

## **Book review**

***Paul A. Mwaipaya The Foundation of Hume's Philosophy. Aldershot: Ashgate 1999, 99-71886 (ISBN 1840149574), 144pp (Hardcover)***

This book stems from Mwaipaya's doctoral studies. Its basic argument is that the entire philosophy of David Hume is founded on his doctrine of belief. It consists of four chapters: chapter 1 is the introduction, chapter 2 is an exposition of Hume's general theory of perception, chapter 3 an exposition of Hume's theory of knowledge and probability, and chapter 4 being on Hume's theory of passions and morality.

In chapter 1, Mwaipaya asserts that the foundation of Hume's Philosophy is his doctrine of belief. For Hume, belief is a lively idea associated with a present sense impression. According to Mwaipaya, Hume's critics i.e., James McGlyn and Thomas Reid failed to grasp that Hume's doctrine of belief is central to his philosophy. They failed to perceive that Hume's theory of perception; knowledge, probability, and morality are founded on his doctrine of belief.

Mwaipaya examines Hume's theory of perception and link it to his doctrine of belief in chapter 2. As regards perception, Hume claims that our consciousness and feelings are nothing but perceptions. Thus, to hate, love, think, feel are all various modes of perceiving. In addition, perceptions consist of impressions and ideas. Thus, impressions and ideas constitute the basic contents of our consciousness.

According to Hume, ideas derive from impressions. Every idea has a correspondent impression, which it resembles in all aspects except in its degree of vividness. Impressions are more vivid and forceful than their correspondent ideas, which are generally calm and gentle. Furthermore, Hume claims that impressions fall into two main classes: impression of sensation and impression of reflection.

For Hume, sense impressions are crucial because they are the source of our ideas, emotions, feelings, thinking, reasoning, understanding of the universe, and human behaviour and conduct. Furthermore, sense impressions are the first experiences a person has of the external world. Such impressions also feed the mind with images of the external objects.

In relation to impressions of reflection, Hume holds that these impressions constitute our passions, desires, and emotions. These impressions arise in the following manner: when, for example, an object presents itself to the senses, an impression of sensation arises instantly which in turn triggers a perception of pleasure, pain, etc. And when the vividness of the impressions of sensation decreases, the impression degenerates into an idea of its correspondent impression i.e., either of pleasure or pain.

But when a languid idea returns to the mind, it gets vivified, and thus generates a new impression. This new impression is what Hume calls impression of reflection. The faculty of the memory or imagination could in turn copy this impression. If such were the case, then the impression of reflection became a pure idea. In summary, according to Hume, ideas originate from impression of reflection.

Of course, ideas are the most important elements for the functions of the mind. When we reason, we use ideas and not impressions. But according to Hume, ideas have no influence on our conduct unless they are vivified to the level of their correspondent impressions.

Furthermore, Hume divides ideas into ideas of memory and ideas of imagination. Ideas of memory are closer to the object they represent. Thus ideas of memory are as vivid as impressions of sensations. Consequently, according to Hume, ideas of memory together with impressions of sensation strengthen our belief in the existence of things experienced in the past.

Hume uses the concept of imagination in three different senses: (1) as referring to all impressions and ideas, (2) as referring to everything excluding sense and memory, and (3) referring to fancy. For Hume, the imagination has the potential to facilitate causal reasoning. In other words, it enables us to reason demonstratively, from cause to effect, which consists of systematic comparison of ideas.

As stated above, belief has been defined into sense (1) narrow sense as lively ideas, and a broad sense, as original sensation which are vivid and lively. Mwaipaya argues that since impressions of sensation are vivid and lively they are, therefore, founded on belief in the broad sense. In addition, ideas of memory are founded on belief in the narrow sense. In this sense, belief being a lively idea is equal to ideas of memory, which are vivid (vividness of the perceptions of the memory).

In chapter 3 Mwaipaya demonstrates that Hume's theory of knowledge and probability is founded on his doctrine of belief. For Hume, the prime and constitutive elements

of knowledge are impressions and ideas. And thinking or reasoning deals with complex ideas and not simple ideas. Complex ideas fall in three main type: (1) modes, (3) substance and (3) relations.

The ideas of mode and substance according to Hume are fictitious and empty specifically because these ideas are not rooted in any sense impression. And since knowledge is rooted in sense perception, hence ideas of mode and substance cannot yield any knowledge. According to Hume ideas that can yield knowledge must be copies, images or representation of their correspondent impressions. Therefore, only complex ideas of relations are the source of knowledge and probability.

Hume uses the concept 'relation' with reference to natural and philosophical relations. In natural relations, ideas are spontaneously connected together in the imagination; one idea naturally introduces another. Philosophical relations are relations of ideas established by an individual in the understanding by consciously comparing one idea with another. Hume regards these relations as being the only proper source of human knowledge and probability. Some of the philosophical relations constitute the source intuitions, demonstrative reasoning, the basis of probable reasoning and the source of absolute certainty and probable knowledge.

Probability or moral reasoning is based on matters of facts. According to Hume, probable reasoning cannot guarantee absolute certainty about what we know because in such cases we are heavily dependent on drawing inferences from cause to effect. So probable reasoning can only generate probability, which is uncertain, full of doubts, and skeptical.

Mwaipaya points out that knowledge, which is absolute certainty, consists in the comparison of ideas, which are rooted in appearance of objects. Therefore, such knowledge is founded on belief in the narrow sense (lively idea).

Concerning probability, Hume maintains that belief is a product of probable reasoning or causal inference and that probable reasoning facilitates the formation of belief itself since it is founded on past experience. In addition probability includes impressions of sense, memory as well as lively ideas. And since lively ideas are integral aspects of the liveliness of impressions, and that probability consists of lively ideas which also constitute the future of belief in the narrow sense thus, probability is founded on belief as a lively idea and vivid impressions. Hence, probability is founded on belief in the narrow and broad sense.

Chapter 4 analyses Hume's conception of passions and morality. According to Hume, passions are affections, feelings, sentiments, desires and emotions. Furthermore, Hume asserts that passions originate from sense impression, thus why they are named impressions of reflections and that also originate from ideas, which are images of their correspondent impressions.

Furthermore, passions arise in the mind as a kind of reflection of our affectivity on impressions of sensations and their correspondent ideas. In reflecting on the past or present experience, the mind is capable of producing a new impression of sensation. This type of impression is what Hume calls impression of reflection which constitutes a passion

Passions are classified into calm and violent passions. Calm passions are gentle and mild while violent passions are rough. Violent passions arise solely from impressions of sensation and from their correspondent lively ideas. Calm passions arise from natural instincts such as benevolence, resentment, and love.

Hume thinks that calm passions have considerable influence on the will. And as such, some philosophers mistake the activities of calm passions for the actions of free will. Hume refers to what other philosophers call WILL or VOLITION as calm passions. So in his opinion, reason never moves us into moral activity. Such powers belong only to passions, which also determine human conduct and behaviour. In other words, for Hume (and Mwaipaya) morality is not rooted in the will and reason but in passions. These views are based on Hume's conception of human nature.

For Hume, human nature consists of two basic principals: (1) the understanding, which consists of thinking, intuition and reasoning and (2) the affections which are made up of passions, feelings, sentiments, and emotions. Hume's argument is that, since the faculty of reason is only involved in demonstrative and probable reasoning but never in the activation of action, therefore, the understanding is the source of morality. Human morality is founded on passions and not reason.

Reason (demonstrative and probable) is simply concerned with comparison of ideas or objects while in operations of passion and feeling, no comparison of ideas is involved. Reason is inert and cannot prevent or produce any actions or affections. Its major function is simply to discover truth and distinction of truth from falsehood. But never the prevention or activation or production of actions. In this sense morality lies in our sense perception and sentiments and reason plays only a subsidiary role.

Of course, holding that reason has no role to play in morality has serious implications, which I am going to show in the proceeding paragraphs. But regarding belief and morality and passions, Mwaipaya rightly identifies that both passions and morality are founded on belief in the narrow, as well as in the broad sense. Morality is founded on passion. And passion arise from lively ideas and impression of sensation, therefore, passion and morality are founded on belief (as lively ideas and lively perceptions).

Mwaipaya, unlike James McGlyn and Thomas Reid, succeeds to show that the entire philosophy of Hume rests on his doctrine of belief. Of course Mwaipaya proves his point successfully that McGlyn failed to grasp and identify the basic principal of Hume's philosophy, but this failure does not warrant anybody to treat McGlyn with scorn and contempt. So, by getting personal with McGlyn, Mwaipaya commits a fallacy of *argumentum ad hominem*. Secondly, Mwaipaya employs emotive language in his book, oblivious to the fact that emotive language is uncalled for in a scholarly work of this nature. Thirdly, he endorses Hume's problematic assertion that morality is founded on passion and that reason plays a subsidiary role in morality.

Actually, morality is not concerned in the activation of action but in the rightness and wrongness of an action which are matters of judgement. As such, it calls for serious engagement of reason in matters of morality.

Action spring from the will and not from passions and reason. Reason is not totally divorced from morality. It can evaluate and judge our action wrong or right before or after the action has taken place. By offering justification for or against particular action, reason can prevent an action from taking place by empowering the will with justification for or against the actions.

If the will is weak, it may succumb to the rule of passions, but not without a price. Passions by their nature are blind to norms, rules and regulations. Unlike actions, passions or feelings are not matters of right or wrong. Judgement is related to actions and not emotions. And people are held responsible for their action and not their feeling. Hence, in morality, reason should rule the passions, access and dictate the cause of action. This is the way human beings should relate to passion, moral action and reason. In short, reason is crucial for morality.

So divorcing reason from morality is a gross mistake. Firstly, if morality is solely based on passions, on what grounds can we condemn a crime? Moral judgements are the concerns of reason and not of passions. Secondly, by relating morality to passions, Hume and Mwaipaya are suggesting that morality require no critical thinking. Yet

Mwaipaya holds the belief that philosophy is crucial for the well being of society. If he was to be consistent, he must also accept that morals are also a matter of philosophy. A great deal of moral reasoning is critical reasoning. And many moral situations demand the ability to think clearly, relevantly and the avoidance of self-contradictions. So morality is not simply a matter of taste i.e., passions and desires but requires serious thought.

Nevertheless, *The Foundation of Hume's Philosophy* is quite an achievement. In this work Mwaipaya has displayed remarkable ingenuity. He succeeded in demonstrating that, indeed Hume's doctrine of belief is the foundation of his philosophy. Of course Mwaipaya is not the first to write a book on Hume, McGlyn, Thomas Reid, just to mention a few, have written so much on Hume's philosophy. But Mwaipaya is rather unique. His major contribution to the literature on Hume is that he is the first to identify that Hume's doctrine of belief is central to the philosophy of David Hume. It is the foundation of Hume's theory of knowledge, morality and perceptions.

Mwaipaya's book is systematic, lucid and has something fresh and interesting and it says virtually everything important on Hume's philosophy. His book deserves serious engagement, and will benefit undergraduates, graduates and anybody interested in philosophy.

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