

David Hume has always sided with the theory of the "moral sense" regarding ethics and its origins. He argues that we develop the sense of what is virtuous and what vicious by examining actions and thoughts from a common or unbiased point of view. Sympathy or what we would call empathy by today's means plays a big role in the development of a so called moral sentiment, sympathy being the psychological procedure which conveys to us another person's passions/feelings via communication. Having a strong impression (the strongest we can have) of ourselves, Hume argues, by obtaining in our minds the idea of another person's passion we actually make this idea an impression for us. To this procedure very helpful is the fact that all human beings have things in common like experiencing the same kinds of passions for similar causes, so it's not hard to think of ourselves in the same situation as others. Resemblance and contiguity seem to be the key factors of this psychological mechanism. The same way we appreciate the beauty of something even when it's not ours we can feel the pain or joy of others. This is very apparent for the conventional (as Hume would call them) virtues such as justice. We seem to respect those even when they do us harm because of their tendency to reassure the greater good.

Regarding actions and volitions (as well as passions) he argues that reason alone can never give rise to an action (or create a volition or passion of course). For this to happen we need a passion to be created. The only thing that reason can do to an action is to point it towards a certain end so it only acts as giving direction. This contention is supported by 3 basic arguments, the two being similar. The first being an empirical argument says that reason can either find relations between objects and ideas or make rational assumptions for the results of an action (Demonstrative and cause and effect reason respectively). Neither of those functions as it seems though can give rise to an action or create a motive. The second states that if reason cannot give rise to an action he alone can't prevent one. That is because an opposing similar force should be present in order for what caused a certain action to stop causing it. This meaning that if reason alone could cause such a similar force he would have the ability to cause action which is taking in regard the first argument impossible. The third argument isn't empirical and has to do with volition, actions or passions having no representative quality thus they not being suitable to be assessed by reason. We can say that an idea of an existing thing is either true or agreeable with reality or not but actions and motives as well as passions are original existences and so they are not proper objects for such an evaluation. Saying that a passion such as love made us act irrational is just inaccurate Hume argues. It's the false perception that we had for things that caused our actions to have unwanted results. Once this perception is corrected our action and passions which trigger would yield and be headed towards the correct direction/ course of action.

It's also apparent that the idea of virtue and what is virtuous cannot be fully defined by reason. To support this thesis we would also make use of an empirical argument similar to the two we already used. Reasons can as we have already mentioned trace the relations between objects and ideas. However virtue is neither similar to any known relation that can two ideas have (contradict, resemble each other etc) nor can it represent any abstract other abstract relations between physical objects. Reason can also make logical assumptions for the results of an action based on its means and the situations in which the action is made. But the virtue or vice or to be more accurate the ethical judgement of an action isn't based on its

means or results but rather to the action itself. We would never think that someone who did damage to persons shop by accident for example is unethical or made an unethical/vicious act neither would we regard an action with good results that happened by accident ethical. So as it seems the idea of virtue cannot find its roots or be decreased to reason alone.

So the initial thesis that virtue is a result of a moral sentiment which is based on our sympathy/empathy and our disposition to feel pleasure from the approval of certain things and the opposite for other, seems to be coherent with reality. This means of course that the only thing that governs our ethics can be passions and not reason thus the famous quote.

However critique can be made to some of those arguments. Regarding the representation argument we can argue that passions (similarly for action or volitions) have a representative quality. This is the object or person they are headed towards. For example when we feel anger we feel anger for something and the anger is also caused by something. So reason can't be from this perspective completely removed from the procedure. I also believe that there are apparent many situations in life where we don't seem to act reasonably although we know what's reasonable to do or act reasonable even though our feelings/passions may urge to do something else. So for me it's ambiguous whether it is matter of perspective or perception. The sentiments of humans are also very different and there are many examples in which we feel drastically different things about an action. This couldn't result to a common sentiment about virtue and vice and so create lots of problems regarding the moral evaluation of actions. Empathy/Sympathy can be absent from some people or from some of their aspects and is an unreliable mean for a moral system to be shaped. So from my point of view reason doesn't seem to be the servant of the passions and his inability to cause action and oppose to actions isn't true in many cases. Although I believe that an entirely reason based ethical system can't be suitable for humans because of our natural urge to judge some things and feel some other a certain way, reason plays a big role to the creation of a non contradictory, stable and common for everyone moral system of values and can himself evaluate actions as ethical or unethical based on their wanted or unwanted qualities regarding both reason and sentiment.