

# Moral Sentimentalism

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*We know that in traditional ethics reason plays the major role to determine morality. Traditionally, ethics has been viewed as the study of what kinds of actions are right and wrong, how the world is and how it ought to be, what kinds of decisions are made and what kinds of decisions ought to be made. Plato, Aristotle, Utilitarian Philosophers, Kant focused on reason to determine morality. But now a days there is an alternative ethical theory, which is called Moral Sentimentalism. According to moral sentimentalism, our emotions and desires play a leading role in the anatomy of morality. Some believe moral thoughts are fundamentally sentimental, others that moral facts make essential reference to our sentimental responses, or that emotions are the primary source of moral knowledge. Some believe all these things. The two main attractions of sentimentalism are making sense of the practical aspects of morality, on the one hand, and finding a place for morality within a naturalistic worldview, on the other. The corresponding challenges are accounting for the apparent objectivity and normativity of morality. Recent psychological theories emphasizing the centrality of emotion in moral thinking have prompted renewed interest in sentimentalist ethics. In this paper I will try to show how Sentimentalism revisits the ethical as well as moral standards .*

**Keywords:** *Sentimentalism, Morality, Emotion, Reason*

## I

### INTRODUCTION:

One is a question of moral epistemology: how do human beings become aware of, or acquire knowledge or belief about, moral good and evil, right and wrong, duty and obligation? Ethical theorists and theologians of the day held, variously, that moral good and evil are discovered: (a) by reason in some of its uses (Hobbes, Locke, Clarke), (b) by divine revelation (Filmer), (c) by conscience or reflection on one's (other) impulses (Butler), or (d) by a moral sense: an emotional responsiveness manifesting itself in approval or disapproval (Shaftesbury, Hutcheson). Hume sides with the moral sense theorists: we gain awareness of moral good and evil by experiencing the pleasure of approval and the uneasiness of disapproval when we contemplate a character trait or action from an imaginatively sensitive and unbiased point of view. Hume maintains against the rationalists that, although reason is needed to discover the facts of any concrete situation and the general social impact of a trait of character or a practice over time, reason alone is insufficient to yield a judgment that something is virtuous or vicious. In the

last analysis, the facts as known must trigger a response by sentiment or “taste.”

Now in this paper we will discuss how was David Hume influenced by Third Earl of Shaftesbury and Francis Hutcheson and influenced his later philosophers about the role of Emotion in Morality and it is a kind of Moral Psychology. Moral psychology is the area of scholarship that investigates the nature of psychological states that are associated with morality—states such as intentions, motives, the will, reason, moral emotions (such as guilt and shame), and moral beliefs and attitudes. The purview of moral psychology also includes associated concepts of virtue, character trait, and autonomy. It has generally been thought of as a descriptive enterprise rather than a normative one, though this is not always the case.

## II

### **SENTIMENTALISM OF THIRD EARL SHAFTESBURY:**

Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713) was an English philosopher who profoundly influenced 18th century thought in Britain, France, and Germany. Shaftesbury was most influential in the history of English language philosophy through his concept of the moral sense which heavily influenced Hutcheson, Butler, Hume, and Adam Smith. The works of Lord Shaftesbury collected into the massive volume *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711) present a wealth of material on the emotions.

Shaftesbury was particularly fond of the term ‘affection,’ using it quite broadly for the purposive responses of creatures endowed with sense-perception to their world. He sometimes uses it interchangeably with ‘passion,’ but prefers ‘affection’ when talking about our motives for actions. Unlike simple sense-perceptions, affections and passions can be communicated, as when the “panic passions” are raised in a multitude and passed by contact or “sympathy”. Shaftesbury also uses ‘sentiment’ specifically for the affections of creatures who have a sense of right or wrong and thus reflect

upon their feelings or affections. As reflected affections, sentiments are closely connected to judgments.

Basic to Shaftesbury's understanding of the affections is his conception of the systematic and holistic structure of the world. This conception allows him a teleological approach to considering how individuals fit into their environment: individuals are parts, which can be judged good or bad relative to their natural fit within that whole, that is, to whether they promote the good of the whole. This teleology extends to the affections and passions: indeed, “our business will be to examine what are the good and natural and which the ill and unnatural affections” (“Inquiry” 170). Shaftesbury takes issue with Descartes for his failure to appreciate the teleological structure of the passions, comparing Descartes to a person who examines the material makeup of a watch without examining its use. For similar reasons, Shaftesbury has little truck with physiological investigations of the passion, although he does not rule out the importance of observations, especially inward-looking ones, which can reveal the natural purposiveness of our affections.

Shaftesbury's conception of our moral sense were taken up by such sentimentalist moral philosophers as Hutcheson, and rather more ambivalently, by Hume, while other elements of his thought bore fruit in the rationalist moral philosophy of, e.g., Joseph Butler. His arguments against the view that our emotions are basically egoistic were repeated by philosophers of both stripes, including Hutcheson and Hume. His influence was also felt in French and British aesthetic theory. In general, Shaftesbury set the terms of approach to sentiments for the next generation of British and French authors.

## III

### **SENTIMENTALISM OF FRANCIS HUTCHESON:**

Francis Hutcheson was an eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher whose meticulous writings and activities influenced life in Scotland, Great Britain, Europe, and even the newly formed North American colonies. The

moral philosophy of Hutcheson's *Inquiry* borrows many important elements from Shaftesbury. It rests on the notion of a moral sense, which is an inborn faculty and comparable to the aesthetic sense. And although all our affections involve an element of reflection, the exercise of the moral sense calls for additional reflection by someone adopting the position of a spectator. What the spectator takes as objects of moral evaluation are the affections of rational agents, insofar as they produce intentional actions. Moral evaluation is particularly targeted at those cases where agents exhibit other-directed affections, or where we feel that they should.

Like many other early modern theorists of the emotions (including Hobbes and Mandeville), Hutcheson considers us to be incapable of true malice. In general, he assumes that nature, or at least our psychological nature, is generally benevolent, much as did Shaftesbury, although Hutcheson thinks that Shaftesbury's natural teleology gets the order of explanation wrong. Because of the intrinsically well-ordered benevolence of our nature, our feelings of approval and condemnation, and their correlative moral affections are inherently pleasurable and painful. But Hutcheson insists that the pleasure and pain are effects of the approbation or condemnation, not their causes. Pleasure and pain are, in turn, antecedent to any sense of advantage or interest, which derive from those feelings. Our moral sense is thus 'disinterested' in a way that is comparable to the aesthetic sense. And the moral sense seems internally consistent: just as we approve of benevolent affections in those we judge, so too can our judgments withstand our own scrutiny.

Evaluating what is good or not—what we morally approve of or disapprove of—is done by this moral sense. The moral sense is not the basis of moral decisions or the justification of our disapproval as the rationalists claim; instead it is better explained as the faculty with which we feel the value of an action. It does not justify our evaluation; the moral sense gives us our evaluation. The moral faculty gives us our sense of valuing—not feeling in an emotional sense as that would be something like sadness or joy.

Reasoning and information can change the evaluation of the moral sense, but no amount of reasoning can or does precede the moral sense in regard to its approval of what is for the public good. Reason does, however, inform the moral sense, as discussed below. The moral sense approves of the good for others. This concern for others by the moral sense is what is natural to humankind, Hutcheson contended. Reason gives content to the moral sense, informing it of what is good for others and the public good (Hutcheson 1728, I. 411).

Hutcheson's moral sense theory helped to conceptually circumvent the problems that stem from a strict doctrine of egoism. He claimed that it is natural for us to want good things for others. When someone's moral sense operates and they judge an action as morally wrong, the moral sense is not why they feel the wrongness, it is how they feel it. It is like an applause meter that evaluates the morality that is expressed in the sentiment: "I morally disapprove of that." This last statement is a report of the moral sense into an opinion of morality, moving from a feeling to an idea. Yet, if the moral sense faculty works the way Hutcheson describes, there needs to be an innate benevolence, and that case is made by Hutcheson.

Hutcheson's influence was particularly marked on those authors who adopted, or simply considered, sentimentalist positions in moral philosophy, such as Hume and Adam Smith. Hume was also clearly affected by Hutcheson's moral and affective psychology, from which he learned much. But Hume argued directly against Hutcheson's approach to our other-directed passions, distinguishing sharply between extensive benevolence and limited generosity. Hume went so far as to allow that other-directed passions need not be benevolent in character at all, admitting malice as a genuine psychological possibility. Both Hume and Smith also borrowed some of Hutcheson's (and Shaftesbury's) terminology, but put it to novel uses, quite different from what Hutcheson envisioned. And Smith used the very notion of sympathy to argue against the basis on which Hutcheson built his moral

sense theory, particularly criticizing it for providing no independent sense of its own normative status.

#### IV

### **SENTIENTIALISM OF DAVID HUME:**

David Hume, an 18th century Scottish philosopher, stated that morality is based on sentiments or emotions or passions rather than reason. He concluded this after he developed his “theory” of knowledge which stated that everything we could know was observable by the senses — he was a naturalistic philosopher. He then looked at situations in which he thought that there was an obvious “wrong” and he tried to identify the “matter of fact” vice in the situation. He immediately found that he could not find the vice within the facts of the situations. Hume’s main ethical writings are Book 3 of his *Treatise of Human Nature*, “Of Morals”, his *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, and some of his *Essays*.

According to Hume’s observation, we are both selfish and humane. We possess greed, and also “limited generosity” — dispositions to kindness and liberality which are more powerfully directed toward kin and friends and less aroused by strangers. While for Hume the condition of humankind in the absence of organized society is not a war of all against all, neither is it the law-governed and highly cooperative domain imagined by Locke. It is a hypothetical condition in which we would care for our friends and cooperate with them, but in which self-interest and preference for friends over strangers would make any wider cooperation impossible. Hume’s empirically-based thesis that we are fundamentally loving, parochial, and also selfish creatures underlies his political philosophy.

According to Hume’s theory of the mind, the passions (what we today would call emotions, feelings, and desires) are impressions rather than ideas. The direct passions, which include desire, aversion, hope, fear, grief, and joy, are those that “arise immediately from good or evil, from pain or pleasure” that we experience or think about in prospect (T 2.1.1.4, T 2.3.9.2); however he also groups with them some instincts of unknown origin, such as the bodily appetites and the

desires that good come to those we love and harm to those we hate, which do not proceed from pain and pleasure but produce them (T 2.3.9.7). The indirect passions, primarily pride, humility (shame), love and hatred, are generated in a more complex way, but still one involving either the thought or experience of pain or pleasure. Intentional actions are caused by the direct passions. Of the indirect passions Hume says that pride, humility, love and hatred do not directly cause action; it is not clear whether he thinks this true of all the indirect passions.

Hume famously sets himself in opposition to most moral philosophers, ancient and modern, who talk of the combat of passion and reason, and who urge human beings to regulate their actions by reason and to grant it dominion over their contrary passions. He claims to prove that “reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will,” and that reason alone “can never oppose passion in the direction of the will” (T 413). His view is not, of course, that reason plays no role in the generation of action; he grants that reason provides information, in particular about means to our ends, which makes a difference to the direction of the will. His thesis is that reason alone cannot move us to action; the impulse to act itself must come from passion. The doctrine that reason alone is merely the “slave of the passions,” i.e., that reason pursues knowledge of abstract and causal relations solely in order to achieve passions’ goals and provides no impulse of its own, is defended in the *Treatise*, but not in the second *Enquiry*, although in the latter he briefly asserts the doctrine without argument. Hume gives three arguments in the *Treatise* for the motivational “inertia” of reason alone.

Hume claims that moral distinctions are not derived from reason but rather from sentiment. His rejection of ethical rationalism is at least two-fold. Moral rationalists tend to say, first, that moral properties are discovered by reason, and also that what is morally good is in accord with reason and what is morally evil is unreasonable. Hume rejects both theses. Some of his arguments are directed to one and some to the other thesis, and in places it is unclear which he means to attack.

Hume also attempts in the *Treatise* to establish the other anti-rationalist thesis, that virtue is not the same as reasonableness and vice is not contrary to reason. He gives two arguments for this. The first, very short, argument he claims follows directly from the Representation Argument, whose conclusion was that passions, volitions, and actions can be neither reasonable nor unreasonable. Actions, he observes, can be laudable or blamable. Since actions cannot be reasonable or against reason, it follows that “[l]audable and blameable are not the same with reasonable or unreasonable” (T 458). The properties are not identical.

The second and more famous argument makes use of the conclusion defended earlier that reason alone cannot move us to act. As we have seen, reason alone “can never immediately prevent or produce any action by contradicting or approving of it” (T 458). Morality — this argument goes on — influences our passions and actions: we are often impelled to or deterred from action by our opinions of obligation or injustice. Therefore morals cannot be derived from reason alone. This argument is first introduced as showing it impossible “from reason alone... to distinguish betwixt moral good and evil” (T 457) — that is, it is billed as establishing the epistemic thesis. But Hume also says that, like the little direct argument above, it proves that “actions do not derive their merit from a conformity to reason, nor their blame from a contrariety to it” (T458): it is not the reasonableness of an action that makes it good, or its unreasonableness that makes it evil.

This argument about motives concludes that moral judgments or evaluations are not the products of reason alone. From this many draw the sweeping conclusion that for Hume moral evaluations are not beliefs or opinions of any kind, but lack all cognitive content. That is, they take the argument to show that Hume holds a non-propositional view of moral evaluations — and indeed, given his sentimentalism, that he is an emotivist: one who holds that moral judgments are meaningless ventings of emotion that can be neither true nor false. Such a reading should be met with

caution, however. For Hume, to say that something is not a product of reason alone is not equivalent to saying it is not a truth-evaluable judgment or belief. Hume does not consider all our (propositional) beliefs and opinions to be products of reason; some arise directly from sense perception, for example, and some from sympathy. Also, perhaps there are (propositional) beliefs we acquire via probable reasoning but not by such reasoning alone. One possible example is the belief that some object is a cause of pleasure, a belief that depends upon prior impressions as well as probable reasoning.

Our moral evaluations of persons and their character traits, on Hume’s positive view, arise from our sentiments. The virtues and vices are those traits the disinterested contemplation of which produces approval and disapproval, respectively, in whoever contemplates the trait, whether the trait’s possessor or another. These moral sentiments are emotions (in the present-day sense of that term) with a unique phenomenological quality, and also with a special set of causes. They are caused by contemplating the person or action to be evaluated without regard to our self-interest, and from a common or general perspective that compensates for certain likely distortions in the observer’s sympathies.

Approval (approbation) is a pleasure, and disapproval (disapprobation) a pain or uneasiness. The moral sentiments are typically calm rather than violent, although they can be intensified by our awareness of the moral responses of others. They are types of pleasure and uneasiness that are associated with the passions of pride and humility, love and hatred: when we feel moral approval of another we tend to love or esteem her, and when we approve a trait of our own we are proud of it.

V

#### **SENTIMENTALISM IN MOEDERN MORALITY:**

Hume offers as an empirical hypothesis the claim that the moral sense approves of motives that are pleasant and useful to agents themselves or to others. Adam

Smith criticizes Hume for ignoring another important way in which we judge people's sentiments. We judge the propriety of people's reactions—whether they are excessive or weak in relation to their object. When we blame someone for excessive anger we do so not only because of its bad effects on that person or others, but also because it is out of proportion to its object or occasion.

Like Hume and Smith, Blackburn wants to provide a naturalistic theory that is consistent with the scientific worldview. According to his theory, to value something is to have a stable disposition in favor of that thing, a disposition we approve of having and are concerned to preserve. Blackburn believes human beings tend to share the same settled dispositions because we need to coordinate our actions with those of others and because we want to be loveable in their eyes.

Moral obligation and motivation result from a four-step process. Following Hume, Blackburn thinks the process begins with the natural emotion of love we feel toward certain character traits. We turn that love into moral esteem by taking up what Hume calls the common point of view. We then notice whether we have the character trait or not. Blackburn relies on Smith's theory that we become agents by internalizing the moral gaze of others and on his explanation of how we come to desire not just praise but praiseworthiness. For Blackburn, the latter is the desire to do what is right, so we are motivated to act morally.

Blackburn adopts the Humean view that the role of reason is limited to informing us of the facts of the case, including the likely effects of proposed actions. Awareness of these facts will move us, but only if they are tied to some desire or contingent concern of ours. Like Hume, Blackburn denies that there are rational standards governing action. Nevertheless, he argues that there is a perfectly respectable sense in which people may be said to reason about their ends or are criticized for being unreasonable. Reasonableness stands for freedom from certain traits—ignorance, lack of foresight, lack of concern for the common point of view. Those of us who value these traits may condemn

someone who lacks these traits as unreasonable.

Baier sees Hume's moral theory as friendly to women's moral experiences and the inspiration for a new approach to feminist ethics. She thinks Hume anticipated many important elements of feminist ethics. Agreeing with the classical sentimentalists that we are essentially social creatures, she believes, as she thinks Hume did, that relationships are at the heart of morality. She applauds Hume for realizing that the system of justice with its rules and rights is an offspring of family cooperativeness and love. She sees him as one of the first philosophers to emphasize intimate and involuntary relationships and relationships between unequals such as parents and children.

Traditional ethics are built upon the primacy of reason. They value reason as a stable faculty of mind over emotion, which they viewed as unstable, changeable, ephemeral, and less important. While care ethics recognizes the value of reason, it recognizes the importance of feeling or emotion and related virtues such as benevolence, compassion, sensitivity, responsiveness, and sympathy. The emotions that traditional ethics have rejected are egoistic, impartial emotional attachments which brings about favoritism, resentment, hatred, and other negative or destructive feelings. Care ethics was initially developed by psychologist Carol Gilligan during the 1960s from a feminist perspective. Since then, it has been widely applied in various professional fields such as nursing, health care, education, international relations, law, and politics. While both care ethics and Confucian ethics consider the family as the foundation of ethics, care ethics is critical of the Confucian patriarchal

## VI

### CONCLUSIONS:

I would like to end my paper with the following remarks. There is no denying that the scarcity of emotion for others in our hearts is the root cause of all human sufferings. But, then, distresses such as the one through which are the present day people are going through do not have causes lying beyond human

control. They are the result solely of the modern man's self-obsessed character. As I see, the present world of isolation and suffering is largely due to man's thick-skinned but conspicuous self-contredness which hardly leaves any space for this concern for others. There is nothing to surprise here. A self-centered person is happy when all around him are unhappy; his typical aim is to stand alone in the comfort for his own happiness. I am sure that this state of affairs would appal any sensible person. To be sure, this kind of human condition is a loss of humanity, and it is unlikely that this loss can be made good without radical change of our mindset. It is important that this loss should be realized. For one thing, this state of affairs, if it continues, would in all likelihood plunge humankind more and more deeply into misfortune. This possibility is profound and terrible; it cannot be waved aside with easy optimism.

Emotions – that is to say feelings and intuitions – play a major role in most of the ethical decisions people make. Most people do not realize how much their emotions direct their moral choices. Emotions evoked by suffering, such as sympathy and empathy, often lead people to act ethically toward others. Indeed, empathy is the central moral emotion that most commonly motivates prosocial activity such as altruism, cooperation, and generosity. So, while we may believe that our moral decisions are influenced most by our philosophy or religious values, in truth our emotions play a significant role in our ethical decision-making. Needless to say, it is through upon hume's doctrine of sympathy for others that we can free human life from this hopeless plight, and to this extent Hume's doctrine is vital to the regeneration of mankind; this doctrine thus may be regarded as the doctrine that represents the best hope for humanity .So, Sentimentalism as a alternative theory of rationalistic view in ethics has a great impact of human life.

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