Journal of Modern Philosophy

Hume's Cultural Bigotry

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In the literature, discussion of Hume's racism has largely centred on an appalling and infamous footnote to his essay entitled 'Of National Characters'. This ignores, or at best sidelines, the bigotry contained in the main text of the essay. I will first make the case that the main text of the essay expresses a cultural bigotry. Then, I contrast this cultural bigotry with the racism expressed in the infamous footnote. This contrast serves to cast light on Hume's cultural bigotry itself, of course, which is an important undertaking in its own right. But further, it also serves to elucidate the character and severity of the racism expressed in the infamous footnote. In particular, while this racism violates several of Hume's theoretical norms, importantly in committing unphilosophical probability and ignoring the theoretical virtue of simplicity, the same is not true of his cultural bigotry.

Keywords: Hume; Culture; Bigotry; Racism; Sympathy

1. Introduction

Disappointingly, for a man so admired for both his genius and his character, Hume wrote racist and bigoted things. In the literature, discussion of this issue has largely centred on the following footnote to his essay entitled 'Of National Characters' (1748):[1]

1. There are a few other passages that have been cited as problematic in the literature, although the footnote is uncontroversially the most blatant and extreme.

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https://doi.org/10.25894/jmp.2544

> I am apt to suspect the negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the whites, such as the ancient Germans, the present Tartars, have still something eminent about them, in their valour, form of government, or some other particular. Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction between these breeds of men. Not to mention our colonies, there are Negroe slaves dispersed all over Europe, of whom none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity; though low people, without education, will start up amongst us, and distinguish themselves in every profession. In Jamaica, indeed, they talk of one negroe as a man of parts and learning; but it is likely he is admired for slender accomplishments, like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly. (EMPL: 208)[2]

Heikes (2015: 149) and Willis (2018: 505–6) argue that Hume's remark that 'a Laplander or Negroe has no notion of the relish of wine' (EHU 2.7) indicates that he thinks that such people lack fine taste. It might be objected that Hume is merely trying here to adduce support for his Copy Principle by citing the fact that those who have had no impressions of the taste of wine similarly lack ideas of the same, and is not passing any judgment, aesthetic or otherwise, on anyone. But as Willis points out, Hume arbitrarily brings race into the discussion, declares these two racial groups to be 'wholly incapable' of such sentiments, describes their inability as a 'deficiency in the mind', and takes other instances of this phenomena (presumably as applied to other races) to be of 'a less degree' (EHU 2.7). These seem suggestive that something more sinister is motivating the claim.

Jacobson (1992: 9), Garrett and Sebastiani (2017: 38), and Willis (2018: 507) worry that EPM 3.18 claims 'Indians' to be inferior to Europeans, but Valls (2005: 139–43) argues that Hume is not endorsing this view, and indeed implies that it was a mistake on the part of the Europeans to adopt it: 'The implication of this sentence, and particularly of the phrase "tempted us to imagine", is that [the attitude of the Europeans] was a mistake' (ibid., 142).

Willis (2018: 506) also points to Hume's essay 'Of Commerce', which notes that those living 'between the tropics' cannot ever 'attain to any art of civility' (EMPL: 267). And he also highlights Hume's description of the Africans, Indians, and Japanese as 'very barbarous and ignorant' (NHR 8.4), observing that 'non-whites were *only* referred to as savages, pagans, and barbarians' (Willis 2018: 507).

Roberts (2020) argues that Hume's remarks in a footnote to EPM 9.8 referencing 'a rude untaught savage' is racist towards indigenous American Indians and that Hume's discussion of justice in EPM 3.1 also asserts 'the great superiority of civilized Europeans above barbarous Indians'.

2. In the references to Hume's texts throughout, 'THN' refers to *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 'EPM' to *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 'EHU' to *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 'NHR' to *Natural History of Religion*, and 'EMPL' to *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*. Arabic numerals refer to section and paragraph numbers (EHU, EPM, and NHR), or to book, part, section, and paragraph numbers (THN). EMPL numbers refer to pages in the Miller revised edition of the *Essays* (Liberty Fund Inc., 1985).

This footnote is obviously appalling, and thus has understandably become a point of focus for those troubled by Hume's problematic views, both within and outside the philosophical community.[3] Yet, perhaps somewhat obscured by this footnote, what has gone by and large unremarked upon (in both the literature and the public sphere) is Hume's cultural bigotry, which will be the focus of this paper.

2. Culture and Cultural Bigotry

First, what is cultural bigotry? In line with Ramsey's (2013) general account of bigotry, we can characterise cultural bigotry as involving taking negative attitudes towards members of certain groups on the basis of their culture, because this culture is associated with certain problematic ethical qualities. One may fruitfully distinguish cultural bigotry from racism:[4] while racism discriminates on the basis of race, cultural bigotry discriminates on the basis of culture.[5]

3. Hume's racism has become particularly salient in light of the recent controversy about the renaming of what was formerly known as the David Hume Tower at the University of Edinburgh. Some discussions in the public sphere that focus on the footnote are as follows:

> Kenan Malik, "David Hume Was a Complex Man. Erasing His Name Is Too Simplistic a Gesture." *The Guardian*, September 20, 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/sep/20/david-hume-was-a-complex-man-erasing-his-name-is-too-simplistic-a-gesture.
>
> David J Black, "David Hume: Was This Great Scottish Philosopher Really a Racist?" *The National*, July 20, 2020. https://www.thenational.scot/news/18593152.david-hume-great-scottish-philosopher-really-racist/.
>
> Julian Baggini, "Is the University of Edinburgh Right to 'Cancel' David Hume?" *Prospect Magazine*, September 15, 2020. https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/philosophy/edinburgh-university-cancel-david-hume-rename-building.
>
> The last of these goes so far as to say: 'but for a footnote, we would have assumed Hume was as enlightened as any 18th-century white man who had not travelled further than Italy could have been'.

4. The analysis offered in this paper does not require a detailed account of racism, since its focus is on Hume's cultural bigotry. For some discussion of how to characterise racism, see Bracken (1978); Appiah (1990); Garcia (1996); Blum (2002, Ch. 1); Grillo (2003: 162); Zack (2018, Ch. 7); Lauwers (2019).

5. Lauwers (2019: 318–20) contrasts cultural bigotry with racism, but there is some debate about the extent to which cultural bigotry counts as a form of racism. For instance, Taguieff (1988: 14) argues that 'racist discourse was culturalised… abandoning, sometimes ostentatiously, the explicit vocabulary of "race" and "blood"'. Meanwhile, Stolcke (1995: 4) argues that cultural bigotry is 'racism in disguise'. Lentin (2008) similarly makes the case that in Europe, race has been replaced by culture and ethnicity as signifiers in contemporary discourse, even though the underlying discriminatory sentiments remain unchanged. Likewise, Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith (1997) and Bobo and Smith (1998) classify the view of Black culture as inferior as a form of modern racism.

For my purposes, this issue is somewhat terminological. I do not take issue with anyone wishing to characterise Hume's bigotry in the main text of 'Of National Characters' as a form of racism.

This naturally raises the question: what is culture? As one might expect, there is plenty of debate on this issue.[6] For my purposes, I will adopt without defence Margaret Mead's (1953: 22) account: culture is 'the total shared, learned behaviour of a society or subgroup'. This is not intended by Mead to be a strict definition in the sense of providing necessary and sufficient conditions, but it does imply that the application of the term 'culture' anything outside this behavioural domain requires qualification (Mead 1953: 23). Nevertheless, this offers enough of a grip on the notion of culture for my purposes here.

One might worry that to utilise the notion of culture in analysing Hume's work would be anachronistic. Indeed, the first notable account of culture was offered almost a century after Hume's death (Tylor 1871). On his part, Hume classifies cultural and political causes under the category of what he calls 'moral causes' (EMPL: 198). As we understand it, Geopolitical environment and governmental structures would not count as part of the total shared, learned behaviour of a society or subgroup. Yet, like culture, they are moral causes.

Why, then, impose this distinction on Hume? First, although Hume does not explicitly recognise culture as a subcategory of moral causes, he does, in practice, distinguish between political and cultural moral causes.[7] For instance, in 'Of National Characters', Hume identifies governmental boundaries as possible vehicles of such sympathetic spread, citing the example of the uniformity of character enjoyed by Chinese citizens, as well as the distinct manners of the Athenians and Thebans; Hume also takes governmental structures to explain the national characters of the Languedocians and Gascons, as well as the Pyrenees (EMPL: 204). He likewise notes that the same set of manners will transmit to their colonies (EMPL: 205). Moreover, he remarks that republican and monarchical governments create their distinct sets of manners (EMPL: 207), and political and commercial interaction also propagates certain behaviours, as in the case of the 'Franks' (EMPL: 206). But elsewhere, Hume explicitly discusses non-political moral causes. He argues that 'where any set of men, scattered over distant nations, maintain a close society or communication together, they acquire a similitude of manners, and have but little in common with the nations amongst whom they live' (EMPL: 205). In discussing a subgroup that is scattered over different geo-political environments, Hume explicitly excludes political causes, and seems to be restricting himself to distinctly cultural causes in this case.

Nor need I disagree with accounts such as Willis (2016), which carefully argues that religious culture and race were intertwined for Hume. My fundamental theses would still stand: first, the main text expresses problematic discriminatory sentiments; second, these discriminatory attitudes manifest differently, and have a different theoretical basis, from those of the footnote.

6. For some substantive collections on the topic, see Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) and Baldwin et al. (2006).

7. See Garrett (2004) for an excellent discussion of the effect of political circumstances on national characters in the context of 'Of National Characters'.

I offer one further reason to impose this category on Hume. To blame the negative qualities of a group of people on their culture can be problematic, in a way that blaming for these deficiencies other 'moral causes', such as governmental systems or socio-economic conditions, would not. For instance, associating higher crime rates among a certain subpopulation with their culture is problematic in a way that associating it with poverty and low graduation rates is not. Part of the reason for this is perhaps as follows: although not as intrinsic as race,[8] culture nevertheless seems intimately bound with the core identity of its participants in a way that other 'moral causes' are not.[9] But this means that we cannot hold Hume accountable for his cultural bigotry if we restrict ourselves to the theoretical apparatus that he explicitly employs. This gives us reason to read Hume through these admittedly anachronistic lenses, at least for the purposes of this paper.

A further clarification is required before we proceed. Clearly, not all negative attitudes towards members of cultures on this basis should count as cultural bigotry, which is a morally loaded term.[10] Recognising this distinction is important in providing an account of why some negative cultural evaluations might be acceptable. Consider, for instance, a culture that engages in ritual human sacrifice of outsiders, a practice that is internally celebrated and cherished by the community in question. Adopting a negative attitude towards the members of the human-sacrificing culture on the basis of this heinous practice seems justified. Here, it is worth noting that Ramsey argues that bigotry also requires that 'the property used for grouping cannot provide proper support for the negative evaluation' (Ramsey 2013, 141). In this case, the human-sacrificing culture (the grouping property) is indeed responsible for the ethically problematic practice of human sacrifice (the basis for the negative evaluation), and therefore such negative evaluations are not bigoted but are perfectly warranted. To put Ramsey's qualification in simpler terms, cultural bigotry involves negative assessments towards culture that are *epistemologically* problematic, insofar as they falsely regard culture as the cause of negative phenomena.

8. Bracken (1978: 241) and Lauwers (2019: 312) take it that the racist sees these flaws as having a biological basis. Appiah (1990: 5) distinguishes between extrinsic racists (who see certain racial essences as entailing morally relevant qualities) and intrinsic racists (who see certain racial essences as intrinsically carrying different moral statuses, independently of whatever qualities they entail), although both agree on the existence of a racial essence.

9. As Balibar (1991: 22) puts it: '*culture can also function like a nature*, and it can in particular function as a way of locking individuals and groups a priori into a genealogy' (italics in original). Grillo (2003: 160–61) explores this tension between these two opposed qualities of culture—its essentiality in defining a person, but also its mutability. Parekh (2000: 158) notes: 'human beings are neither determined by their culture, nor are they transcendental beings whose inner core or basic nature remains wholly unaffected by it'.

10. I focus here on negative cultural evaluations, since these are the ones we are examining in Hume. There can be positive cultural evaluations that are bigoted and harmful as well, for example, with 'model minority' stereotypes.

Might it be the case that Hume's own negative attitudes towards cultures are warranted in this way? Intuitively, I think no one would be inclined to think so—it cannot be warranted to associate Jewish people with fraud, or to take modern Greeks to be cowardly and deceitful. As we will see, Hume associates these problematic traits with what we will now call 'their culture'; in doing so, he commits cultural bigotry.

3. 'Of National Characters'

'Of National Characters' tends to be closely associated with Hume's views on race, but, in fact, on the whole it has very little to say on the issue. When we focus too much on the racial aspects of the essay, we overlook his concern with culture, including how it might prove problematic.

The essay intends to argue for the thesis that the general character traits associated with each nationality are products of what he calls '*moral* causes'; as mentioned earlier, this refers to socio-political factors broadly construed, such as 'the nature of the government, the revolutions of public affairs, the plenty or penury in which the people live, the situation of the nation with regard to its neighbours' (EMPL: 198, italics in original).

Hume's general thesis in this essay may strike contemporary readers as relatively uncontroversial, but he was in fact quite iconoclast in this respect. The essay argues against the prevailing explanation of national characters, which was that these character traits are products of '*physical* causes', defined as 'qualities of the air and climate' (EMPL: 198, italics in original). Such views were defended by intellectual luminaries such as Montesquieu; indeed, it has been argued that 'Of National Characters' was intended as a direct response to Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* (Montesquieu 1748).[11] In this respect, Hume can be said to have achieved some success; Montesquieu certainly seemed to have a high regard for the essay, generously praising it in a letter as a 'lovely essay' that comes 'from the hand of a master' (19 May 1749) (Garrett 2004, 134). But while Montesquieu was undoubtedly one of the more prominent defenders of the view in Hume's time, there were several other important proponents, a quick study of whom sheds some light on the discriminatory power of such a framework. For instance, Willis cites von Linné as using the climate theory to promote the notion of racial personality types (which, as one would expect, was used in

11. Chamley (1975: 285) and Palter (1995: 6), but see Garrett (2004) for disagreement. Garrett cites the fact that Hume's views in the essay are a continuation of his views in the *Treatise* (2004: 135), and also points out that Montesquieu's account is narrower than Hume's target in the essay, since Montesquieu largely takes temperature to be the significant factor in moulding national characters (2004: 138).

service of a pernicious racism) (Willis 2018, 502–4); similarly, Garrett cites Dubos as linking climate with the artistic genius of various populations.[12] Given this context, while Hume denies the empirical thesis that physical factors are responsible for national character, he seems generally happy to accept the normative claim that there are indeed significant differences in both greatness and moral worth between populations.

Thus, on closer examination, it is somewhat remarkable just how unconcerned the main text is with the topic of race. The thesis of the essay is that national characters are the result of moral rather than physical causes. Moral factors clearly do not encompass purportedly biological elements such as race. But, perhaps more surprisingly, neither do the factors Hume refers to as 'physical causes', which are strictly limited to 'qualities of the air and climate' (EMPL: 198). Thus, physical causes fail to include not only race, but other hereditary factors as well, as Garrett points out (Garrett 2004, 138). In light of this, it is apparent that the main text of the essay is largely orthogonal to race. It neither explicitly endorses nor rejects racial accounts of 'peoples'. It certainly does not seek to supplant such accounts, and indeed, it has been argued that it supplements them.[13] Hume certainly does not take his account in the main text to render otiose the category of race: he independently appeals to both racial factors and moral factors in determining differences among populations.[14]

4. Cultural and National Characters

I will argue that we can account for culture in Humean terms as patterns of imitations. Cultures can be distinguished by different patterns of imitation and the history of those patterns.

As Garrett succinctly puts it: '[National characters arise] when a group of continuous individuals are engaged in a set of similar and repetitive practices and do not come into contact with a sufficient quantity of other individuals with opposed or divergent practices' (Garrett 2004, 139). It is worth exploring this process in more detail. Importantly, sympathy is the mechanism by which national characters are meant to be inculcated (Garrett 2004, 137–42; Willis 2018, 504). Already in the *Treatise*, Hume makes this point, claiming that 'the great

12. Garrett (2004: 135–36). Garrett and Sebastiani (2017) also point out that Buffon is another proponent of the 'climate' view.

13. Garrett (2004: 148) argues that the essay restricts its scope to white populations, and relies on racialist explanations to explain the differences between whites and non-whites: 'Hume tried to deal with non-whites in terms of moral causes and seems to have thought this a dead end'.

14. As Willis (2018: 499) remarks, 'it would be anachronistic to imagine that Hume could avoid participating in the quickly expanding discourse on race'.

uniformity' of characters within nations 'arises from sympathy' (THN 2.1.11.12). This same thought persists in 'Of National Characters':[15]

> The human mind is of a very imitative nature; nor is it possible for any set of men to converse often together, without acquiring a similitude of manners, and communicating to each other their vices as well as virtues. The propensity to company and society is strong in all rational creatures; and the same disposition, which gives us this propensity, makes us enter deeply into each other's sentiments, and causes like passions and inclinations to run, as it were, by contagion, through the whole club or knot of companions. Where a number of men are united into one political body, the occasions of their intercourse must be so frequent, for defence, commerce, and government, that, together with the same speech or language, they must acquire a resemblance in their manners, and have a common or national character, as well as a personal one, peculiar to each individual. (EMPL: 202–3)

Key to the formation of national characters is the 'imitative' nature of the mind, allowing us to 'enter deeply into each other's sentiments' in a 'contagion'-like manner. The psychological mechanism that facilitates this is exactly that of sympathy, which Hume characterises as a process by which we 'receive by communication' the 'inclinations and sentiments' of others (THN 2.1.11.2). More precisely, sympathy operates in accordance with Hume's vivacity-based psychological framework. We 'derive' ideas of others' passions, and sympathy enlivens these ideas to the extent that they become impressions, making us quite literally feel what those around us feel:

> We have a lively idea of every thing related to us. All human creatures are related to us by resemblance. Their persons, therefore, their interests, their passions, their pains and pleasures must strike upon us in a lively manner, and produce an emotion similar to the original one; since a lively idea is easily converted into an impression. (THN 2.2.7.2)

In this vein, Hume compares the actions of sympathy to wound strings communicating movement from one to the rest (THN 3.3.1.7). With this in view, we can see how sympathy promotes the spread of certain character traits. For Hume, character traits are best understood as dispositions to various patterns of passions and/or behaviour: a character trait of benevolence is a tendency to possess benevolent passions and to act in benevolent ways; a character trait of jealousy

15. This passage does not explicitly mention sympathy, although sympathy is identified as the driving mechanism a few passages after (EMPL: 204).

is a tendency to feel jealous passions and to behave jealously, and so forth (Qu 2014, 516; 2017). In a given society, by chance, some character traits may initially predominate. The actions of sympathy facilitate the transmission of various passions from one person to the other, and eventually 'kindle the same passion in every bosom' (EMPL: 203). Given the motivating force of our passions, these similar passions give rise to corresponding similar behaviours. Where there is sufficiently close interaction between individuals or groups of similar individuals over a period of time, those involved come to express the same patterns of passions and behaviours, and thus can truly be said to possess the same character traits. Thus, Hume remarks: 'In the infancy of society, if any of these dispositions be found in greater abundance than the rest, it will naturally prevail in the composition, and give a tincture to the national character' (EMPL: 203).

The above offers the basis for a Humean account of culture as a pattern of imitation. In particular, culture is both caused by the above-described sympathetic transmission of traits and sentiments, and also serves as a vehicle for this sympathetic propagation. First, where various habits, behaviours, and character traits are sympathetically transmitted, this creates a shared, learned behaviour of a society—that is, a culture. Such behaviours are clearly shared, via sympathy. And, just as a child can be said to learn behaviour by mimicking it, we can be said to learn behaviour from others via sympathetic mimicry. In line with this, cultural transmission is recognised to be fundamentally imitative. Genetic accounts of cultural transmission, in which cultural units (called 'memes') reproduce, offer a quasi-biological account of this replicative process.[16] But perhaps a more apposite account is as follows. Hume's description of this sympathetic spread as a 'contagion' above is striking (EMPL: 202). This is not a mere passing, colourful characterisation. More directly, he succintly describes the establishment of national characters by means of moral factors as 'a sympathy or contagion of manners' (EMPL: 204). And Hume elsewhere frequently describes the actions of sympathy as 'contagion'.[17] This description of the sympathetic spread of national characters closely resembles Sperber's account of cultural transmission, which characterises it in *epidemiological* terms (Sperber 1996): cultural ideas are described as contagious, and compared with diseases (Sperber 1996, 2). Were one to offer a Humean explanation of culture, one would say that sympathy is the mechanism by which culture is created.

But besides being a child of sympathetic spread, culture is also a parent of it. Sympathy is partial, and acts more strongly on people who are contiguous to us, with whom we have personal relations, and with whom we share commonalities

16. This was initially suggested in Dawkins (1976: 193–94), who coined the term 'meme', and subsequently developed in Dennett (1995) and Blackmore (1999), among others.

17. See, for instance, EMPL: 112, 120, 201; EPM 7.2, 7.21. Lenz (2022) offers a nice reading of Humean sympathy as modelled after medical contagion.

(THN 3.3.1.14). All three of these features are produced by culture. As we partake in a mutual culture with others, we directly share commonalities with members of these groups, leading us to interact more closely on both a personal and a physical level. Thus, once inhabitants of a society share a certain culture, the sympathetic propagation of traits intensifies. This reinforcement of cultural ley lines entrenches various traits and behaviours, adding robustness to these accidents of fate.

5. Political Circumstances and National Characters

To be sure, culture is not the only possible facilitator of national characters; we have seen earlier that political circumstances can prove highly influential in this regard. Thus, it is worth briefly exploring how political circumstances can influence national characters.

While culture exerts its influence by means of a sympathetic transmission between people, political circumstances instead promote certain qualities in a people by imposing similar sets of circumstances on them as a whole. Such similar circumstances, when of a 'grosser and more stubborn nature' (EMPL: 112), are liable to give rise to similar qualities in a populace. By 'grosser and more stubborn', Hume means that these circumstances are heavy-handed and course-grained rather than subtle in their effects: they are 'less subject to accidents, and less influenced by whim and private fancy', and their influence is unlikely to be overcome by 'the smallest incident in the health, education, or fortune of a particular person' (EMPL: 112).

Concrete examples of the influence of political circumstances on national characters can be found in 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences' (1742). In this essay, Hume recognises the ways in which political circumstances can promote traits such as 'curiosity' in a people (EMPL: 113). Hume notes that although progress in the arts and sciences is driven by a small number of people, such visionaries can only arise from a populace that is in general intellectually inclined. As Hume puts it:

> The question, therefore, concerning the rise and progress of the arts and sciences, is not altogether a question concerning the taste, genius, and spirit of a few, but concerning those of a whole people; and may, therefore, be accounted for, in some measure, by general causes and principles. (EMPL: 114)

What is responsible for a 'spirit and genius' being 'antecedently diffused throughout the people' (EMPL: 114)? Hume attributes such a phenomenon primarily to the political structures of a nation. For one, free republics, rather than

monarchies, promote such qualities: '*it is impossible for the arts and sciences to arise, at first, among any people unless that people enjoy the blessing of a free government*' (EMPL: 115, italics in original). This is because absolute monarchies are 'repugnant to law', and laws provide the necessary security for curiosity and knowledge to flourish: 'From law arises security: From security curiosity: And from curiosity knowledge' (EMPL: 118).

Another political factor that promotes curiosity in a populace is if a nation has '*a number of neighbouring and independent states, connected together by commerce and policy*' (EMPL: 119, italics in original). This political circumstances gives a 'stop' to the '*power*' and '*authority*' of a government (EMPL: 119, italics in original). Such neighbouring states tend to be of a smaller size, being kept in check by their neighbours. Small governments discourage authoritarianism because word of oppression quickly spreads throughout the nation (EMPL: 119), and we have seen that oppression and authoritarianism are anathema to the curiosity required for the arts and sciences to flourish. Moreover, the 'mutual jealousy' of neighbouring states ensures that ideas and art are examined 'with the greatest care and accuracy' (EMPL: 120). This same political circumstance also influences national characters in a different way, as Hume mentions in 'Of National Characters': the presence of neighbouring and interacting nations will tend to cultivate a 'similitude of manners' in their peoples (EMPL: 205).

Hume, moreover, remarks that '*a republic is most favourable to the growth of the sciences, a civilized monarchy to that of the polite arts*' (EMPL: 124, italics in original). In a republic, candidates for office are dependent upon the people for their power, which ensures that 'to be successful' in a republic, 'it is necessary for a man to make himself useful' (EMPL: 126). Meanwhile, in a civilised monarchy, one must 'render himself *agreeable*' in order to succeed (EMPL: 126, italics in original). In this way, 'a strong genius succeeds best in republics: A refined taste in monarchies' (EMPL: 126). Thus, republics encourage the flourishing of the sciences, while civilised monarchies encourage the flourishing of the arts. This discussion is significant, because it reveals that it is not merely the more intellectual inclinations that might be influenced by political circumstances, but also qualities such as manners and politeness. In this, we can see that a wide range of character traits might be promoted by political circumstances.

Hume reinforces the point that civility is less apt to arise in republics, arguing that in such governments 'power rises upwards from the people to the great', putting people on more of an even footing with one another (EMPL: 126). On the other hand, civility is promoted by civilised monarchies, because it promotes in every person 'an inclination to please his superiors' (EMPL: 127).[18] And where we find politeness of manners, 'none of the liberal arts will be altogether

18. Hume alludes to this phenomena in 'Of National Characters' as well in EMPL: 207.

neglected or despised' (EMPL: 127), which is why civilised monarchies are more prone to promote the fine arts. This explains the fact that, as Tolonen remarks, Hume generally reveres the French in regard of their fine manners (Tolonen 2008). On the other hand, Hume is quite uncomplimentary about the manners of the various republics in Europe, singling out the English, Swiss, and Dutch as notorious in this regard:

> The republics in Europe are at present noted for want of politeness. *The good-manners of a* Swiss *civilized in* Holland, is an expression for rusticity among the French. The English, in some degree, fall under the same censure, notwithstanding their learning and genius. And if the Venetians be an exception to the rule, they owe it, perhaps, to their communication with the other Italians, most of whose governments beget a dependence more than sufficient for civilizing their manners. (EMPL: 127, italics in original)

Thus, we have seen the concrete ways in which political circumstances can influence national character traits such as curiosity and politeness. While cultural transmission relies on the mechanisms of sympathy and interpersonal transmission to produce national characters, political circumstances instead act through the imposition of structural dynamics that cause some traits to flourish and others to wither in a populace. While cultural transmission acts in an intimate and individual fashion, political circumstances act in a more impersonal manner, which perhaps explains their 'grosser and more stubborn nature' (EMPL: 112).

6. Cultural Bigotry in Hume

In the course of citing some examples of differences in national characters that result from moral causes, Hume makes the following unsavoury claims in 'Of National Characters':

> Thus the Jews in Europe, and the Armenians in the east, have a peculiar character; and the former are as much noted for fraud, as the latter for probity. (EMPL: 205)
>
> The integrity, gravity, and bravery of the Turks, form an exact contrast to the deceit, levity, and cowardice of the modern Greeks. (EMPL: 205)
>
> The ingenuity, industry, and activity of the ancient Greeks have nothing in common with the stupidity and indolence of the present inhabitants of those regions. Candour, bravery, and love of liberty formed the character of the ancient Romans; as subtilty, cowardice, and a slavish disposition do that of the modern. (EMPL: 206)

At the very least, these are comments that would make one fidget uncomfortably if they were voiced by an inebriated relative on Christmas Eve.

I argue that at least some of these comments express cultural bigotry. When Hume passes judgment on certain qualities in these remarks, he is drawing cultural generalisations, some of which associate these cultures with negative moral attributes. Where these associations are unwarranted or unsupported by the culture in question, Hume commits cultural bigotry.

As we have seen, moral causes divide broadly into 'cultural transmission' and 'political circumstances'. In the case of Hume's discriminatory attitudes towards the Jews and modern Greeks, the crucial cause of what he takes to be their moral failings is in fact their cultures rather than political circumstances. Consider Hume's discussion of the Jewish and Armenian people:

> Where any set of men, scattered over distant nations, maintain a close society or communication together, they acquire a similitude of manners, and have but little in common with the nations amongst whom they live. Thus the Jews in Europe, and the Armenians in the east, have a peculiar character; and the former are as much noted for fraud, as the latter for probity. (EMPL: 205)

Importantly, unlike with the cases adduced above, Hume cannot here appeal to governmental structures or boundaries to explain the character traits of the Jewish and Armenian people, because these groups do not constitute autonomously governed nations of their own, being 'scattered over distant nations'. Instead, Hume's explanation for the national characters of the Jewish and Armenian people clearly boils down to their particular culture, which has 'little in common with the nations amongst whom they live': their national characters arise due to their 'close society or communication together', which causes them to 'acquire a similitude of manners'. In short, the distinctive characters of the Jewish and Armenian people are due to the practices and customs of these societies, as well as their relative lack of meaningful integration with the larger nation they inhabit. Indeed, this is a particularly deleterious form of cultural bigotry. For although the Jewish people are 'scattered over distant nations', and thus are spread across disparate communities, Hume takes these distinct societies to all share in their fraud. That is to say, for Hume, Jewish culture is intimately linked to dishonesty to the extent that distinct isolated Jewish communities, inhabiting different socio-political environments, and with meaningfully divergent histories, all exhibit this negative trait, presumably due to the entrenchment of this dishonesty in an original, unified Jewish society.

Similarly with his remarks on the modern Greeks, which directly follow this passage:

> Where any accident, as a difference in language or religion, keeps two nations, inhabiting the same country, from mixing with each other, they will preserve, during several centuries, a distinct and even opposite set of manners. The integrity, gravity, and bravery of the Turks, form an exact contrast to the deceit, levity, and cowardice of the modern Greeks. (EMPL: 205)

Again, Hume cannot appeal to governmental structures or political boundaries to explain the distinctive character traits of the Turks and the Greeks, since, as he notes, these two nations inhabit 'the same country', and yet express very different character traits. As with the case of the Jewish and Armenian people, Hume explains the 'deceit, levity, and cowardice' of the modern Greeks, in contrast to the 'integrity, gravity, and bravery of the Turks', in terms of their cultures. Here a difference in 'language or religion' causes the modern Greeks and the Turks to form 'a distinct and even opposite set of manners'.[19] The distinctive culture of the modern Greeks both enforces the sympathetic spread of particular traits, and also prevents any tempering of these traits with those of the Turks by creating a social divide between the two societies.

Let us now bring these points together. As argued earlier, culture is formed and propagated via sympathetic patterns of imitation. In this way, when Hume discusses the collective behaviour and traits of the Jewish or modern Greek people, he is talking about Jewish and modern Greek culture. This culture will necessarily be a rich and complex thing; it will include religion, language, celebrations, customs, traditions, as well as shared values and dispositions. So, when Hume associates Jewish culture with fraud, or modern Greek culture with deceit, levity, cowardice, stupidity, and indolence, he is associating these cultures with decidedly negative moral attributes. He does so without argument, and it seems clear to our modern sensibilities that these associations cannot be warranted: nothing about the Jewish or modern Greek culture promotes fraud or indolence. In this way, Hume commits cultural bigotry.

So far, this paper has focused on Hume's cultural bigotry in the context of the essay 'Of National Characters', but if the argument developed here is correct, we might expect to find evidence of the same bigotry elsewhere in Hume's corpus as well. I here consider one such instance, which is Hume's remarks about the 'honest gentlemen' of England:

> I am sensible, that these two cases of the strength and weakness of the mind will not comprehend all mankind, and that there are in *England*, in

19. Indeed, religion is a particularly important element of culture. Notably, it plays a significant role with regard to Hume's attitudes towards other races and cultures beyond 'Of National Characters' (notably in the *Natural History of Religion*), as spelt out in Willis (2016), who argues that Hume's thoughts on religion were influenced by, and exerted influence on, his views on race.

> particular, many honest gentlemen, who being always employ'd in their domestic affairs, or amusing themselves in common recreations, have carried their thoughts very little beyond those objects, which are every day expos'd to their senses. (THN 1.4.7.14, italics in original)

While Hume does go on to wish that the 'gross earthy mixture' of such honest gentlemen might be acquired by philosophers of a more metaphysical disposition (THN 1.4.7.14), the above passage is unmistakeably condescending about the intellectual capabilities of these commonfolk, who seem capable of reasoning only about concrete banalities. While presumably such 'honest gentlemen' might be found in a number of nations, notable is Hume's singling out their ubiquity in England 'in particular'. At the time, such a sardonic putdown at the expense of the English would hardly be surprising coming from a proud Scotsman such as Hume. I argue that it constitutes cultural bigotry.

The commonality of such simple-mindedness is explicitly linked to England in THN 1.4.7.14. Presumably, given the similarity of racial heritage between the England and the Scots, there is no racial element involved.Nor does it seem that political structures would be held accountable for such dull-wittedness and lack of curiosity. Hume thinks that England is, in his time, much more a republic than a monarchy: he states that 'the tide has run long, and with some rapidity, to the side of popular government' (EMPL: 51), and he elsewhere lists it as one of the republics in Europe (EMPL: 127). And as we have seen in 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences', republics are prone to promote curiosity and knowledge in their people (EMPL: 124). Equally, England at the time was indeed surrounded by interconnected neighbouring and independent states (and still is), which also promoted curiosity and learning (EMPL: 119)—it was deeply interwoven with Ireland, Scotland, and Wales in particular, and, to a lesser degree, with France as well.

Having eliminated these two possible explanations, the only plausible systematic explanation left available is a cultural one; English culture—or at least the culture of the English commonfolk—is such that it promotes such vapid thinking.[20] Thus, we find that Hume's cultural bigotry is not confined to 'Of National Characters'.

7. Contrasting Hume's Racism and His Cultural Bigotry

In this paper, we have examined Hume's cultural bigotry both in 'Of National Characters' and beyond. As a concluding observation, we might consider how

20. That said, Hume does recognise in 'Of National Characters' that, in general, the English have a less distinctive national character than other nations (EMPL: 207).

Hume's cultural bigotry differs from his racism. Importantly, both these forms of prejudice are different, both in their theoretical underpinnings and in their violation of Hume's theoretical framework: although both are instances of poor probable reasoning (i.e. inductive reasoning), Hume's racism violates his fundamental theoretical strictures in a way that goes beyond his cultural bigotry.

In the infamous footnote in 'Of National Characters', Hume forms the generalisation that Black people are intellectually inferior to white people.[21] The crucial point of departure from the main text comes from Hume's explanation for this generalisation. Hume offers a distinctly racialist explanation for this perceived inferiority of Black people to white. Notably, Hume describes this inferiority as a natural one, thereby ruling out 'moral' factors—which are the product of human behaviour—from being responsible (Garrett & Sebastiani 2017, 35; Willis 2018, 504). He also remarks that 'such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction between these breeds of men' (EMPL: 208).[22] On the other hand, Hume's explanations for national characters has to do with the sympathetic transmission of the relevant propensities—these propensities are not innate, but learnt.

In virtue of its having a different theoretical basis, Hume's racism is also more theoretically problematic than his cultural bigotry. Both Hume's racism and his cultural bigotry are epistemologically wanting: as we have seen earlier, both involve poor probable reasoning. However, Hume's racist claims, unlike his cultural bigotry, further violate two of Hume's more fundamental theoretical strictures.

First, Hume's appeal to a genetic or racialist explanation in the footnote comes at the cost of the simplicity of his overall framework. In the main text, Hume offers a considered, general, and systematic account that purports to explain the differences that we find in national characters. One would expect that he would seek to explain as many such differences as possible under the same framework, given his emphasis on simplicity as a theoretical virtue.[23] He seeks to explain all effects 'from the simplest and fewest causes' (THN Intro 8);

21. Schliesser (2017: 65n) sees this inferiority as taking the form of an inherent cap or limit to the intellectual capabilities of Black people.

22. Hume's use of 'original' here is telling. Hume describes original principles as those that do not admit of any further explanation. In this respect, my reading of Hume's usage of 'original' in the footnote differs from that of Valls (2005: 129), who takes the term to mean something like 'inherent', although our ultimate conclusions in this regard are similar.

23. As I argue in Qu (2023), Hume does think that we can take this thirst for simplicity too far (EPM App 2.6), but extending his general theory of national characters to account for his perceived inferiority of Black people would hardly seem to be problematic in this respect. Hume's approach in this footnote contrasts with his account of the calm passions, where he seeks to explain away purported counterexamples to his theory of motivation by postulating that they involve calm passions (THN 2.3.3.8), thus preserving the simplicity of his account; see Qu (2018).

he takes it to be a 'sign of an unskilful naturalist' to have to appeal to a myriad of different explanations (THN 2.1.3.6); he regards it as 'an inviolable maxim in philosophy' that we 'ought not to multiply causes without necessity (THN 3.3.1.10); he describes it as 'the utmost effort of human reason' to 'reduce the principles, productive of natural phænomena, to a greater simplicity, and to resolve the many particular effects into a few general causes' (EHU 4.12); he describes 'simplicity' as 'the principle force and beauty' of his 'system' (THN 2.2.6.2); and he claims that the wanton postulation of new principles is a sure sign of the falsehood of a theory (THN 1.3.16.3; THN 2.1.3.7).

Hume's racialist explanation for his perceived inferiority of Black people and nations is therefore intellectually problematic, not just in itself, but also for his broader account as defended in 'Of National Characters'. He rejects a unified theory of differences between populations, appealing to both race and moral causes as independent and non-intersecting explanations thereof. To accept this bifurcation without meaningful effort to explore the possibility of a unified theory seems not just morally but also theoretically perverse. Thus, while the cultural bigotry of the main text is theoretically continuous with the general framework of the essay, Hume's racist footnote departs sharply from this framework and violates the norm of simplicity.

The second respect in which the theoretical basis of the racist footnote is more theoretically problematic than his cultural bigotry is because of its unwillingness to countenance any exceptions to the generalisations formed. 'Of National Characters' recognises the possibility of exceptions to generalisations regarding national characters: while the 'vulgar… admit of no exception, but comprehend every individual under the same censure', Hume believes that 'Men of sense condemn these undistinguishing judgments' (EMPL: 197). Likewise, in 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences', Hume remarks that 'many individuals' may be free of the predominance of an inclination or passion 'among a certain people':

> …when any *causes* beget a particular inclination or passion, at a certain time, and among a certain people; though many individuals may escape the contagion, and be ruled by passions peculiar to themselves; yet the multitude will certainly be seized by the common affection, and be governed by it in all their actions. (EMPL: 112)

Such judgments about national characters are by their nature sweeping, broad-based generalisations, and are not meant to be exceptionless.

Yet Hume refuses to recognises exceptions to his problematic claims about Black people. He claims that the inferiority of Black people to white people is a 'uniform and constant difference' (EMPL: 208). Most damningly, he confronts

a potential exception to his generalisation (likely referring to the poet Francis Williams),[24] only to rather flippantly dismiss it:[25]

> In Jamaica, indeed, they talk of one negroe as a man of parts and learning; but it is likely he is admired for slender accomplishments, like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly. (EMPL: 208)

Notably, Hume does not bother to adduce any evidence that would contradict this testimony regarding Williams' erudition, but is seemingly happy to dismiss such testimony *a priori*.[26]

To sum up, we have seen that, in addition to the infamous racist footnote in 'Of National Characters', the main text also embodies a cultural bigotry, and this cultural bigotry extends beyond this essay. The two have a different theoretical basis; moreover, while both are philosophically problematic, Hume's racism has further theoretical deficiencies. While it is natural to focus on the most obviously invidious passages in Hume, it is important not to pass over perhaps the more subtle, but no less problematic, elements in his writing.[27]

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

24. See Popkin (1992: 70–71); Palter (1995: 7); and Willis (2018: 505). Palter notes the insulting nature of Hume's refusal to refer to Williams by name, as well as his comparison to a parrot, which, despite not meaning to imply that Williams is only parroting knowledge without understanding it, is hardly flattering.

25. As noted by Immerwahr (1992), Hume revised the footnote for the posthumous edition published in 1777—it was originally even more extreme in both breadth and depth. For one, it expressed Hume's suspicion that all non-white races were inferior to white people, and for another, it stated that there had *never* been any civilised non-white nation or eminent individual. The edited footnote, as seen above, singles out Black people, and weakens 'never' to 'scarcely'. The refusal to countenance Williams as a potential exception to his generalisation remains unchanged, however: any apparent openness to recognising exceptions seems little more than lip service. Immerwahr (1992) sees this revision as a response to Beattie's attacks on Hume's racism, but see Garrett (2000) for criticism of this reading.

26. Smith (2015: 234) puts it well: 'Hume would pretend to be ever on the lookout for exceptional Africans, ever ready to be proved wrong: a pretence of falsificationism lending an air of scientific respectability to a prejudice'. Ten (2002) discusses this refusal in the context of Hume's account of miracles in EHU 10.

27. Thanks to Jonathan Cottrell, Tang Xiling, the reading group at the National University of Singapore, and two referees of this journal for their helpful feedback on the paper.

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Submitted: 24 May 2024 **Accepted:** 11 March 2025 **Published:** 22 December 2025

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