

Exercise: Sympathetic Interpretation (I)

Due by e-mail: Thursday, February 27th

Goal:

The distinctive tool that historical philosophy helps us hone is that of charitable interpretation, or, as I prefer to think of it, *sympathetic interpretation*. Charitable interpretation makes it sound a bit like you are fixing up the historical figure's work on their behalf. Sympathetic interpretation, I hope, better captures the sense that you are trying to enter into their perspective, and correctly identify the issues they care about, and how those would play out in responding to concerns that might be raised against them.

This exercise has three parts, concerning Treatise 2.3. Parts (B) and (C) have the most to do with sympathetic interpretation.

Part (A): Liberty vs. Necessity

Briefly (one paragraph), present Hume's stance on the conflict between Liberty and Necessity (sections 1 and 2). Then, present and describe Hume's distinction between Liberty of Indifference and Liberty of Spontaneity, and explain how that distinction relates to Hume's position. Finally, identify which elements of Hume's case for his position you find *most* and *least* compelling, and briefly explain why.

Part (B): Reason vs. Passions

In 2.3.3, Hume famously says that "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them." Hume seems to be claiming that our passions cannot be irrational. Your task is to sympathetically explain Hume's stance, and in particular, offer a Humean defense (in your own words) of Hume's claim that "It is not contrary to reason for me to choose my total ruin to prevent the least uneasiness of an Indian or person wholly unknown to me. 'Tis as little contrary to reason to prefer even my own acknowledged lesser good to my greater." Note: Hume does make room for two types of case of "unreasonable" passions, so your discussion should address this.

Part (C): Curiosity as the Love of Truth

In one paragraph, explain what Hume is up to in 2.3.10.