



Paul Russell. *Freedom and Moral Sentiment: Hume's Way of Naturalizing Responsibility*

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PAUL RUSSELL. *Freedom and Moral Sentiment: Hume's Way of Naturalizing Responsibility*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. xi + 200. ISBN 0-19-509501-4, \$49.95, cloth.

Hume's influential treatment of liberty and necessity has traditionally been understood as a statement of what might be termed the classical compatibilist position. On this view, articulated by empiricists from Hobbes to Schlick, analysis of the concepts of freedom and causal necessity reveals that moral responsibility is consistent with—indeed, requires—the causal determination of voluntary actions. It is not difficult to see why Hume, too, has been counted in this camp: as it appears familiarly in the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, "Of Liberty and Necessity" begins by declaring the long-disputed question of free will to be a merely verbal controversy that a few intelligible definitions should put to rest. In this noteworthy and provocative book, Paul Russell rejects the standard interpretation of Hume as a classical compatibilist.

Russell maintains that to read Hume as a classical compatibilist is to overlook the naturalistic account of moral sentiment that provides the crucial context for his treatment of moral responsibility. On Russell's view, Hume's starting point is not, as the standard reading would have it, the conceptual analysis of liberty and necessity, but our actual practices within the moral sphere, and in particular the conditions under which we assign or withhold praise and blame. The failure of the standard reading to appreciate this point has had the result of placing "Of Liberty and Necessity" outside the purview of Hume's science of man even as it is ensconced in the positivist's primer. According to Russell, this dislocation has also led past interpreters to misconstrue the purport and scope of Hume's theory by treating his account of moral responsibility as if it were reducible to his account of freedom as liberty of spontaneity. One of Russell's most significant contributions is to show that these are not coextensive, but that, on the contrary, for Hume moral agents may justifiably be held responsible for involuntary attitudes and sentiments as well as for voluntary actions.

This and other important ramifications of Hume's account of moral responsibility emerge in Part II of *Freedom and Moral Sentiment*, where Russell provides a detailed critical examination of issues that, though integral to Hume's developed view, have hitherto been largely neglected; for example, his treatment of moral character, will and intention, punishment and desert. Part I of the book is devoted to the explication and defense, both exegetical and philosophical, of the naturalistic as opposed to the classical compatibilist interpretation of Hume's arguments. Both parts should be of interest to histo-

rians and ethicists alike, for the interpretive and philosophical gains made by Russell's reading are considerable.

On the side of the former, in addition to re-situating Hume's discussion within his descriptive and empirically based treatment of moral subjects, the naturalistic interpretation makes better sense of the role Hume's analysis of causal necessity plays within his larger argument. The classical compatibilist's strategy focuses, first and foremost, on the concept of freedom. This accords ill with Hume's own emphasis on his account of causation as the key to his dissolution of the free will controversy. Russell's naturalistic interpretation assigns the Humean account of causation its proper weight within his treatment of moral responsibility. On this reading, Hume's analysis of causation as constant conjunction and causal inference enables him to show, first, that causal necessity applies to the realm of human actions just as much as to the natural realm, and, second, that, as a matter of fact, our ascriptions of responsibility require that there be causal links between actions, attitudes, character, and our reactive sentiments.

Philosophically, Russell's reading brings out Hume's relevance to contemporary naturalist and sentiment-based ethical theory and moral psychology, a relevance underscored by his discussion of Strawson's "Freedom and Resentment."¹ Just as Strawson looks to our actual attitudes and practices in order to flesh out the compatibilist account, so too Hume, on Russell's view, draws on the mechanisms of sentiment to provide a theory of moral responsibility that goes beyond the classical compatibilists' forward-looking utilitarian approach to the justification of condemnation and punishment, and their largely negative conception of freedom as the absence of external force.

This is not to say that Russell judges Hume's account of responsibility entirely successful. Among other objections, he charges Hume with failing to provide sufficient conditions for freedom, moral agency, and moral virtue. Russell's commitment to philosophical engagement with the issues is commendable, although I suspect that Hume has more resources than certain of his criticisms suggest. For example, Russell attributes a feeling theory of the passions to Hume, then faults its inability to capture the intentionality and evaluative capacity of moral sentiment and the reactive emotions. It is certainly true that Hume characterizes the passions as original existences—that is, as simple, unanalyzable impressions on a par with sensations. But, as Russell himself acknowledges, Hume also takes these feelings to be causally linked to particular beliefs and objects, and to dispose us toward further beliefs, sentiments, and actions. No doubt some would maintain that the tie between emotions and their causes, objects, or functions is stronger than a purely causal mechanism can account for, but this point should not be assumed without argument. Moreover, to see Hume as advancing a feeling-*cum*-causal theory of the passions is in keeping with the two senses of naturalism Russell outlines: scientific naturalism, the empirical and descriptive approach to philosophical

problems, and feeling naturalism, the empirical and sentimentalist, as opposed to a priori and rationalist, approach to moral theory. Applied to the passions, Hume's scientific naturalism yields the view that emotions are connected with their causes, objects, and outputs as a matter of contingent psychological fact rather than logical or conceptual truth. Hume's feeling naturalism, on the other hand, dictates that, rather than assimilate the passions to purely cognitive states, as Russell seems inclined to do, we take seriously the features by which Hume distinguishes sentiment from reason.

Russell also objects to Hume's treatment of moral capacity. As he understands it, Hume holds that an agent is subject to moral evaluation in virtue of possessing traits productive of pleasure or displeasure, a criterion that is obviously far too broad unless my cat or your car are to be accounted moral agents. There is a more charitable alternative, however. Hume explains the generation of indirect passions by appeal to a double relation of impressions and ideas. On this model, while pleasure- and pain-producing qualities explain the pleasurable or uneasy feeling component of a passion, they are nevertheless not sufficient for a passion or sentiment—a relation of ideas is also required. In the case of moral sentiment, the requisite ideas are, first, the idea of a pleasure- or pain-producing trait as flowing from and expressing a subject's character, which leads to the second requisite idea of the subject as praiseworthy or blameworthy. More, obviously, would need to be said regarding what counts as the right relation between a subject's character and the traits that exhibit it, but this sketch alone should suffice to show that Hume can do better than Russell sometimes suggests.

NOTES

1. P. F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," in his *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1974).

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