



## **Hume's Theory of Moral Imagination: Sympathy, Benevolence, and the General Point of View**

Mark Collier (University of Minnesota, Morris MN, USA)

Hume endorses three claims which are not easily reconciled: (1) sympathy is sufficient for benevolence, (2) our sympathy is extensive, but (3) our benevolence is limited. In order to understand how Hume solves this puzzle, we must carefully distinguish between the psychological mechanisms that are responsible for altruistic motivation and moral evaluation. We are *prima facie* disposed to help those in distress because the associative principles of the imagination lead us to resonate with their pain and suffering. But our disinterested moral judgments are based upon the affections that we would (but do not actually) have if certain counterfactuals were true. We can make extensive moral judgments about distant characters without feeling compassion towards those outside our close circle, then, because adopting the general point of view involves an element of pretense. This hybrid account of sympathy can be defended, moreover, by drawing upon cognitive science. Hume's theory of moral imagination receives a surprising amount of support from recent work on affective mirroring and simulation theory.