledge. The passions are simple impressions of reflection, a class of secondary perceptions. They are said to be violent or calm according to intensity. The passional phenomena are causally explicable, they are said to have their objects towards which they are directed. The passions are related to belief, habit and imagination.

There are three views on Hume's division of the passions into calm and violent ones : Kemp Smith's, Rachel Kydd's and Mary Warnock's. These are examined along with a consideration of P. Ardal's comments.

Hume sub-divides the passions also into direct and indirect ones. Passmore and Ardal on the nature of indirect passions. Kemp Smith's classification of evaluative passions vis-a-vis Ardal's and Mercer's views.

The simple indirect passions are unanalysable, hence indefinable. Hume describes them as having an object and a cause. The passion called 'pride' is described accordingly. The problem concerning the object of pride. Pride as self-valuing. The distinction between being proud and feeling proud overlooked by Hume.

Humility is the contrary passion of pride. The quality and the subject of the passions. Can pride be justified? Ardal's view on the matter.

The principle of the double association of ideas and impressions. Its application to explain the passage from one passion to another. How are the passions related? Dispositional association among the passions. The difficulties in Hume's account.

P. L. Gardiner's view that Hume's theory of the passions is cartesian is examined.

The assumptions of Hume's theory. The logical behaviour of the emotion-words. Wittgenstein and Kyle on the traditional theory of emotions. Does Hume subscribe to the so-called traditional theory of the passions?

The problem of corrigibility of our knowledge of the passions.

Hume's account of such passions as self-love, love, shame, etc. The problem of our knowledge of ourselves in the light of Hume's theory. Pages 43 - 179.

3. The Principle of Sympathy : Communication of Sentiments.

Sympathy for Hume is the communication of sentiments (= feelings, passions) based on 'signs' of emotions. The process converting an idea into an impression. Hume's model of mirror. Factors in the operation of sympathy. It involves probable reasoning.

Kemp Smith on the process of sympathetic communication. Does it involve any inferential element? Mercer's view criticised.

Scope of Sympathy. The role of belief, imagination and custom in the operation of sympathy. Adam Smith and Hume on sympathy and its kinds.

Benevolence, love and pity in the context of sympathetic communication. Strong and weak sympathy. The nature of the passions felt in sympathy. The principle of comparison and sympathy. Hume's notion of general rules. Sympathy and ethics. Pages 180 - 165.

4. Action and Freedom.

Hume's notion of human action : "actions of the body or mind". His notion of the human agent, Hobbes and Descartes on the issue.

The notions of will and "necessary action." Hume's idea of necessity. Uniformity of human actions. The thesis that actions exhibit a constant union with the agent's motives. 'Necessity' and the causal relation. Hume's notion of "moral evidence". Necessity is natural necessity and uniformity.

Liberty and necessity. Hobbes on 'liberty' and 'free will'. Locke's view : 'voluntary' is not opposed to 'necessary'. The verb 'to will'. Kemp Smith and P. T. Geach on Hume's definition of the will. Aristotle's view of voluntary actions. Cudworth and Reid on the issue of human freedom.

Hume on the idea of power : a quality of perceptions, not of objects. The spectator's view versus the agent's point of view.

Descartes on the freedom of the will. Leibniz's rejection of the Cartesian thesis, and his view of freedom. Spinoza and Hume : the Stoic heritage.

Hobbes and Hume on 'liberty'. 'Liberty of spontaneity and 'liberty of indifference'. The causal theory of human actions. Predictability and intelligibility of actions.

Anscombe, Ryle and Grice on 'motive' vis-a-vis Hume's Motives and reasons for actions. The verbs of action : their descriptive and ascriptive use. H.L.A. Hart on Hume's notion of responsibility. Hume's determinism is methodological, Criticism of Raphael's view of Hume's notions of freedom and necessity. Pages 266 - 399

5. Reason and Action.

Hume's notion of practical reason. Promptive and directive uses of reason. Clarke, Reid and Price on reason and action. Their criticism of Hume's views. Reason and experience : the alleged impotence of reason. Hutcheson and Hume on 'reason'. The reason-like calm passions as principles of action.

Kemp Smith on the role of calm passions in determining the will. Reasonableness or unreasonableness of actions.

Three senses of 'reason' in Hume : the discovery view of reason; the notion of reason as causal explicability; and reason as "artificial rules". The relationship between the three senses of 'reason' in respect of human actions. Concluding remarks. Pages 400 - 524

6. Bibliography

Pages 525 - 529