Of Racist Philosophers and Ravens

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Abstract: How can historians of philosophy justify spending the preponderance of their professional lives writing about historical philosophers who held racist views? I use the controversy over University of Edinburgh's David Hume Tower as a jumping-off place for discussion of this issue. I argue that worthwhile philosophical ideas in historical philosophers can be conceptually isolated from their racist views.

1. The David Hume Tower

In the middle of Edinburgh is a green space called George Square. The square is enclosed on all four sides by a fence of black iron poles with spearhead finials. On each of the four sides is a gate. When the gates are locked, the square sits empty and still, except for the darting of squirrels and the pecking of magpies. The square is such a green inviting place that it is hard to believe no one is allowed in. I have seen tourists walk around the entire square, pulling three or four times at each of the gates, unwilling to accept that all of them are truly locked.

Most days, however, the gates are open and anyone can enter. Inside the square, just past the gates, are nineteenth-century lampposts. The lampposts have large trapezoidal lanterns, and are painted green with gold trim. Atop each lantern is a sculptured procession of maidens and unicorns.

Around the outer band of the square are casually arranged medium-to-large lime trees and sycamores. Beneath the limes and sycamores are clumps of bluebells, daffodils, and daisies. There are also tall grasses, which have been allowed to go to seed.

Directly within the outer band of trees is a wide expanse of lawn. Single trees—oak, hawthorn, ash, alder—are placed throughout the lawn, so there are sunny spots and shady spots and spots that are sun-dappled. On nice days, dozens of people dot the grass. Individuals lie on their stomachs and read. Pairs drink coffee. Groups of five picnic.

Toward the middle of the square is a circle of beeches, variegated hollies (spikey dark green leaves with white edges), and laurel bushes. Along the inside of the circle is

a path and a ring of benches. The benches are almost always occupied—by readers, by friends engaged in conversation, by couples engaged with each other. Within the circle of benches is a ring of daffodils and bluebells. Within the daffodils and bluebells—at the square's centre—is a sea of ivy, out of which rise three wych elms. The wych elms are old and thick-trunked, their crowns grown together to form a wide green canopy.

The square dates from the 1760s. Some of the buildings from that time are still standing—on the west side of the square, and on half of the east. The original buildings are three-storey stone-and-mortar terraced houses. The walls of some of them sport a "cherry cocking" design: embedded in the mortar between the large main blocks are columns of small stones, accented by elegant white pointing. The terraced houses are what you would hope to find if you were location-scouting for a movie about distinguished citizens of Georgian Britain. Walter Scott lived in one of the terraced houses, as did Peter Mark Roget (of the thesaurus), Robert Louis Stevenson, and Arthur Conan Doyle.

But most of the buildings surrounding the square are of twentieth-century construction. The tallest, by far, is a thirteen-storey tower set back from the southeast corner. The tower is unapologetically rectangular, its regularity broken only by a box on top to accommodate the elevator shaft. The large east and west sides of the tower are clad in rectangular black-slate panels, with a few buff sandstone panels placed here and there. The short north side is flat and sandstone-clad. Extending from the short south side is a column that houses a floating staircase with top-to-bottom windows.

The tower was completed in 1963 for the University of Edinburgh. It was controversial from the start. Some Edinburgh residents were appalled by the destruction of eighteenth-century houses to make way for the tower. They denounced the tower's size and design as aggressively out-of-keeping with the environs. They took it to be a blatant affront to the character of the square and the city as a whole.

Others sided with the tower. A living city needs vibrant design, they argued, and the tower was a modernist masterpiece that would help revitalize city architecture. The terraced houses that had to be removed were of no great architectural or cultural significance. Moreover, the tower was needed to accommodate the booming post-war population of young people. Preciousness about homes built for eighteenth-century burghers was not going to serve the socially important purpose of expanding accessibility to the benefits of a university education.

I first became aware of the tower in the summer of 2019, during a campus tour. Like most of the middle-aged people on the tour I was with my teenage child, who was applying to the university. I had my own reasons to be there as well. I had recently been offered a job at the university and I was considering whether to accept.

When we got to the southwest corner of George Square the student-tour guide pointed up and said, "That large building there is called the David Hume Tower. In it are classrooms and study spaces and faculty offices. There's a café in the basement. I think it's great that we have a building named after David Hume because he's my favourite philosopher. I just wish the building named after its greatest graduate wasn't so ugly." As the guide spoke, I had a reaction I am embarrassed to admit to. I felt a self-satisfied thrill. It fed my ego. Why? Because my field is philosophy, my speciality is the work of David Hume, and I felt that the tour guide's esteem for Hume somehow transferred to me, as the Hume scholar the great man's own university sought to hire.

I accepted the job and arranged to take up the position a year later. I looked forward to teaching the philosophy of David Hume to students who held him in such high regard, at a university that named its tallest building on campus the David Hume Tower.

As I said, I am embarrassed to admit to that reaction, for numerous reasons. The summer of 2020 brought some of them into particularly sharp relief. But even in 2019, I should have known enough not to feel smug.

2. Hume and the University of Edinburgh

David Hume was born in Edinburgh in 1711. He spent his early childhood in a town forty-five miles southeast of the city, then moved back to Edinburgh to attend university. After his studies he considered various professions but eventually devoted himself to philosophy and other literary endeavours. In a lifetime of writing, Hume developed undeniably ground-breaking views on an astounding array of topics: epistemology, morality, politics, psychology, economics, religion, aesthetics. On lists of the most important philosophers of all time, academics typically place Hume in the top five, up there with Plato, Aristotle, and Kant. Of philosophers who wrote in English he often tops the list. Hume was also one of the foremost historians of his day, producing a monumental six-volume history of England that was a great success with the book-buying public. At the time of his death in 1776 he was among the most famous men of letters in all of Europe. It would be hard to identify a graduate of any institution who had more of an impact on the world of ideas. It is unsurprising that the university Hume attended would want to commemorate its connection to him.

But actually, the nature of Hume's association honours the University of Edinburgh less than might be expected. For one thing, Hume's university experience was probably not tremendously formative to his intellectual development. He first enrolled when he was ten or eleven and stopped taking classes when he was fourteen, living the entire time with his mother and brother in the family's Edinburgh residence. In many ways Hume's university experience had more in common with our secondary school years than higher education. When he was twenty-three Hume wrote, "our College Education in Scotland, extending little further than the Languages, ends commonly when we are about 14 or 15 years of Age," suggesting that he himself considered his academic training there to be limited.[1]

Moreover, after he stopped taking classes at fourteen, Hume never again had any official connection to the university. It was not for his lack of trying. In 1745 he applied for the university's Chair of Ethics and Pneumatical Philosophy. Numerous people supported his candidacy. But in the end Hume was deemed a "very unfit person for such an office," and his candidacy was defeated.[2]

Opposition to Hume was spearheaded by Edinburgh clergymen, who judged Hume's writings to be irreligious and immoral. Later on, they would accuse Hume of heresy and threaten him with excommunication. The accuracy of the specific criticisms of Hume is a topic of scholarly debate. But there can be no doubt that Hume attacked a great deal of church teaching, as well as many other widely held beliefs of the day. He raised fundamental objections to the existence of miracles and a providential god. He argued that morality originates in human emotion rather than in mind-independent reality or divine will. He advanced a view of causality that upended traditional conceptions of the laws of nature. Hume was a philosophical radical, a firebrand. From *A Treatise of Human Nature*,

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[1]   David Hume, *The Letters of David Hume, Vol, 1: 1727-1765*, ed. J.Y.T. Grieg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), 13.

[2]   Hume, *Letters*, 58.

which he wrote in his twenties, all the way until his posthumously published *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, Hume put to the sword sacred cow after sacred cow.

Because Hume's philosophy undermined so many established principles, naming a tower after him strikes rather off-key. It's as though the University of Bonn had a Friedrich Nietzsche Mental Health Centre, or the University of Minnesota had a Bob Dylan Administration Building. Nietzsche did attend the University of Bonn, Dylan did attend the University of Minnesota. But named buildings at those institutions hardly seem the most fitting monuments to their achievements. Nor does it seem likely that Nietzsche or Dylan—or, for that matter, anyone who cherishes their works—would put great stock in that kind of honour.

Be that as it may, in 1963 Hume's name was attached to the tower built on George Square. It was still comfortably ensconced there when I went on the campus tour of 2019. Then the summer of 2020 happened. In response to the murder of George Floyd, the Black Lives Matter movement demanded the removal of monuments to racism. In Alabama, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky and North Carolina, statues of Confederate soldiers were pulled down. In Bristol, a statute of the slave trader Edward Colston was thrown into the sea. In Oxford, there were marches to remove a sculpture of Cecil Rhodes. And in Edinburgh, protestors targeted the racism of the David Hume Tower. The basis of for this? An essay Hume wrote. One footnote in particular.

3. Hume's Racism in "Of National Characters"

The essay is called "Of National Characters."[3] Hume begins the essay by addressing a question. Are there fixed characteristics that distinguish different nations from each other? Is there one set of traits that characterizes Spaniards, a different set that characterizes Frenchmen, and still a different set that characterizes Englishmen?

Hume answers with a qualified Yes. People from the same nation generally share a fairly robust set of characteristics that distinguishes them from other nations. There are "national characters." To substantiate this claim, Hume cites as evidence what we would consider prejudicial stereotypes. The Irish are less honest than the Swiss. The Spanish are less intelligent than the French. The Danes are less knowledgeable than the English. The Greeks are more cowardly than the Turks. The Jews are less honest than the Armenians. Hume qualifies his answer with the acknowledgement that national characters do not hold invariably for every individual. There are exceptions. Once in a while, we will encounter an intelligent Spaniard like Cervantes or a knowledgeable Dane like Tycho Brahe. Maybe somewhere we will discover an honest Jew. But, such exceptions notwithstanding, fairly robust generalizations do hold.

Hume then addresses a second question. What explains these national characters? He considers two possibilities. National characters could result from "physical causes" that work on the body, such as "air, food, or climate." Or they could result from "moral causes" that work on the mind, such as government, the nature of public affairs, and the "the plenty or penury in which the people live." The bulk of the essay consists of Hume's case for the "moral" answer. The primary causes of national characters, he argues, are social. A country's physical features play a much smaller role than the interpersonal circumstances that "render a peculiar set of manners habitual to us."

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3 All quotations from "Of National Characters" come from *Hume Texts Online*: https://davidhume.org/texts/empl1/nc.

But he qualifies that second answer too. While social causes are generally most important, there are some exceptional physical causes that override everything else. The exceptional physical causes he has in mind are extreme heat and cold. We have reason to think extreme heat and cold have such strong effects, he says, because "all the nations, which live beyond the polar circles or between the tropics, are inferior to the rest of the species, and are incapable of all the higher attainments of the human mind." Social causes explain why, say, the Swiss are more honest than the Irish, and the English more knowledgeable than the Danes. But physical causes explain why all the cultures of sub-Saharan Africa and the Arctic are inferior to any nation in Europe.

At the end of Hume's discussion of the effects of extreme heat and cold the following footnote appears:

> I am apt to suspect the negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the whites, such as the ancient Germans, the present Tartars, have still something eminent about them, in their valour, form of government, or some other particular. Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction between these breeds of men. Not to mention our colonies, there are Negroe slaves dispersed all over Europe, of whom none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity; though low people, without education, will start up amongst us, and distinguish themselves in every profession. In Jamaica, indeed, they talk of one negroe as a man of parts and learning; but it is likely he is admired for slender accomplishments, like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly.

Hume contends here that "negroes" are naturally inferior to whites. All groups of white people have produced at least some great accomplishments, but no negroes have. Negroes have not managed to produce one true civilization. On this point, unlike the other generalizations about natural characters, there are no exceptions. The example of Cervantes reveals that not *all* Spaniards are witless. The example of Tycho Brahe reveals that not *all* Danes are ignorant. But the inferiority of negroes is "uniform and constant." Stories about seemingly intelligent negroes can be dismissed as cases of individuals' having been taught to repeat a few stock phrases, "like a parrot."

The footnote did not appear in the first two editions of the collection in which the essay appeared, in 1748 and 1752. Hume added the footnote to the new edition of 1758, and kept it unchanged through the next three editions, in 1764, 1768, 1770. He altered the first two sentences of the footnote for the final edition, which came out in 1777, a year after his death.[4] All of which makes it impossible to dismiss the footnote as a slip. Hume wrote the footnote for a revised edition, as he sought to improve the original articulation of his position. Then, in a later attempt at improvement, he rewrote it without altering its substance. The footnote expresses a position to which he consciously subscribed for decades, until his death. If further evidence of Hume's attitude toward "Negroes" were

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[4] I have quoted from the 1777 edition of Hume's essay. In earlier editions, the footnote started with the following two sentences: "I am apt to suspect the negroes, and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, not even any individual eminent either in action or speculation." So the earlier version of the footnote disparaged all non-whites, while the 1777 version singled out Blacks. I don't know which is worse.

needed, consider something else he says in the essay: "You may obtain any thing of the Negroes by offering them strong drink; and may easily prevail with them to sell, not only their children, but their wives and mistresses, for a cask of brandy."

The essay was not newly discovered in 2020. It had remained in print. Hume scholars were well-aware of what was in it, including the footnote.

Yet many of those scholars remained ardent champions of Hume. Indeed, many of those scholars expressed great admiration not only for Hume's philosophical writings but for the man himself. Conferences on Hume in the decades before 2020 often had the air of a personality cult devoted to "Le Bon David," with panegyrics to the man's character almost as common as close analysis of his texts. Which raises the question: How could these academics—people with political orientations that would make them absolutely horrified to be seen as endorsing anything racist—have held in such high esteem the author of the footnote?

The esteem is jarring when the offending pages of "Of National Characters" dominate one's thoughts of Hume. But to understand the attitude of scholarly admiration, one has to keep in mind that Hume wrote thousands upon thousands of pages that do not contain the footnote. And the scholars spent thousands upon thousands of hours reading those other pages—pages in which they found brilliant argumentation, penetrating insight, good humour, quirky wit.

In *The Catcher in the Rye*, J.D. Salinger has Holden Caulfield say, "What really knocks me out is a book that, when you're all done reading it, you wish the author that wrote it was a terrific friend of yours and you could call him up on the phone whenever you felt like it." Salinger was describing how love for a novel could evoke affection for the novelist. Those who study history of philosophy can have a similar experience. After years of communion with a text, they can come to feel that they would get along famously with the philosopher who wrote it. This experience is often part of what motivates enthusiastic scholarship. Scholars are utterly thrilled by a historical philosopher's ideas. They then try to produce work that captures the ideas' power and beauty—that conveys the thrill they experienced.

Also of relevance is that many scholars believed that Hume held other views that were morally ahead of his time. As they saw it, Hume argued for unusually enlightened positions on such matters as toleration, free speech, bigotry and superstition, and the role of women. That did not eliminate the blight of "Of National Characters." Nor was Hume's historical context entirely exculpatory. In his own time and place, there was conspicuous opposition to the racism expressed in his footnote. In the 1740s, the Glasgow philosopher Francis Hutcheson, one of Hume's closest philosophical forebears, condemned anti-Black racism. In 1770 James Beattie from Aberdeen explicitly attacked the racism in "Of National Characters," which did not deter Hume from revising and reprinting the footnote for the 1777 edition. The footnote betrays, moreover, a credulity about travel stories and a simplistic view of causes that elsewhere in his writings Hume explicitly condemns. He absolutely should have known better. Still, even though the footnote was a massive moral and intellectual failure, it was a failure that was far from unusual in eighteenth-century Britain. Pernicious though the footnote is, it does not reflect as badly on Hume as it would on someone who wrote the same thing today. Pro-Hume scholars could be thought of as grading on a curve. On one assignment, Hume scored in a middle-to-low percentile. But on dozens of other assignments, he scored extremely high. He thus merited a stellar mark overall. These scholars did not condone the racism in "Of National Characters." But it was an essay they found easy to bypass, in the same way decades of friendship can absorb a two-week spat.

That changed in the summer of 2020. It was no longer tenable simply to acknowledge that Hume wrote a problematic footnote—to mention it, say, in a footnote of one's own—and then continue on without further ado. What had been a peripheral blot became a central topic.

4. Removing Hume's Name from the Tower

The University of Edinburgh responded to the 2020 protests by announcing that the name of the tower would be temporarily removed. There would be careful consideration and discussion, and then a decision would be made about what to call the building going forward. In theory, the university could have decided to reinstate "David Hume Tower." In practice, there was no way the name was going back up once it had already come down.

What should the building be called instead? An initial suggestion was "Julius Nyerere Tower," in honour of the anti-colonial Tanzanian leader who graduated from University of Edinburgh in 1952. It was then pointed out that Nyerere's leadership was characterized by despotism and homophobia.

It was decided that for the present, the building would be known as "40 George Square." Only that name was also problematic, referring as it did to King George III, overseer of eighteenth-century sins of the British empire. But no, it was pointed out, the square was not named for *King George*. It was named for *George Brown*, the brother of the builder James Brown, who constructed the square. So, problem averted.

But the "George Brown" solution was unsatisfying, for two reasons. First, the claim that the square's name was not associated with the King probably has to be taken as limited in scope. The builder James Brown may have wanted the square to carry his brother's name. But would it really have been clear to everyone else in eighteenth-century Britain that the square was built to the glory of the builder's relatively anonymous brother rather than the guy with the sceptre on the throne? The George Square in Glasgow was definitely named for the King, and it would have been reasonable to draw a similar assumption about the one in Edinburgh too. Second, George Brown was no more worthy of the honour than David Hume. Far from being an abolitionist, George Brown had business ties to large slave-holding plantations in Jamaica.

Some responded to these concerns by questioning the whole enterprise of naming academic buildings after individuals. Maybe it would be better to call them simply Building Nine, Building Ten, etcetera. Others encouraged the University to retain the practice of naming buildings after those who had made great intellectual contributions, in contrast to institutions that bestow such honours on rich donors. Still others proposed giving to the tower the name of the first-year accounting student who had just won the television series Great British Bake Off.

In the end, the vexing question was put off. In university communications, the building formerly known as the David Hume Tower would henceforth be referred to as "40GS."

5. Justifying Hume Scholarship: Conceptual Isolation

But for academics like me there was another question that could not be put off. How could we justify having hitched our professional lives to the writings of Hume now that "Le Bon David" had lost so much buoyancy?

One approach that can be taken to an historical philosopher with racist views is to make the offending material the very topic of investigation—to spend one's scholarly time and effort exposing the racism and its pernicious effects. But that is not what many of us

did. Many of us focused on other topics in Hume, without addressing the racism in any significant respect. What could make that okay?

What I think many of us had in mind (even if we never explicitly articulated it) is a two-part justification. The first part can be called "conceptual isolation." The idea here is that philosophers can advance positions that are isolatable from racist views they hold—that philosophers' racist views may not infect all their philosophical conclusions. Conceptual isolation certainly seems possible in cases of scientific advances. Galileo, Newton, and Euler may have had prejudices, but those prejudices did not infect the scientific accomplishments we attribute to them. Their scientific accomplishments can be conceptually isolated from whatever racism also existed in their world-views. In the same way, according to the idea of conceptual isolation, the ground-breaking positions Hume developed in some areas of philosophy can be completely disengaged from the racism in "Of National Characters." Hume's view of causality is a prime example. Hume argued that all our judgements that one thing causes another involve some non-rational operation of the mind. Reason alone cannot underwrite our beliefs about the world's causal structures. According to the idea of conceptual isolation, this position on causality is free of the infection of Hume's anti-Black racism. It is free of infection in the same way early advances in astronomy, physics and mathematics are free of infection from racist beliefs held by early astronomers, physicists and mathematicians.

The second part can be called "division of intellectual labour." This is an endorsement of different people working on different aspects of the history of philosophy. Scholarship is a cooperative endeavour. Those who write about Hume on causation and those who write about Hume's racism are not in competition with each other. They are all engaged in the joint exercise of expanding knowledge and deepening understanding. Exposing the racism of historical philosophers is worthwhile. Explaining philosophical achievements that can be isolated from their racism is worthwhile too. It may not be possible for one person to excel at both things. It makes sense for some people to concentrate their energies on the first, while other people concentrate on the second. There is a value in specialization—in scholars working on what they know best, on what they are best-equipped for.

"Division of intellectual labour" presupposes "conceptual isolation." If all a philosopher's positions are ineluctably infected by racism, then it will not be worthwhile to try to explain any of his positions without also addressing his racism. If all his positions are infected, then none of his positions can be properly understood without understanding the racism. If, however, a philosopher's position can be conceptually isolated from his racism, and if that position constitutes a significant philosophical accomplishment, then explaining that position without addressing the racism can be worthwhile.

Those who accept this two-part justification might justify in the following way the decision not to include a discussion of racism in a treatment of Hume on causality: We believe we have something worthwhile to say about Humean causality. We believe we have the intellectual tools and ability to advance understanding on this philosophical issue. We accept that Hume held pernicious racist views. But those views have no bearing on his arguments about causation. Moreover, while we are well-equipped to elucidate views of causality, other scholars are much better equipped than we are to address the issues of race. Given that the exploration of causality that we are well-equipped for is conceptually independent of Hume's racism, and given that we have nothing significant to contribute to others' explorations of Hume's racism, the only purpose adding a discussion of race to our exploration of Humean causality would serve is to assure readers that we have the

right politics and morals. But signalling our own virtue is not what scholarship should be about.

I am not sure, however, how well this justification works for names of buildings. It may be natural to conclude that a building called the "David Hume Tower" is intended to honour the whole person, not merely a subset of the positions he held. The building was not, after all, called "The Tower of Causal Scepticism." We could try to prevent that impression by posting signs and educational materials describing Hume's mixed intellectual legacy. But it is fair to question how effective that strategy will be. The name of a building is a pretty blunt instrument. How much philosophical subtlety can we expect signage and website paragraphs to convey? At the same time, there may be an asymmetry between the decision to name a new building after an historical figure, and the decision to remove an historical figure's name after it has been on a building for sixty years. Perhaps naming a new building after Hume would send the message that his racism was unimportant. But stripping his name after sixty years might send the message that nothing about Hume is worthy of serious intellectual engagement. Stripping his name might also eliminate the opportunity to address not only explicit racism in Hume's time but also moral failings in our own. But I don't know. The more I think about the events concerning the tower, the gladder I am that I will never have the responsibility of naming a building.

6. Philosophy Infected by Racism: Examples from Locke, Mill, and Kant

How far can conceptual isolation be pushed? Maybe it works for causality and other technical areas. But can the same case be made for moral and political philosophy? Can a philosopher's positions that bear on how we ought to live also be isolated from his racism?

One might think the same case cannot be made for moral and political philosophy, that conceptual isolation does not apply in those cases. A philosopher's racism, one might think, will inevitably infect the DNA of his thought about how we ought to treat each other, structure society, live our lives. If we propagate those views, we will reproduce the racism. The only justifiable approach to the history of philosophy on these topics is to interrogate the racism of the subjects—to make racism the explicit topic of inquiry. To do otherwise would be to take advice from a racist about how to structure society, treat each other, live our lives—to take racist advice.

The concept of human nature is illustrative of how philosophical concepts can be carriers of racism. Fundamental to early modern moral philosophy were putatively universal claims about what is true of all humans. But those early modern claims were not, in fact, value-free statements about what every member of the species has in common. Those claims, rather, embodied normative views about the intrinsic superiority of European man. And those normative views served to justify domination of non-Europeans.

We have seen how Hume's "Of National Characters," while purporting to be a descriptive and scientific investigation, asserts the ineluctable inferiority of Blacks. Other examples are not difficult to find. I will briefly describe three: Locke's view of property, Mill's view of liberty, and Kant's anthropology.

Locke's view of property is perhaps the single most discussed treatment of the topic in European philosophy.[5] According to Locke, it is natural for humans to acquire ownership of land—to convert wilderness into private property. One can accomplish this conversion by agricultural cultivation. When one cultivates the land, one mixes the labour of one's body into the land. A human naturally has the right to exclude others from violating his own body. So every human naturally has the right to exclude others from violating land that has mixed into it the labour of his own body. Every human has the right, therefore, to enclose land he has farmed. Moreover, agricultural cultivation increases land's productivity, which also accords with the universal ends of human nature. We can thus conclude that all humans are built to respect and promote land ownership—that the property rights of seventeenth-century England follow from universal features of human nature. But what about Native Americans who did not engage in the kind of ownership and cultivation that Locke describes? Were not Native Americans a counterexample to Locke's claims, revealing that his ideas of land usage and property were culturally specific rather than universal truths? Not at all. What their lack of European-style agriculture and property reveals is that Native Americans failed to make the most of the land—failed to live up the highest human ends. Not incidental to this conclusion is that European appropriation of North American land is justified—indeed, is morally mandated.

Mill's view of liberty is one of the most influential treatments of that topic in European philosophy.[6] Mill argued that human beings should be granted the widest liberty possible, so long as they are not harming others. Government is never justified in interfering with persons' self-regarding decisions about how to live their own lives, even if their decisions appear to be immoral or self-destructive. We might expect this position to lead to a condemnation of colonial control of indigenous populations. So long as they are not harming others, all humans should be allowed to pursue whatever goals they wish, which would seem to militate against authorities from a foreign country forcibly imposing social and economic structures on other peoples. But Mill participated in the British colonial domination of the indigenous populations. How could such domination be justified, given Mill's principle of liberty? It could be justified because Mill's principle of liberty applied only to humans who have achieved intellectual maturity, not to barbarians. Populations that have not yet achieved intellectual maturity—races that are still in their "nonage"—are like children who can legitimately be coerced for their own good.[7]

Kantian anthropology may not be as salient to contemporary morals and politics as Millian liberty, but Kant's ideas shaped European attitudes throughout the eighteenth century. According to Kant's anthropology, there are essential biological ("in the blood") characteristics that distinguish the races from each other.[8] These characteristics imply a strict racial hierarchy. Europeans are intellectually and morally superior, as they alone are capable of self-government and moral enlightenment. Asians can never advance beyond lower levels of despotism. Africans lack the capacity for abstract thought, and thus can be taught only to do manual labour in the fields; that is why Africans were born slaves. American Indians are intellectually and morally inferior even to Africans. In developing this theory, Kant endorsed Hume's footnote:

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[5] John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, edited by C.B. Macpherson. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1690/1980), 18–29.

[6] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, ed. Gertrude Himmelfarb (London: Penguin Books, 1859/1974).

[7] Mill, *On Liberty*, 69.

[8] Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Practical Point of View*, ed. Robert B. Louden and Manfred Kuehn (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 222.

> Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises about the ridiculous. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to adduce a single example where a Negro has demonstrated talents, and asserted that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who have been transported elsewhere from their countries, although very many of them have been set free, nevertheless not a single one has ever been found who has accomplished something greater in art or science or shown any other praiseworthy quality, while among the whites there are always those who rise up from the lowest rabble and through extraordinary gifts earn respect in the world. So essential is the difference between these two human kinds, and it seems to be just as great with regard to the capacities of mind as it is with respect to color.[9]

Non-European races are essentially incapable of achieving the vocation of the human species. Only Whites can do that. Only the laws and moral principles of Whites, who alone possess the capacity to be moral, have true legitimacy. There is scholarly disagreement about how thoroughly these views on race conditioned Kant's moral and political positions. But it is clear that for at least large parts of his career Kant advanced a baldly racist theory that infected his positions on interactions between different societies, moral progress, and human teleology.

Hume's national characters, Locke's property, Mill's liberty, and Kant's anthropology are all infected by racism. According to the objection I am considering to racially oblivious treatments of the history of philosophy, there is no reason to think it will be different for other moral and political positions held by racist early modern philosophers. Responsible history of philosophy must confront this fact. Scholarship that extols early modern positions on practical matters without confronting the racism will propagate the racism.

7. Ad Hominem Argument for Learning from the Morally Flawed

I think the moral infection objection overstates the prevalence of racism in early modern moral and political philosophy. Yes, many early modern positions were infected by philosophers' racism. But not all of them were. Early modern philosophers can teach us practically important lessons that are conceptually isolated from their racist views. To make that case, I will first put forward a general ad hominem argument, and then give three examples from Hume.

The ad hominem argument is directed at interlocutors who contend that eighteenth-century philosophers with racist views could not have developed any valuable moral insights. To these interlocutors we put the following question: Do you think that you yourself hold any views that will eventually prove to be morally pernicious? Do you think that if you travelled centuries into the future and absorbed all the discoveries of that time, you would realize that back in the first part of the twenty-first century you made at least one significant moral error? Or do you think all your views are unimprovably perfect? That there is nothing you could ever learn that would lead you to revise the moral views you currently hold? That all your present positions are the last moral word?

The second option—that all one's moral views are unimprovably perfect—cannot be sustained. It flies in the face of an inductively rational assessment of human history, in which every generation up to now has proved benighted in some respects. It betrays moral complacency and epistemic arrogance.

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9   Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, ed. Patrick Frierson and Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1764/2011), 59.

Allow, therefore, that the interlocutors take the first option, acknowledging that some of their current moral views are mistaken. We now ask a second question: Does acknowledging that you hold some erroneous moral views force you to abandon *all* your moral views? Does the fact that you are currently making a moral mistake necessitate the conclusion that your entire moral outlook is corrupt? Or can you coherently hold that you are right about some things even though you are wrong about others?

If the interlocutors take the first option, they can no longer stand behind their moral criticism of eighteenth-century philosophy. For their moral criticism is based on their own moral outlook. Their own moral outlook is almost certainly partly mistaken. And the first option implies that the existence of some mistaken moral views vitiates one's entire moral outlook. That is to say, if the interlocutors admit that they are probably making some moral error, and if the interlocutors maintain that moral error inevitably infects one's entire moral outlook, then the interlocutors cannot consistently maintain confidence in their criticisms because those criticisms issue from their own moral outlook.

I doubt the interlocutors will want to go in that direction of complete moral quietism. Nor do I think they should go in that direction. Even though they are almost certainly wrong about some moral matters, the interlocutors should maintain confidence in their judgement that eighteenth-century racist views are wrong. That the interlocutors' moral outlook includes some errors does not mean their moral outlook is entirely corrupt. They can be right about some things even though they are wrong about others.

The interlocutors' criticism of eighteenth-century views, along with an appropriately humble attitude toward their own moral outlook, commits them to the possibility that someone can be wrong about some issues while being right about others. That implies that it is at least possible that an eighteenth-century philosopher guilty of a pernicious moral error may nonetheless have some valuable moral insight to offer.

One might object that there's being wrong, and then there's being *really wrong*. Maybe the interlocutors bear some minor moral blemishes. They are not, however, guilty of anything as pernicious as Hume's racism. Moral error of Hume's sort—being *really wrong*—is disqualifying in a way marginal missteps are not. The problem with this objection is that it flies in the face of an inductively rational assessment of very recent history. Just within recent decades there have been significant cultural changes that almost all of us take to constitute moral improvement of the highest importance. We do not view homophobia as merely a minor moral misstep—nor do we so view transphobia, disregard of animal welfare in agriculture, or blithe acceptance of environmental degradation. And yet, all of those *really wrong* attitudes were very much majority positions fifty years ago. It is highly unlikely that just now, at this particular moment in time, we have finally achieved a level of moral near-perfection—highly unlikely that there is nothing in our world-view that, if we were born two hundred years in the future, we would judge to be profoundly immoral.

The ad hominem argument is a prolix way of making a simple point: nobody is perfect. If you are going to take advice from anyone, you are going to take advice from someone with moral flaws—flaws that may be apparent now, or may only become apparent in years to come. And if others take *your* advice, they are going to be taking advice from someone with moral flaws too. That is not to say that everyone has something morally valuable to offer. But it is to say that someone's being wrong about one thing does not warrant concluding that they are right about nothing.

The trap to avoid here is dichotomous thinking.[10] Dichotomous thinking consigns all humans to one of two mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive categories: right or wrong, good or bad, with the angels or with the demons. When a single up-or-down verdict must be delivered—guilt or innocence, heaven or hell—relying on a stark moral dichotomy might make sense. But for us subluminaries in everyday life it is misguided. A single person might have some traits that warrant admiration and others that warrant disapproval, might be praiseworthy for some things and blameworthy for others. To have mixed moral feelings about someone—to think positively in one respect and negatively in another—is not confused or self-contradictory. It is an appropriate response to the complexity of human character. The same is true in the history of philosophy. A single thinker could be responsible for both error and insight.

8. Moral Insight from the Morally Flawed: Three Examples from Hume

I turn now to three topics Hume addresses: psychological egoism, moral rationalism, and belief in the afterlife. In each of these cases, I believe, Hume makes important points with practical implications that are uninfected by the rebarbative views in "Of National Characters." These are examples, I submit, of valuable insights from a philosopher whose writings also include undeniably racist claims.

Psychological egoism is the view that the ultimate motivation behind all human conduct is self-interest.[11] If psychological egoism is true, then all humans act for the same fundamentally selfish reasons. The promotion of one's own welfare is the only thing anyone ever desires for its own sake, as an ultimate end. Everything else one pursues merely as a means to one's own welfare. Exclusive concern for self is at the bottom of all human conduct—the saint's as well as the knave's.

Psychological egoism was a prevalent position in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It remains popular. I have been teaching undergraduate ethics classes for thirty years. Every semester without fail a significant proportion of students start out by affirming psychological egoism.

Belief in psychological egoism can matter. Because the view implies that intrinsic concern for others is impossible, propagating at least certain versions of it can discourage the development of other-oriented concern. The belief that self-interest is the only thing anyone ever really cares about can determine one's expectations of what others will do, influencing one's interactions with them accordingly. If self-interest is truly the only basic human motivation, certain political and economic systems will be mandated while systems that require other-oriented concern must be rejected.

Hume and his predecessors Hutcheson, Butler, and Shaftesbury maintained that there is plethora of behaviour that psychological egoism fails to explain.[12] Biological

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[10] I discuss the misguidedness of dichotomous thinking in *Humean Moral Pluralism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 206.

[11] For examples of egoist views targeted by Hume and his contemporaries, see Thomas Hobbes, *Three-Text Edition of Thomas Hobbes's Political Theory*, ed. Deborah Baumgold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 135–136; and Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, ed. F.B. Kaye (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 258.

[12] See Hume's *Enquiry concerning Morals* Appendix 2, "Of Self-love" (*Hume Texts Online*: https://davidhume.org/texts/m/app2); Shaftesbury's *Inquiry concerning Virtue* (*Liberty Fund*: https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/uyl-characteristicks-of-men-manners-opinions-times-vol-2); Hutcheson's *Inquiry into*

observation reveals that members of non-human species—beavers, wolves, ants, bees—act to benefit conspecifics even when it harms their own welfare or leads to their own demise. Attention to human beings reveals that they sometimes do the same. A parent sacrifices her health and perhaps even her life for the welfare of her child. A soldier jumps on a grenade to save other soldiers, and maybe even strangers. Individuals routinely inconvenience themselves to assist someone when they stand to gain nothing by doing so.

Egoists try to explain away such phenomena by identifying self-interested motives that underlie all seemingly self-sacrificial behaviour. When we aim to ease others' distress, egoists maintain, we do so to relieve the pain we ourselves feel by observing their distress. By performing good deeds, we garner the rewards of others' esteem and avoid the punishment of others' disdain. We may at times perform good deeds in secret or without any chance of reward or punishment. But that is only because we wish to avoid the stinging discomfort of self-recrimination and gain the warm glow of self-congratulation.

Hume and his predecessors developed a battery of arguments against those egoist explanations. According to the egoists, seemingly self-sacrificial behaviour is ultimately motivated by the desire to avoid feeling pain oneself. But if that were true, we would be neutral between acts that eliminate our own pain by helping others and acts that eliminate our own pain by other means. If we saw another in distress and had the choice either of helping the person or of taking a pill to instantly forget her distress, the egoist explanation implies that we would have no preference between the two. Many, however, have the preference actually to help, even if it involves inconvenience or sacrifice. Many would prefer actually helping to taking a pill that induces the false belief that they have helped.

The egoist explanation implies that as a person nears death she will care less and less about the welfare of others. But the opposite is often the case. A person nearing death may become more concerned for the welfare of her children, her friends, her community, humanity in general. Such concern may not diminish even if she becomes convinced her certain death is only moments away. People who do not believe in an afterlife—who think that death is complete annihilation—exhibit such concern as powerfully as people who do believe.

Egoist explanations rely on complicated lines of reasoning about the effects of various courses of action on one's long-term self-interest. But many people are moved by immediate direct concern for others, without any thoughts that match the complicated accounts in the tracts of egoist philosophy. The simplest explanation is most likely to be true, and the simplest explanation of the vast array of human behaviour that benefits others is that humans really care about benefiting others. That non-human animals also exhibit such behaviour is also reason to doubt the egoist explanations based on complicated lines of reasoning.

Nor is altruistic behaviour the only problem for egoism. Vengeance and spite and vindictiveness can motivate people to do all sorts of things that are positively self-destructive. If self-interest really were at the bottom of all human action, we would not witness so much of the malicious activity that harms not only others but the agent herself.

Egoists may try to save their position by pointing out that getting what one wants is satisfying and not getting what one wants is frustrating. Desire for the satisfaction of

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Virtue (*Liberty Fund*: https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/leidhold-an-inquiry-into-the-original-of-our-ideas-of-beauty-and-virtue-1726-2004); Butler's *Fifteen Sermons Preached at Rolls Chapel*, especially sermons 1, 5 and 9 (*Project Canterbury*: http://anglicanhistory.org/butler/rolls).

getting what one wants and aversion to the frustration of not getting what one wants, egoists may claim, underlie all our pursuits, not any truly non-selfish desires. But this egoist move commits a basic logical mistake. That one feels satisfaction at getting something presupposes that one antecedently cares about that thing. If we want to explain why a person feels satisfaction from succeeding at a pursuit, we have to attribute to the person an original concern for the object of that pursuit. The satisfaction cannot explain her original concern. If you care about old stamps, you will feel satisfaction when you acquire one; if someone else does not care about old stamps, she will not feel satisfaction when she acquires one. If you care about others' welfare, you will feel satisfaction when you succeed in promoting it; if someone else does not care about others' welfare, she will not feel satisfaction when she promotes it. It is the original desire—for old stamps, for others' welfare—that explains why you engage in the pursuit, and why you feel satisfaction when you succeed at it. The feeling of satisfaction is on its own no explanation. It cannot account for the difference between you who care about old stamps and helping others, and someone else who does not. The feeling of satisfaction can figure in a story of motivation only when there is already on board some prior desire the agent wishes to satisfy.

A similar problem afflicts the egoist claim that everything one does is selfish because everything one does is what one most wants to do. Even if there is some sense in which everything one does is what one most wants to do, that does not establish that the only thing one wants to do is promote one's own welfare. Some people can sincerely want others to be happy for their own sakes. That one's actions originate in one's own wants is entirely compatible with one's wants having truly altruistic (or, for that matter, truly self-destructive) content.

I believe Hume, Hutcheson, Butler, and Shaftesbury succeeded in showing that psychological egoism is irredeemably flawed, and that their conclusions have been confirmed by recent psychological research. Understanding the eighteenth-century arguments against psychological egoism produces a truer picture of human motivation. Studying the eighteenth-century texts can elevate one's aspirations of how one can conduct oneself, raise one's expectations of how others will act, and lead one to take seriously social systems that rely on the possibility of other-oriented concern.

Does Hume's racism infect his role in the refutation of psychological egoism? I do not see how it does. Some egoist views may embody ideas that contribute to a Eurocentric, racist view of human nature. The idea that a certain type of overriding self-interest is essential to all human conduct may imply that European social structures are the only fully human ones—that cultures not predicated on the same type of self-interest are subhuman. But the anti-egoist arguments do not presuppose that Eurocentric idea. They attack it. The anti-egoist arguments show that egoism is an egregiously narrow conception of human nature. Their whole point is that human motivation is more varied than the egoists claim. Look carefully and without prejudice at what humans actually do, Hume and the other anti-egoist philosophers tell us. Take seriously the actual phenomena of human motivation. What you will see is that there is much more diversity than egoism allows for.

Moral rationalism is the view that morality originates in reason alone. There are many versions of moral rationalism. In the version Hume, Hutcheson, and Shaftesbury addressed, moral judgement is modelled on the rationality of mathematics and science.[13]

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[13] For examples of rationalist views targeted by Hume and his contemporaries, see Samuel Clarke, *A Discourse concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion* (London: W. Botham, 1706); and John Balguy, *The Foundation of Moral Goodness* (London: John Pemberton, 1728).

We come to understand mathematical and scientific truths by engaging in rational thought. Such rational thought informs us of universal truths, such as 2 + 2 = 4 and the laws of physics, which hold in exactly the same way everywhere. Understanding these truths is entirely independent of emotion, history, culture. To mathematical and scientific questions there are objectively right answers, and what makes those answers right is the mind-independent structure of reality.

According to the eighteenth-century rationalist position, morality has the same rational status as mathematics and science. Moral truths are part of the mind-independent structure of reality. Moral judgement, at least when it's done right, is the exercising of pure rationality to discern those truths. Emotion plays no role.

Hume and his predecessors argued this rationalist view fails because reason alone is incapable of producing moral judgement.[14] Moral judgement does things reason alone cannot do. Non-rational emotion is essential.

What reason alone can do is describe the world. It tells us what exists, and how one thing causes another.[15] But moral judgement does not simply describe the world. Moral judgement prescribes. It tells us what *ought* to be, not simply what *is*.

Consider a physician and a poisoner. The physician administers a pill she thinks will cure a person. The poisoner administers a pill she thinks will kill a person. Reason tells the physician and the poisoner what the world is like—the condition of the person, the chemicals in the pill, the effects of giving the pill to the person. But reason does not tell them what ought to be done. The physician uses reason to cure. The poisoner uses reason to kill. But their goals—the different ways the physician and the poisoner go about changing the world—come from something other than reason. Reason serves their ends but does not itself provide them.

The claim here is not that moral judgement is entirely independent of reasoning. Hume and his predecessors readily affirm that reason plays *a role* in many moral judgements. What they deny is that reason can play the *only role*. The moral judgement that one ought to give a person this pill rather than that pill may involve a great deal of complex reasoning about the pills' effects. But complex reasoning cannot on its own account for the moral judgement. The physician and the poisoner can engage in exactly the same reasoning. They may both come to the identical rational conclusion that one pill will cure and the other will kill. They may, nonetheless, make opposite decisions about which pill to give.

Rationalists of Hume's time contended that the kind of reason we use in mathematics and science informs us of ultimate moral ends. They maintained, for instance, that reason tells us that it is morally better to make twenty people happy rather than only one person happy, because reason tells us that twenty is greater than one. But the fact that twenty is a bigger number than one is distinct from the judgement that helping twenty is morally better than helping one. Reason tells us that twenty rocks are more than one rock, but

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[14] See Hume's *Treatise* 3.1.1–2, "Of Vice and Virtue in General" (*Hume Texts Online*: https://davidhume.org/texts/t/3/1) and *Enquiry concerning Morals* Appendix 1, "Concerning Moral Sentiment" (*Hume Texts Online*: https://davidhume.org/texts/m/app1).

[15] When discussing causality in Book 1 of the *Treatise*, Hume denies that the demonstrative reasoning that informs us of mathematical truths can alone establish our concept of cause (see, for instance, Hume's *Treatise* 1.3.3.3). But when discussing the passions and morality in Books 2 and 3 of the *Treatise*, Hume treats both mathematical and causal beliefs as originating in reason, at least insofar as he is concerned to contrast both of them with what the passions can do, such as motivate and fund moral judgement (see, for instance, *Treatise* 2.3.3.2-3 and 3.1.1.12).

that does not imply that it is better to have twenty rocks. Whether it is better to have more or fewer rocks depends on what we care about. Now it might be the case that because we all care about the happiness of humans, we all judge that the happiness of twenty is better than the happiness of one. But the rational apprehension that twenty is bigger than one does not produce that judgement on its own. Also essential is that we care about the happiness of others. A malicious person who prefers fewer people to be happy may be no less rational than a person who wants fewer rocks.

Early eighteenth-century moral rationalism has fared worse than psychological egoism. There are still plenty of philosophers who identify as moral rationalists, but they do not generally argue that moral judgement is based on the early modern rational faculty. Few twenty-first-century undergraduates start from a commitment to the eighteenth-century rationalist position. But that should not diminish Hume's accomplishment. He, along with Hutcheson and Shaftesbury, initiated many of the inquiries that have led thinkers from many different intellectual traditions to search for the origins of morality in something other than reason alone. Moreover, Hume's attention to how emotion, history, and culture influence moral judgement pioneered the development of empirically informed approaches to the study of morality and other human phenomena.

Does Hume's racism infect his arguments against moral rationalism? Again, I do not see how it does. The rationalist position itself may very well embody Eurocentric presuppositions that contributed to early modern racism. The idea that a certain conception of rationality is essential to moral judgement may bolster a hierarchy that Europeans sit atop of. But Hume's anti-rationalist arguments do not presuppose that idea. They attack it. What his anti-rationalist arguments reveal is the moral paucity of rationality modelled on mathematics and science. He shows that being outstandingly rational in that sense is consistent with all manner of reprehensible conduct—no guarantee of virtue or even decency, no bulwark against vice and atrocity. To be a person who treats others well requires characterological aspects that are robustly distinct from adhering to standards of mathematical and scientific rationality. This is a puncturing of the moral arrogance of Eurocentric rationality, not a promotion of it.

According to a view common among Hume's contemporaries, people who do not believe in heaven and hell will lack sufficient motivation to perform their moral and civic duties. The promise of reward and the threat of punishment in an eternal afterlife is necessary to motivate people to virtue. The importance of ensuring that people maintain this belief justifies governments' silencing philosophers—by censorship, imprisonment, or death—who would raise doubts about the afterlife.

Many of Hume's contemporaries believed that such silencing was also justified because the belief was true. Proper attention to the way this world operates establishes the existence of heaven and hell in the next. Here is how their argument went: Nature manifests order and beauty. The best explanation for such order and beauty is that nature was created by a being of great power and wisdom. A being of great power and wisdom would have both the desire and the ability to reward all the virtuous and punish all the vicious. In this life, it is not the case that all the virtuous are rewarded and all the vicious are punished. So the being of great power and wisdom who created the natural world must also have created another world in which all the virtuous are rewarded and all the vicious are punished. From the beauty and order of this world we can infer the even greater beauty and order of the next.

Hume obliterates that position.[16] He grants for the sake of the argument that we can infer that there exists an entity that possesses the power and wisdom necessary to produce all the order and beauty we observe in nature. But he shows that this provides no justification whatsoever for inferring that there exists a supernatural world of heaven and hell.

The only justification we have for drawing conclusions about the wishes and abilities of the creator of the observable world is—the observable world. We observe that in this world the virtuous are not always rewarded and the vicious are not always punished. We have no justification, therefore, for believing that the creator of this world has the desire and ability to reward all the virtuous and punish all the vicious.

The claim that that creator of this world also created another, never-observed world outruns the evidence. Imagine you come across a single painting. About the artist you know nothing except that the artist produced this single painting. You would have no justification for concluding that that artist also produced sculptures that are artistically superior to the single painting you can see. That the unknown artist had the desire and ability to produce sculptures of greater majesty than the single observed painting would be pure conjecture. In the same way, the claim that there is an entity capable of producing the world we can observe does not justify concluding that that same entity has produced another, superior world that we cannot observe.

Hume considers the following objection to his argument. The state of the observable world constitutes evidence that heaven and hell exist in the same way that a half-finished building surrounded by brick and mortar constitutes evidence that a finished building will eventually be produced. From the construction of an incomplete building and the presence of materials to finish it, you can infer that there is a builder with the desire and ability to produce a completed building. Similarly, from the imperfect world we observe we can infer that there is an intelligence with the desire and ability to produce another world that is perfect. We see enough amazing stuff in this world to give us good reason to believe that there will be even more amazing stuff in another world.

Hume responds to this objection by identifying a crucial difference between, on the one hand, all the inferences we legitimately draw about human builders and, on the other, any inference about the creator of the world. We have extensive experience of many instances of what human beings have done. Over and over again we have observed humans producing one thing and then another. But of the creator of the world, we have experience of this one world and only this one world. It's a single instance, like the single painting.

If you are walking on the beach and see in the sand the print of a human right foot, you can reasonably infer that next to it there had been a print of a human left foot that has since been swept away. But that inference from the observable right footprint to the unobservable left footprint is not the same as the inference from the observable natural world to an unobservable supernatural world. The first inference is justified by the myriad of experiences we have had of humans with right feet also possessing left feet. But we have experience of one and only one natural world. We have no evidence whatsoever that whenever a natural world of this kind comes into existence, a counterpart supernatural world of perfect justice also comes into existence. Of the pairing of left to right feet we have countless experiences. Of heaven and hell following an earthly existence we have literally

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16 See Hume's *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* 11, "Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State" (*Hume Texts Online*: https://davidhume.org/texts/e/11).

no experience. If you are walking along a beach and come across a singular print in a shape you have never seen before—a shape that has occurred exactly once—you have no grounds to conclude that whatever made the print also made another, more glorious print somewhere else.

The hidden assumption behind the flawed argument for the afterlife is that the creator is like us. If *we* were in charge, *we* would complete things in a certain way. But having experience only of the creator's single production of this world, we cannot infer how the creator wishes to complete things. While an eternal afterlife that rewards the virtuous and punishes the vicious fits *our* vision of what would be best, we have literally no idea what fits the vision of the creator other than what actually exists in the world we can see. "No new fact can be inferred from the religious hypothesis; no event foreseen or foretold; no reward or punishment expected or dreaded, beyond what is already known by practice and observation." And this argument ultimately undermines the citing of the creator of the universe to justify political or moral action of any sort. Invoking God's will to justify a policy or line of conduct is nothing more than dressing up one's own ideas of right and wrong as God's.

As with egoism and rationalism, I do not see how Hume's racist views infect his discussion of the afterlife. His discussion does turn on a certain conception of inductive justification that some in Hume's time might have deemed a great accomplishment of European thought. But the takeaway from Hume's discussion is not that non-Europeans are inferior. The takeaway is that Europeans—at least those who tout the line of thought Hume is attacking—are inconsistent. They misapply their own principles. They misidentify the basis of their own positions. They boast of their rationality, but their beliefs about an afterlife—and the repressive policies they use those beliefs to justify—fail miserably by their own standards. Non-rational aspects underlie their view of heaven and hell and all that they build on that view. Hume's discussion is an internal criticism of European religion and the politics it leads to, not a disparagement of anything non-European.

One may object that I am cherry-picking. By selectively shining a light on certain texts and keeping others in the dark, I fail to present a true picture of Hume's thought. But writing about Hume's racist texts is cherry-picking as well. For that, too, highlights certain aspects of his thought while ignoring others. If focusing exclusively on something positive is distorting, then focusing exclusively on something negative is distorting as well.

My view? Cherry-picking is okay. Scholarship is a cooperative endeavour. We are all part of an effort to develop the best overall picture of philosophy's history. Parts of the picture will represent elements worthy of admiration. Parts will represent elements deserving of opprobrium. No one can cover it all. Each of us should try to do the best we can on our own part—while valuing contributions from those working on different parts.

You may not agree with me that Hume is right about egoism, rationalism, and the afterlife. Many have disputed his conclusions, and many will continue to do so. The case I hope to make is that his arguments are worth engaging with. Reading and thinking about his views on these topics has value that is undiminished by Hume's other, racist views.

9. Ravens and Views

In 1 Kings 17, Elijah delivers a dire prophecy to the king of Israel and then flees to a hidden ravine to escape the king's wrath. God tells Elijah, "I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there." For the next few days ravens bring bread and meat to the ravine, and Elijah eats the bread and meat the ravens bring. The Israelites disdained ravens.

Ravens were dirty scavengers. They were not kosher. But God directs ravens to bring bread and meat to Elijah, and Elijah eats what the ravens bring.

The moral often drawn from 1 Kings 17 is that we should accept the good things God offers, however they happen to be delivered. I first encountered this moral in a series of letters between Benjamin Whichcote and Anthony Tuckney, two Cambridge clergymen of the seventeenth century.

In his teachings, Whichcote commends ideas of Socrates, Plato, and other ancient Greek philosophers. Tuckney, a strict Puritan, is appalled to hear of this. The ancient Greeks, Tuckney chides Whichcote, were heathens who were guilty of many sins. Their writings will lead astray. True guidance can come only from sanctified authors—from those who accept Christ and heed the Bible.

Whichcote agrees with Tuckney that the Greek philosophers lacked true religion. He acknowledges the need to accept Christ and the benefits of scripture. But he insists that within Greek philosophy there is much of great value. About some moral matters the Greek philosophers thought more deeply than any Christian. They had profound insights, their errors and blind spots notwithstanding. "Elijah despised not, what the *Raven* brought," writes Whichcote. Nor should we despise the wisdom that can be found in heathen writings.

Whom do we wish to emulate: Tuckney the Puritan or Whichcote the Philosopher?

Halfway through my second year at the University of Edinburgh the Philosophy Department has to relocate. The building it shares with other departments is no longer big enough to house them all, and because of the other departments' need for lab space, it makes most sense to move Philosophy.

The building Philosophy is asked to move to is none other than 40GS. At the College meeting about this matter I say, "We'll move on one condition: the building name be changed back to David Hume Tower." I mean it as a joke. Some of the people in the meeting laugh.

After the meeting I walk the short way to 40GS and enter the building. I climb the stairs to the thirteenth floor, at the top, where Philosophy offices will be.

My first impression is of deferred maintenance. Banisters are damaged, baseboards are scuffed, light switches don't work, walls bear stains of Blu Tack. In the hall are banks of unusable mustard-yellow cubbyholes. Also unusable is the floating staircase extending from the southern end of the building. Across the door to that staircase stretches orange-and-black police tape and a sign that reads, "Fire exit only. Caution. This door is alarmed." It all seems rather shabby and dispiriting.

Then I spend some time in the offices themselves, and my impressions change. The offices are a bit scruffy. But they are also open and spacious, with agreeably woody appointments. And they are laid out wonderfully well for writing and reading and meeting with students.

Most significantly, each office has wall-to-wall windows—with glorious views. Visible from one side of the building are George Square, the Meadows, a rich variety of Edinburgh architecture from multiple eras, Edinburgh Castle, and the Pentland Hills. From the other side, more Edinburgh architecture, the monuments on Calton Hill, the ancient volcano of Arthur's Seat, and the dramatic cliff-faces of the Salisbury Crags. Past the Crags are the waters of the Firth of Forth. And further still you can see where the Firth opens up to become the North Sea.