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CEP 461 Reading Assignment 12

Part One: Hume says his goal is to find universal principles from which all morality is ultimately derived. What does he say the most important principle is? Why is that one most important, for Hume? Make sure to refer to the text in support of your answer.

Do Part Two also.

Hume says that the most important principle upon which morality is derived from is the sentiment of benevolence, or the desire to do good onto others. He articulates this when he says, "nothing can bestow more merit on any human creature than the sentiment of benevolence... its merit arises from its tendency to promote the interests of our species, and bestow happiness on human society." (pg 12) Hume thinks that benevolence is most important because it results in the "happiness of mankind, the order of society," (pg 12) which is how society would naturally look if there was an abundance of everything so that every man "feels no more concern for his own interest than for that of his fellows." (pg 14) Because we live in our political society which includes private property and civil laws, rather than in the perfect imaginary society which includes an abundance of the necessities of life and therefore friendship and generosity between men, benevolence that Hume speaks of is the bridge that could bring our society closer to the ideal one because of its ability "to procure happiness and security, by preserving order in society." (pg 15).

I strongly identify with Hume's argument that benevolence is the most important principle on which morality is based on. I can't help but to think of a conversation I had with a friend about what the most valuable thing is life was. After discussing options such as family, love, happiness and more, I had come to my own conclusion, which was that empathy was the most valuable thing in life. Though everyone may have their own answers, I believe empathy has the power to change the world, for essentially the same reasons as Hume discusses. Empathy is broad in its reach and includes things like love, family, happiness, and in a way is a prerequisite to benevolence because doing good onto others in a true and proper way requires an understanding of another person's emotions and needs. When people are able to live with more empathy and benevolence, the world will move away from oppression and hate, towards generosity and happiness.