



welcomes

Professor Rachel Cohon

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“Criticizing Hume’s List of Virtues and Vices”

David Hume's moral philosophy is based on the emotions: what makes a character trait (or action) good or evil, according to him, is that human beings feel approval or disapproval for it when they consider it in an unbiased way and from a point of view in which they sympathize with all those affected by it (the "common point of view"). Although Hume's theory is sentiment-based, his use of this common point of view is intended to give it something like objectivity, since every person who thinks about the same trait or action in the prescribed way will feel the same emotional response. This makes it much more plausible as an account of the nature of morality than a simple subjectivist theory would be. But a difficult question remains: is it possible, on Hume's view, for us to make mistakes about which traits are virtues or vices even when we consider them from the common point of view? Does Hume allow for any warranted criticism of the list of virtues and vices that results from this process of consideration? Is there any normative check on our sentiments? It will be argued that for Hume there is a normative check on our sentiments that permits the rejection of some moral evaluations that are generated in the proper way, but it affords no grounds to criticize others that many find unpalatable. A slight extension of Hume's standard is proposed that justifies more criticisms.

Thursday, October 19, 2006
Tribble Hall Philosophy Library B316 4:30 p.m.

This event is open to the public. If you need special assistance, please call Donna Simmons at 336-758-5359 at least one week prior to the event.

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