

Reply to Botros

H.O. MOUNCE

Sophie Botros's criticism of my review depends in part on certain misprints which appear in the review as printed. In particular, words are omitted from my summary of her position. What I wrote was as follows.

'There are difficulties also in her interpretation of Hume. His argument is that morality cannot be derived from reason, since it is essential to morality that it influences action but reason in itself cannot exert such an influence. Hume, however, phrases his argument in different ways. Sometimes he says that reason alone cannot move us. At other times he says that it is inert or wholly inactive. Botros claims that this involves a contradiction. To say that reason alone cannot move us implies, *or at least suggests, that in part it can. But to say that it is inert or wholly inactive implies* that it cannot move us at all'. (The words in italics are the omitted words.)

I still think that is a fair account of her view. Nor can I see the contradiction she claims to find in Hume. To say that reason is inert or wholly inactive does not imply that reason can play no part whatever in moving us. It implies only that it cannot move itself. Hume is plainly denying the view that reason alone, quite apart from desire, is capable of moving us. His point is that reason cannot move itself and therefore, in itself, cannot move us. But of course it can play a part in moving us, given that we are aroused by desire or passion. As I said in my review, a brick is inert or wholly inactive but it can play a leading part in breaking a window.

Perhaps I can rephrase my point. Hume, it seems to me, did not deny that we can be moved by reason, if all this means is that reason can have an important part in what we do. He knew as well as anyone else that one cannot get what one wants unless one knows how to get it. Knowledge or reason is therefore bound to have some influence on our activities. Hume's point is that it is not the moving element. Suppose a traveller is thirsty. He is already set to get a drink. He is already set to move. It is intrinsic to the desire. Suppose we are told that at a certain point in the desert there is an oasis. This will move us if we are thirsty. But taken simply as information, there is nothing intrinsic in it which

Howard Mounce

can set us moving. In itself, to use Hume's language, it is inert or wholly inactive.

Botros gives an argument intended to parody one of mine. A thirsty traveller wishes to preserve his life. He will avoid water if it is poisoned but not otherwise. According to Botros I am committed to the following conclusion. 'Since the desires are the same, they cannot themselves produce the different acts. Therefore desire depends for its activity wholly on reason'.

Now plainly what I am committed to is that the traveller's desires are not sufficient to explain how he acts. What he does cannot be simply explained by his desires. But now we are back, once again, with the view that reason has a part in what we do. My point is that this is trivial. Hume would not have thought to deny it.

Brynmill, Swansea