

Exercise: Reframing in Contemporary Terms

Due by e-mail: Tuesday, April 1st

Goal:

One of the first things I learned when I started playing the flute was that I did not really know how to breathe. This was quite a shock because I had been breathing pretty much every day since I was born. But it turns out that if you want to play the flute well, you have to go through a period of consciously learning how to control your breath, and then train yourself to breathe that way automatically. Classifying the views of historical figures in terms of contemporary categories is very similar. It is something you've done, more or less automatically, any time you read a historical figure's views on a topic you have some familiarity with. And much like the case with breathing, your untrained approach is likely to be passable for some purposes, but not well-suited for professional purposes.

For this assignment, you will have to read, in addition to the assigned reading from Hume, the paper, "We Make No Promises" by Elinor Mason (Phil Studies, 2005), which will be distributed to you today, by e-mail. Mason's paper presents five views on promising: Two versions of "the practice view", Scanlon's "contractualist" view, Wallace and Kolodny's "hybrid" view, and Mason's preferred view, "deflationism" about promises.

Your first task is to briefly articulate the five views discussed in Mason's paper. Each view should be stated in one sentence. For up to two of the views, you may use a second sentence to clarify or articulate something that you weren't able to capture in the one sentence statement of the view. You should not attempt to capture any of the objections to these views, simply give a precise characterization of each view.

Your second task is to classify Hume's position with respect to these five views, and defend that classification. For this part of the assignment, you should pick the view that *best fits* Hume's discussion of promises, and explain what parts of Hume's discussion led you to conclude that his view falls under that heading. Use one sentence to state your classification, and then at most six sentences to defend it.

Your third, and final task, is to reflect on whether Mason's scheme of views is adequate for the purposes of classifying Hume's position. Whichever side you take on this issue, you should take one to two paragraphs to criticize or defend the adequacy of this scheme for the purposes of classifying Hume's stance on promises. One thing to consider is whether or not all of the views that Hume criticizes or dismisses can easily be fit into this scheme as well.