

**UMAMI ETHICS: Is Kindness an Acquired Taste?**

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ABSTRACT: Is it possible to persuade everyday people to become more generous, courteous and considerate? I believe the answer is yes, and the emotivist framework provides a guide as to how that might be possible. Rather than assume moral values are shared, we are better served by seeking evidence that this is the case. This requires learning how beliefs inform attitudes, which we can do by actively engaging with the experiences of many kinds of people, including those who are very unlike ourselves. When we do this, we can see that values are determined by many things including personal experiences, culture, even simple preference. From here, persuading people to become more kind depends on identifying connections between the values of any one person, and the goals of the society in which they live; being good does not require abstaining from our desires, it means pursuing them with consideration for others.

## Introduction

According to many rationalist accounts of morality, it is very difficult to be very good. This is partly due to the values they espouse: universality and generalizability. That is, moral rules take an abstract form that applies to all people (universally), and these rules extend (generalize) to all similar instances. Different rationalists will divine different moral rules, but this may be better explained by the 'data' from which they are derived and not to whom these rules apply. A one size fits all approach attempts to eliminate our biases by holding all moral agents accountable for following the same rules, regardless of how the circumstances have affected our emotions and desires. In theory, believing that moral rules are derived without giving preference to any particular person or group should promote conformity; in reality, we often see something different. I believe the problem with this approach is that knowing what is morally right does not translate into feeling motivated to act in a morally right way. We regularly observe acts of greed and the harm caused to others, which some may assert is evidence of the selfish nature of human desire: the same human desire that moral rules are intended to restrain.

Acts of extreme generosity, however, are more challenging to explain. My inspiration comes from the story of a woman living in the Bronx, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, pre-vaccine. She placed her refrigerator in the street after painting it with bright flowers and the message 'free food.' If human desire is naturally selfish, as is so often assumed in moral theory, what could motivate her to do something so highly disadvantageous to her well-being? I am very reluctant to describe this behaviour as reckless, careless, or ascetic. I believe

motivation is better explained by empathy for her neighbours; she recognized that if she was struggling to survive, they too must be struggling, and she acted on a desire to help her community.

Desiring something for oneself that you would not wish for another person is neither selfish nor inherently blameworthy, nor are your attempts to pursue or actualize these feelings. I believe it would be more accurate to describe humans as self-regarding: we are all guilty of navel-gazing at times, but we are also capable of compassion and kindness. So perhaps rather than direct everyone (across all of space and time, no less) to hold a particular set of values, we could produce a similar effect if we explore how our multitude of desires interact. My interest, then, becomes persuading individuals to consider how our personal choices may influence the probability of actualizing future desires. Perhaps the problem is not always the things we want for ourselves but how we choose to pursue them: we may be availing of methods that harm other people or, at the very least, prevent them from thriving.

When we act with consideration for others, we must recognize that our satisfaction may be possible by alternative means or that perhaps our goal is less desirable than we once believed. While an individual easily actualizes simple desires, more complex goals require cooperation, which means we must consider how our selfish aims will affect others. We must also remain open to the possibility that not every human desire is selfish. Could we desire to see others succeed and thrive? I firmly believe that with the right poking and prodding, we can persuade most people to be considerate of others while allowing them to remain fundamentally human and pleasure-seeking.

## OUTLINE

With respect to methodology, I will begin by first laying out the framework of emotivist theory as described by C.L. Stevenson. The feature which distinguishes emotivism from other moral theories is that it does not treat disagreement in belief and attitude as one and the same; in contrast to more prominent, rationalist alternatives, our sense of approval or disapproval is not understood to be the net sum of relevant beliefs.

Emotivists deny that moral statements are truth-apt by asserting that these utterances do not correspond to moral facts but instead report attitudes (a sense of approval or disapproval). They also remain open to the possibility that the speaker themselves does not hold the attitude they utter, which is why it is merely reported rather than expressed. These attitudes are informed and supported by our beliefs. These beliefs pertain not only to the properties of entities in the world but also to the causal relationships we encounter through experience.

A moral utterance is not distinguished from any other value statement, which at best expresses something like a preference. As our experiences inform all values, we allow individuals to hold different values without calling this a contradiction. I find it quite curious that the value development proposed by Stevenson is remarkably similar to the acquisition of a palate in that one's appetite for particular flavours, textures, and combinations of ingredients share similar patterns of causation. As lived experience is partially unique to the individual, we must recognize that without the knowledge required to form any given belief, we can neither form or understand the corresponding attitude nor its emotional and imperative functions. The

question then becomes, how do we demonstrate the necessary, harmonious interaction of discretely formed values?

Emotivists recognize that values are often determined by other factors such as one's culture, personal experiences, and even our desires. For this reason, Stevenson suggests that morality should pursue advancement by persuasion, exploring the connection between any individual's desires and values, and those of the society in which they live.

Effective persuasion depends, in part, on how the speaker's goals relate to our own. If helping others makes our goals easier to realize, we may find ourselves motivated to help others more often. Stevenson argues that we should refrain from describing some values as means and others as ends or from ordering values in terms of importance. Instead, discussing how our values are interrelated and how they can generate other goods is more productive.

Getting to this point requires understanding where beliefs (our own and those of other people) come from; I turn to Hume, the original sentimentalist, for this information. Hume explains how sense impressions connect by associative principles, how the imagination can synthesize and counterfeit details our memory has misplaced, and most importantly, how causation does not award us certainty. While necessity and belief attend the most familiar of causal connections, skepticism asks that we must welcome the opportunity to be surprised by new relationships and new connections. This insight is something Hume seems to have lost when describing moral virtue, and it is the point of departure for emotivism.

In chapter 2, I will show that empathy does not have to be something demanded of us by an utterance; it can be self-initiated just as easily, and the effect is much the same. We will,

of course, need a mechanism by which we can discuss the experience of others, and I believe Mark Schroeder's bifurcated semantics is an appropriate tool for this purpose. He argues that nondescriptivists ought to reconceptualize rather than reject propositions. This reconception of propositions allows us to distinguish descriptive from evaluative speech while clearly conveying our meaning. Not only is his theory compatible with Stevenson's emotivism, but it also enriches one of his key concepts, that of persuasive definitions.

Edith Stein provides us with a theory of empathy explaining how to incorporate the experiences of others into our own understanding. She constructs her theory with the limitations of her contemporaries in mind: namely, it is a mistake to assume similarities between oneself and others. Instead, the empathic process should disclose them to us. Empathy is not a means to affirm our judgment in the eyes of others; empathizing requires prioritizing how other people understand their own experiences, not how we understand their experiences. Being mindful of this allows us to recognize that different people will have different perspectives on what appears to be the same event. We do not enter into experiences ahistorically, and we may be surprised by other people's outlooks. Stein recognizes that while we may share values with others, we might also hold them at different levels of importance. We may also discover that other people have values that are foreign and unfamiliar to us. Recognizing our differences further supports the idea that persuasion requires disclosure, and disclosure demands clear communication.

Hume argues that we are motivated by desire, seeking pleasures and avoiding discomfort. How then, does understanding the experiences of others influence our conduct? Hume would say that it happens when reason recognizes that assisting other people may be



necessary in pursuing one's own goals. He says our passions identify our goals, and reason merely plots our course. While it is true that reason cannot counter the motivations of the will, it would be inaccurate to say reason does not influence our behaviour. What would happen if we sought a pleasure that was not directed toward ourselves? If we are motivated by desire and realized that other people's desires were somehow related to our interests, I believe reason would respond to this relationship accordingly.

Learning how to be considerate of others without self-sacrifice is a skill that takes time to develop, and it looks different for different people. The process of moral maturation is the topic of Carol Gilligan's *In Another Voice*, where she clarifies that moral development in females is not inferior to that of their male counterparts; it is simply different because female socialization is different. Suppose you have grown up learning that it was your responsibility to protect other people from experiencing negative feelings, for example. In that case, you also might have learned to sacrifice your desires to maintain your relationships. Learning to be authentic might mean saying no and allowing other people to meet their needs in other ways. Conversely, if you grew up learning that rules exist to ensure we treat each other fairly, you will eventually observe that rules do not always serve their intended function. In such instances, we must be willing to adapt our approach to show that we are not insensitive to the pains of others. Martha Nussbaum's theory of capabilities is intended to complement social contract theories to ensure that all people are included in society, regardless of their ability to contribute to its functioning.

## Chapter 1: Emotivism

Within the bounds of a rationalist ethical theory, moral disagreement is best resolved when pertinent facts are viewed objectively, considered impartially, and judged in a dispassionate manner. My mind immediately goes to Thomas Scanlon's theory of reasons, wherein he attempts to give a fixed value to every aspect of our daily life in order to explain the 'reasonable' way one should conduct themselves, a type of contractualism which suggests that we should refrain from doing what we would not permit others to do: 'Also, it is an implication of my view that something is a reason for an agent only if it is also a reason for any other agent in similar circumstances' (Scanlon, 2013, Lecture 2.2). Scanlon's formula allows us to derive duties that apply to even the most incapable of agents, yet it does not provide a connection between these duties and the motivation required to act on them. It is assumed moral disagreements have less to do with identifying the important facts of the situation and instead, the debate centers on how those facts correspond to values and how those values indicate what actions are possible or even necessary. There is an underlying assumption that what we consider fact is a shared experience, so that we can share a means of evaluating events; it makes the difference between slipping down one step versus slipping down a flight of stairs communicable, without resorting to ratings, rankings, or other coarse methods of comparison.

The primary difference between emotivism and other ethical theories is that it emphasizes rather than minimizes the distinction between a person's attitudes and beliefs. By doing this, we recognize that the experiences you and I have as individuals are an important

factor in determining what we value. More specifically, it allows us the opportunity to discern how other people understand events or entities are connected, or not:

The two kinds of disagreement differ mainly in this respect: the former is concerned with how matters are truthfully to be described and explained; the latter is concerned with how they are to be favored or disfavored, and hence with how they are to be shaped by human efforts. (Stevenson 1944, 4)

This means that the facts which are relevant to the dilemma are no longer assumed to be shared, and some of what you and I might consider facts may also directly conflict because we are different people who may have experiences that contradict one another. The realm of relevant facts, and the domain of ethical dilemmas is a much larger, less defined area for a proponent of emotivism than for those who find themselves satisfied by a rationalist account.

Emotivism is associated with two names: A.J. Ayer and Charles L. Stevenson. Both Ayer and Stevenson acknowledge that Hume's account of causation is a challenge for normative ethics to overcome. Ayer was a frequent visitor of the Vienna Circle, so it should be no surprise that his work in *Language, Truth and Logic* sought to understand if ethical knowledge was compatible with the principle of verification. For several reasons I find the account provided by Stevenson preferable to that of Ayer. Ayer considers judgments themselves to be the functional unit, precluding any possibility of verification. By contrast, Stevenson distinguishes between the belief aspect, which supports our judgment (and is receptive to the notion of verification), and the attitudinal component, which may bear an imperative effect on those around us. Further, while Ayer provides us with the linework of how he supposes moral disagreements proceed, Stevenson explores disagreement at great depth, coupling it with the prospect of persuasion.

As empathy requires at least two people, the account provided by Stevenson is more suited to my purpose at this time.

## **1.A. Disagreements, a Typology**

### **1.A.i. -- Disagreements of Belief**

We might be very tempted at this point to assert that people are truly more similar than not, and the point made by emotivism is a rather trivial one. You could call this a simple matter of perspective; a visit to the dentist makes you anxious because you anticipate pain, but regular visits are a good practice to avoid more significant pain. This analogy is very compelling in part because it is so clear, but how far does this extend to other kinds of pain? It is easy to identify the resemblance between the uniform and the universal; this unfortunately does not make them one and the same.

Potentially, any belief has bearing on ethics. This is a point which many theorists have been careful to recognize; but they have too often recognized it only for certain aspects of ethics – and aspects which are commonly thought to be of little philosophical interest... When an issue is concerned with the value of something as a means to further ends, then (so the familiar contention runs) a great many beliefs, dealing with means-ends relationships, quite obviously become relevant. But when issues concern ultimate ends – and these issues are taken to be of central philosophical importance – then the relevant beliefs become much less diversified. (Stevenson 1944, 12)

The sources of discomfort are as plentiful as the sources of pleasure and avoiding them is also quite incentivizing. You and I may both agree that tax money should be spent on funding homeless shelters. You and I may also disagree regarding whether that funding should be

obtained by increasing taxes, or by diverting funds from other services. The point of consensus is important for sure, but how we achieve our shared goal of supporting unsheltered persons is equally important. The disagreement of methodology highlights some of the differences in our beliefs and highlights an important distinction; we can share the same concerns, we can hold the same values, but we can also prioritize them differently. I attribute this difference to personal experiences, which form connections between ideas that are not shared (this I will return to when I discuss the differences between Stevenson and Hume). The connections are emotional in nature, drawing us towards acts that favour our goals and away from acts that do not further our own ends.

We may have a disagreement solely of belief, which could properly be considered the realm of science:

If agreement or disagreement on scientific issues is always in belief – and this has no exceptions that need now concern us – and if ethics is a branch of science, then it must follow that agreement or disagreement in ethics is always in belief. (Stevenson 1944, 10-11)

It seems counterintuitive to consider ethics as a science if we also want to acknowledge the possibility that different people can have experiences that, on the surface, contradict one another, and yet both are still valid. It is possible that different people may parse the same experience and produce different beliefs, with each account grounded by the same logical processes. I may enjoy the addition of cilantro to my tacos, which you consider ruinous to any dish for the way it reminds you of a mouthful of soap. If we consider the purpose of science to be something like enriching our knowledge of beliefs that are true, we must also remind

ourselves that truth has a context; there is a genetic factor which explains whether you will perceive the flavour of cilantro as citrusy and nutty, or metallic and soapy.

In this context, the concerns of science would be restricted to the flavour profile of the herb, (and ideally) we could expect the explanation as to why different people have such starkly different perceptions of cilantro. When we begin to talk about whether it is appropriate to include cilantro in your cooking, you enter the realm of ethics, albeit a debate that typically does not register for most people:

It is disagreement in attitude, which imposes a characteristic type or organization on the beliefs that may serve indirectly to resolve it, that chiefly distinguishes ethical issues from those of pure science. (Stevenson 1944, 13)

Ayer offers an insight which I think provides us with understanding as to why it is unclear if the ingredient will improve or spoil our dish:

In general, we may say that it is the purpose of a philosophical definition to dispel those confusions which arise from our imperfect understanding of different types of sentence in our language, where the need cannot be met by the provision of a synonym for any symbol, either because there is no synonym, or else because the available synonyms are unclear in the same fashion as the symbol to which the confusion is due. (Ayer 1936, 70)

Essentially, the problem stems from conceptualizing cooking this meal as the successful execution of a culinary procedure while there are in fact two ends being pursued: the meal with a friend and the consumption of the contentious herb.

This would mean that the priority of science is to distinguish true beliefs from false ones, and not to persuade people that certain beliefs are good or bad, desirable, or deplorable,

etc. This is not to say that science is somehow an objective enterprise, or that one's own attitudes are not expressed while engaged in science.

It is by no means the case that every argument represents one sort of disagreement to the exclusion of the other. There is often disagreement of both sorts. This is to say little more than that our beliefs and attitudes must not be compartmentalized. Our attitudes, as many have pointed out, often affect our beliefs, not only by causing us to indulge in wishful thinking, but also by leading us to develop and check such beliefs as point out the means of getting what we want. And conversely, our beliefs often affect our attitudes; for we may alter our form of approval of something when we change our beliefs about its nature. The causal connection between beliefs and attitudes is usually not only intimate but reciprocal. (Stevenson 1944, 5)

This is to say, that in the pursuit of science, and 'true facts' it is often the case that our attitudes and beliefs not only inform our methodology but also our interpretation of the results. This is something to cautiously consider when Stevenson suggests that ethics can benefit from scientific insights when supporting our judgments.

The nature of the working models has now been indicated. To the question, 'what distinguishes ethical statements from scientific ones?' it has been answered: Ethical statements have a meaning that is approximately, and in part, imperative. This imperative meaning explains why ethical judgements are so intimately related to agreement and disagreement in attitude, and helps to indicate how normative ethics can be distinguished from psychology and the natural sciences. (Stevenson 1944, 26)

Stevenson argues that ethical judgment is open to a 'partial proof,' in the sense that we might explore the validity of the belief statements which support our attitudes. Studies of gender are only informative so long as the understanding that cis-heteronormativity is a western standard, not a universal one, is kept at the top of one's mind. Similarly, it is a serious concern that clinical trials do not typically include women, let alone women who are or plan to become pregnant during their participation, because a controlled, documented understanding of the impact of

different medications on the development of mother and child is of great value to prospective patients and physicians alike. The choice to study novel pharmaceuticals on men rests on the unsubstantiated precedent that the bodies of men and women are functionally equivalent in many respects.

We also need to recognize that certain connections may simply not exist for some people, or that they may serve an alternative function from a different viewpoint.

If we should suppose, as the working models may easily lead us to suppose, that important beliefs are never expressed by ethical judgements themselves – that they are always expressed by the sentences that present supporting reasons for the judgements – we should ignore the flexibility of common language, and hence obscure the very factor which, throughout the whole body of ethics, is most urgently in need of attention. (Stevenson 1944, 34)

Many women report feeling afraid when walking alone at night, which is something a man can understand intellectually but likely not emotionally unless he had experienced this for himself. Therefore, the cost of a taxi ride home might carry the force of an absolute necessity for some people while others consider it optional. So, if it were the case that a politician campaigned on the promise to ‘make the streets safe,’ we clearly need to ask, safe for whom? Safe from what?

### **1.A.ii. -- Disagreements of Attitude**

We may also agree about the facts of the matter but disagree in our attitude. Should we be promoting cooking with coconut oil as a healthy choice? That seems to depend on how you define or measure health. As such, these types of disputes are best resolved by developing a shared set of terms for the purpose of communicating your beliefs; Ayer suggests that a ‘definition’ in philosophy is merely a placeholder, while it is understood to be synonymous with



the definiendum elsewhere. It is likely that the action produces a multitude of consequences, and the speakers have arrived at a disagreement by emphasizing different effects.

When we speak of attitudes, we refer to the overall sentiment of approval or disapproval we feel about a certain action or object. They function almost like a lens, highlighting or emphasizing certain experiences or facts as supporting evidence for the attitude.

There are other cases, differing sharply from these, which may yet be called 'disagreements' with equal propriety. They involve an opposition, sometimes tentative and gentle, sometimes strong, which is not of beliefs, but rather of attitudes – that is to say, an opposition of purposes, aspirations, wants, preferences, desires, and so on. (Stevenson 1944, 2-3)

While some information is certain to be obscured or excluded by this process, it is important to note that for each of us, what is considered relevant when forming our appraisals will vary as widely as our own experiences. Your attitudes indicate both how you believe events have transpired and how you believe they ought to proceed. When we recognize that our current circumstances bear a resemblance to an event from our past, we may expect the outcome will also bear a similar resemblance and respond to that expectation accordingly.

This is not to say that agreement is contingent on having shared an experience with another person. I have not been to Spain, but I am certain that someone living there also took delight in starting their day with a generous wedge of pineapple. We may also disagree with each other not because our experiences are wildly different, but because we believe they are communicated with some inaccuracy:

A symbol is said to be ambiguous when it is constituted by signs which are identical in their sensible form, not only with one another, but also with signs which are elements of

some other symbol. For what makes two signs elements of the same symbol is not merely an identity of form, but also an identity of usage. (Ayer 1936, 72)

If I argued that my granny has become an incompetent driver on the basis that she never goes very fast and is always driving well below the speed limit, there is an implicit judgement that driving according to the posted speed limit is a requirement to be considered a competent driver. You may counter that perhaps granny understands that her reflexes have slowed and compensates for this by moving at a slower pace, giving herself more time to react; the implication is that a competent driver is one who allows sufficient time to respond to changes in their route, such as pedestrians.

When we express our attitude about any particular state of affairs (such as what constitutes a competent driver), we draw support from the facts we consider relevant; these are the supporting beliefs. Often there are many which we do not highlight as significant, yet they are no less connected to any given attitude which is an important consideration if your goal is to be persuasive. Attitudes possess an imperative element, which is the mark by which we can distinguish ethics from science:

Both imperative and ethical sentences are used more for encouraging, altering, or redirecting people's aims and conduct than for simply describing them. Both differ in this respect from the sentences of science. And in arguments that involve disagreement in attitude, it is obvious that imperatives, like ethical judgments, have an important place. (Stevenson 1944, 21)

For example, arguing for the value of a vegan diet as cruelty free will appeal to a very different audience than promoting veganism for its cost effectiveness, or its health benefits.

We must also distinguish here between attitudes and the beliefs about attitudes. If you express a preference for the milder flavour of tea because your first experience with black coffee overwhelmed you with its bitterness, a response like 'the majority of people prefer at least a little cream in their coffee,' suggests a belief that your lack of pleasure stems from the absence of cream. We are expressing a belief we hold about the habits of coffee drinkers generally, not the attitude of the public as approving of cream in their coffee. There is no attitude expressed here, and in this case, Stevenson would probably agree that this sentence has no moral content. It can be debated if you hold this view of other people and their consumption habits, but it says nothing of whether you approve or disapprove of this behaviour.

However, it is possible to interpret the sentence as an imperative because it conveys relevant facts. In this second interpretation, we know the statement has been offered in a context such that the information is considered a relevant fact.

First of all, an utterance might serve cognitively to record certain information and 'in the same breath' give vent to the speaker's attitude toward the very fact thereby stated..., One's attitude toward an object might also be expressed in an utterance cognitively indicating its source, as in 'That money is stolen...' (Ledden 1950, 362-363)

The information functions both as the basis of a belief (that this is the preferred method of consuming coffee) and as an imperative (that you ought to consume coffee in this way as well). It follows that the comment is most likely offered as a suggestion following from the belief that if this is the way in which most people find pleasure in consuming coffee, it is also a situation in which the inexperienced coffee drinker is likely to find pleasure as well.

We should note however, that an attitude communicates both imperative and expressive information. Attitudes not only provide the speaker's instructions as to how we should conduct ourselves, but also report the speaker's feelings about said action. In his dissection of moral theory, Ayer categorizes the imperative component as something distinct from moral judgment, and shortly thereafter dismisses the imperative as mere commands which should not concern the philosopher:

We may divide [the actual ethical contents], indeed, into four main classes. There are, first of all, propositions which express definitions of ethical terms, or judgements about the legitimacy or possibility of certain definitions. Secondly, there are propositions describing the phenomena of moral experience, and their causes. Thirdly, there are exhortations to moral virtue. And lastly, there are actual ethical judgements...

The exhortations to moral virtue are not propositions at all, but ejaculations or commands which are designed to provoke the reader to action of a certain sort. (Ayer 1936, 150-151)

I would suggest that the reason Ayer is quick to dismiss the use of imperatives is because he is considering them in isolation from their cause or causes. Stevenson however notes that when we make use of the imperative, we often resort to coupling it with some sort of supporting rationale, or the pertinent beliefs. We are far more willing to be agreeable when someone makes a request of us when it is clear how the request will further our own goals. It is by means of this double function (the expressive and imperative) of an attitude that we can persuade others to adopt our proposed attitude or complete an act which furthers our end:

The imperative is used to alter the hearer's attitudes or actions. The supporting reason then describes the situation which the imperative seeks to alter, or the new situation which the imperative seeks to bring about: and if these facts disclose that the new situation will satisfy a preponderance of the hearer's desires, he will hesitate to obey no longer. More generally, reasons support imperatives by altering beliefs as may in turn alter an unwillingness to obey. (Stevenson 1944, 27-28)

Sharing our thoughts and feelings with other people is often described as ‘vulnerability’ because it opens us up to the possibility of being contradicted or corrected, neither of which are desired. At the same time, it provides us the chance to create or strengthen our connections with other people which is why some would choose to call this practice ‘openness.’ While we are indeed inviting the possibility of resistance, we are also inviting an understanding that succeeds mere compliance. If my neighbor were to ask, ‘can you turn down your music?’ my response may be a simple and curious ‘why?’ to which they might offer a number of responses such as ‘I find it distracting,’ ‘it is eleven o’clock at night,’ or ‘we are not all fans of Beyoncé.’ These are all related to the beliefs held by my frazzled neighbour, and they correspond to my neighbor’s views on music listening etiquette.

The imperative component, included to preserve hortatory aspects of ethical judgements, and stressed as useful in indicating agreement or disagreement in attitude, is really too blunt an instrument to perform its expected task. If a person is explicitly commanded to have a certain attitude, he becomes so self-conscious that he cannot obey. Command a man’s approval and you will elicit only superficial symptoms of it. But the judgement, ‘This is good,’ has no trace of this stultifying effect; so the judgment’s force in encouraging approval has been poorly approximated. (Stevenson 1944, 32)

Successfully navigating these types of interactions requires us to do more than appeal to the force of an imperative. If instead, my neighbor responded to hearing Beyoncé late at night by shouting ‘Beyoncé is the worst! Turn that off!’ I am likely to feel incised or alarmed, but not sympathetic. Their declaration does nothing to persuade me to feel a sense of disapproval towards the singer, nor does it motivate me to act against my desire to play her music. Unless I can find the motivation to comply with my neighbour’s request within myself (such as a desire

to demonstrate that I am considerate of his feelings) it is likely that my neighbour's words will go unheeded.

## 1.B. Value and Normativity

Now let us contrast this with a scenario in which a friend suggests that after Beyoncé, I queue up a song by an unfamiliar artist. The song begins, and after a minute my friend turns to me and says 'Isn't this song great? Doesn't it make you want to go dancing?' and she and I both dance through the night.

### 1.B.i. -- Exploring Value

This line of questioning is more complicated than it appears.

Ethical terms are more than ambiguous; they are *vague*. Although certain factors, at any one time, are definitely included among the designata of the terms, and certain others definitely excluded, there are many others which are neither included nor excluded. (Stevenson 1944, 34-35)

Potentially, I am being prompted not only to agree that the song has some effect on listeners that culminates in dancing, but also to agree that said effect is desired, and that this is sufficient reason to approve of the unfamiliar music. So perhaps we should consider the answer by digesting these questions one at a time.

We first consider if the purpose of listening to music is to encourage dancing, and I mean this in the strictest sense; that there could be no other identifiable source of motivation for turning up the volume and listening to a piece of music. This should strike you as an

obviously absurd conclusion. Stevenson's typology of agreement in attitude is where we come to really understand how important attitudes are when we discuss ethical agreement. His definitions of intrinsic and extrinsic value are important to note:

'I approve of X intrinsically' has the meaning of 'I approve of X when I disregard all of its consequences upon other objects of my attitudes.'

'I approve of X extrinsically' has the meaning of 'the consequences of X meet for the most part with my approval, and so I approve of X when I consider it with exclusive regard to its consequences.' (Stevenson 1944, 177)

We will note here that extrinsic approval of some X may refer to X as an end in itself, or as a required end for some further purpose or purposes. It is also possible to approve of something intrinsically but disapprove of it extrinsically; 'And a speaker who acknowledges that X is intrinsically good may nevertheless insist that X is on the whole bad; for his approval of X, independently of its consequences, may be outweighed by his disapproval of it when he takes its consequences into account' (Stevenson 1944, 178). I might feel a great fondness for my new e-reader, grateful that this device allows me to access hundreds of titles with the mere swipe of a fingertip; right up until I realize the battery has died, and all my books are now unavailable to me.

To what degree is the pleasure of listening to music derived from the way it makes you want to move your body? Surely not all music 'moves' us in this way, and yet it is arguably both popular and enjoyable. When we engage in a task that requires sustained focus and attention, some people choose to turn on music, arguing that it helps them to focus; others argue that any noise at all is distracting, and prefer silence. And then there are those who have no preference, and simply push through the task at hand. We may also have different preferences

for different types of activities; despite an enjoyment of loud music in your leisure time, you may perhaps prefer to work in silence.

What we really need to know, ultimately, is what is this 'goodness' that songs seem to express, yet we cannot describe in much detail without inciting a dispute with the neighbors. If I feel like Saturday night warrants blaring Beyoncé's *Crazy in Love* at 11 PM, why does the neighbor feel compelled to shout out his window in my direction? It probably has more to do with the fact that he finds the music disruptive to his sleep than his claim that Beyoncé is 'the worst'. We should consider if goodness exists only in context:

Thus, in specifying the language to which he intends his definitions to apply, the philosopher is simply describing the conventions from which his definitions are deduced; and the validity of the definitions depends solely on their compatibility with these conventions. In most cases, indeed, the definitions are obtained from conventions which do, in fact, correspond to the conventions which are actually observed by some group of people [...] But it is a mistake to suppose that the existence of such a correspondence is ever part of what the definitions actually assert. (Ayer 1936, 87)

We can confidently assume that it is his belief that loud music is keeping him from sleeping that causes him to cry out. Under different circumstances, you very well might catch him humming along to the very same tune as he demonstrates his grilling prowess for guests at his own party.

When we discuss the effect of promoting dancing, there are several points we should clarify; is dancing a sure sign that a song is good, or is dancing an intermediate step towards another goal? How do we discern whether dancing is the means or the end? Do my friend and I need to share the same view of dancing to have the same attitude about this song? Moreover, if my friend enjoys a song because it makes her want to dance, what would be her motivation



to listen to the same song alone at home? Stevenson defers to G.W. Allport as to how this would unfold; 'X, first sought as a means to Y, may later become an end' (Stevenson 1944, 195). This would explain why she enjoys listening to the same music while alone in her room as she loves dancing to in night clubs: the music itself is a source of enjoyment, not just the activity associated with it.

Compare that with my own situation in which I am inclined to agree that dancing is enjoyable, and I do seek opportunities to go dancing. But now suppose that over time, I have grown familiar with many of the frequenters of my favourite night clubs and now I spend most of my night saying hello and goodbye to friends and acquaintances. 'Dancing' in my mind is now associated with socializing and spending time with friends just as much as it is with dancing. As for myself, Stevenson would explain my approval of a song that promotes dancing by means of Wundt's principle: 'X, first sought as a means to Y, often promotes, unexpectedly, some further end, Z; and thereafter X may be sought as a means to Z no less than Y' (Stevenson 1944, 196). In this way a good song is a means to an end which is itself a means to a further end.

We can now revisit the questions posed by my friend; 'Isn't this song great? Doesn't it make you want to go dancing?' We now have awareness of the multitude of ambiguities: is the song good in itself, or as motivation to dance? If we listen to music for other purposes, could it be both? Further, if we agree that it makes us want to go dancing, it is unclear whether this refers to my friend's idea of dancing (the act of moving your body) or what I mean by dancing (which is in fact socializing in nightclubs), and we do not know if this is sufficient grounds for an agreement that the song is good. We can never really know to which end we are agreeing.

While Stevenson has helped us to identify the ambiguities in our speech, he has no solutions as to how we might resolve them.

Ayer would suggest that the definitions we are working with are ambiguous, and he asserts that it was the philosopher's responsibility (insofar as the philosopher is an analyst) to dispel ambiguity by means of definitions:

In general, we may say that it is the purpose of a philosophical definition to dispel those confusions which arise from our imperfect understanding of different types of sentence in our language, where the need cannot be met by the provision of a synonym for any symbol, either because there is no synonym, or else because the available synonyms are unclear in the same fashion as the symbol to which the confusion is due. (Ayer 1936, 70)

The clarification of terms offers us a satisfying solution; for if my friend had asked if I wanted to go to a nightclub rather than if I wanted to dance, she may equally well have intended to adopt my idea of what 'dancing' entails as much as she may have desired to communicate her own expectations of what happens inside a nightclub (perhaps she has a craving for a fancy cocktail). While in this situation, we can glean what we believe to be her intended meaning with a few questions about how the night will unfold, Ayer and Stevenson both agree that the strategy falls short when it comes to distinguishing which actions and motivations are praiseworthy, and which are vicious.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This would be an appropriate point to consider the Frege-Geach problem and whether or not moral speech performs the function proposed by noncognitivist theories such as emotivism. Unfortunately, restrictions of time and page do not permit a fair and thorough examination of every complication.

## 1.B.ii. -- Emotive Normativity

We struggle to categorize the goods we identify as 'means' or 'ends' for two reasons; first, we cannot clearly discern if/when this good will cease to facilitate further ends (we are never certain it is truly a final end); this we learned from the Allport Principle. In fact, we cannot be certain this same good is ever viewed as an end at all; it may always be viewed as a means to other goals, which is what the Wundt Principle shows us. If we wish to understand the relationship between morality and value, proactively addressing biases and omissions demands we put in the effort to understand and include the perspectives and interests of many different people, especially those who are not like us. It is quite possible that the values of others will overlap with one's own, but the nature of this overlap should be discovered, not assumed.

Ayer rejects the idea that moral goodness requires anything like the feeling of pleasure. This is not entirely incompatible with the argument put forth by Stevenson but connecting the two does require us to consider motivation, imperatives, and persuasion, which Ayer does not believe pertain to ethics. If the value of the action is intrinsic, then choosing to complete it, willingly or begrudgingly, whether it pleases you or not, will still produce the same good as a result. Ayer also rejects pleasure as the indicator of virtue on the grounds that a decidedly good thing can feel bad, while a decidedly wicked thing can offer you a fleeting pleasure: 'And since it is not self-contradictory to say that some pleasant things are not good, or that some bad things are desired, it cannot be the case that the sentence "x is good" is equivalent to "x is pleasant," or to "x is desired"' (Ayer 1936, 154). That said, Ayer doubts that moral good could be divined by intuition alone because attempts to do so seem to produce a variety of notions of goodness

(which are at times contradictory) and these come with no guidance as to how to identify the 'correct' choice:

For it is notorious that what seems intuitively certain to one person may seem doubtful, or even false, to another. So that unless it is possible to provide some criterion by which one may decide between conflicting intuitions, a mere appeal to intuition is worthless as a test of a proposition's validity. (Ayer 1936, 156)

The connection between moral values and action is not always clear.<sup>2</sup> If I live with one other person, and the rent amounts to 800 dollars, we tend to agree that fairness looks like each of us paying 400 dollars; if we split the cost on household goods, such as a 200ml bottle of dish soap, exacting ownership of precisely 100ml of soap is more likely viewed as pettiness rather than fairness. On these grounds, Ayer decides that moral symbols are meaningless. I offer that his error follows from the assumption that 'moral good' refers to something objective, valued by all for its own sake, rather than something pervasive, valued by many as Stevenson's discussion of intrinsic and extrinsic value elucidates for us. Agreeing that 'murder is wrong' is hardly contentious, and in order to benefit from this shared belief, you could simply abstain from murdering anyone else. However, we should not mistake uniformity in judgment for evidence of truth because the two are in fact unrelated. We should not assume that those who choose to abstain from murder do so because they wish to avoid moral blame; they may be motivated by other reasons, such as the belief that committing a murder will result in being haunted by your victim. Consider a statement like 'pineapple is an enjoyable pizza topping' and it becomes quite clear that truth and uniformity can be divorced quite clearly. By affirming the truth of this

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<sup>2</sup> The forms of emotivism I am describing ascribe to forms of judgment internalism, which asserts that the sense of approval for a particular action function as a source of motivation for that action; this is most obvious in the case of Stevenson, who offers that the attitudinal component also has an imperative element.

statement, you are not committed to expressing that you yourself enjoy the combination, rather you are acknowledging that there are an inordinate number of people who enjoy consuming this salty and sweet combination.

Stevenson argues that we should refrain from referring to goods as means and ends for exactly these reasons: this language promotes a hierarchical mindset which prioritizes some goals over others without exploring the influence of the context in which we encounter them.

The present work differs from this tradition in showing that the value assigned to X will depend on its still *radiating consequences*, and in showing that even if these do later converge, the point of convergence will never be taken as an exclusive end but always as a focal aim – valued largely for its own consequences that radiate once more. (Stevenson 1944, 330)

Instead, he favours the term ‘focal aim’ to describe the concept we are referencing; these concepts would serve as either causes or effects depending on the context in which we are referring to them.

With reference to the use of the word ‘good,’ Stevenson identifies that rather than perform the role of an end, it functions as a focal aim: ‘as an end which is also such an exceptionally important means to so many divergent ends that if anything else is not, in its turn, a means to this, it will be without predominating value’ (Stevenson 1944, 203). This is to say, the utilitarian end of happiness is best understood as a precondition in the pursuit to any legitimate other end, rather than as a proof of the legitimacy of ends. That said, happiness is achieved by demonstrating sensitivity to the circumstances we find ourselves in; we simply do not feel the same fondness for a party anthem as the next-door neighbor that we might as an invited guest.

Further, focal aims are best studied in relation to one another; we should be as concerned with the progress that can be made from each point no less than we are concerned with the observations which lead us there, like a circuit or a transit system.

The usefulness of predictions in ethics will be evident; hence only these points need be emphasized: Attitudes are strengthened and guided largely by reinforcement. One's approval of X is strengthened when X is shown to be a means to Y, when is also approved. But it is the belief about X's relation to Y, not the relation itself, which brings the reinforcement; and if this belief is not a predictive one, confirmed in advance, it may come too late to have any practical effect. (Stevenson, 1944, 331)

This is why Stevenson is prioritizing the integration of science into ethics; it is not to explain away moral qualities but to explain their presence, which will in turn enhance the predictive power of ethical judgments. It provides a means to simplify the deliberation process, and a means to persuade others of the connection between unshared interests.

Ethics then, finds its origins in the practice of common courtesy:

[I]f our writer is sensitive to the plurality of ends that people habitually have in view, he will scarcely seek to exalt some one factor as *the* end, reducing everything else to the exclusive status of means. He can hope for an enlightened redirection of aims but can scarcely expect to make human nature anew. (Stevenson 1944, 329).

Much like the utilitarian happiness, we are dependent on focal aims to achieve cooperation among individuals with a variety of personalities, beliefs, and goals. These aims must also be sensitive to the circumstances we find ourselves in so that we can persuade others to cooperate and so that we can pursue new desires as we identify them.

## 1C Hume, the Sentimentalist

### 1.C.i. -- Experience and the Associative Principles

Stevenson's emotivism is largely inspired by Hume, as I will demonstrate by mapping many of the core components of emotive theory onto Hume's writing. There are some notable similarities, especially in the way Hume presents the problem of induction and how he describes the function of belief, but I believe Stevenson departs from Hume when causality is applied to morality, which I will discuss towards the end. The primary criticism that Stevenson offers of Hume is that Hume also believes disagreements in attitude can be resolved by addressing disagreements in belief, especially if the disagreement in belief stems from ignorance of the matter at hand.

First, in an effort to properly identify the inspiration from and influence of Hume on emotivism, I will demarcate what is relevant by considering Hume's own terms, their meanings and relationships to one another. We first look at *impressions*, the meaningful units of sensory information we perceive due to their vividness and intensity. When we are struck by an impression it leaves us with a point of reference, in much the same manner that a seal can be pressed into warm wax. He also distinguishes between simple and complex impressions based on whether the components of the phenomena are distinguishable and separable, or not. At some later point in time, we may revisit this impression in our thoughts, and this generates either an idea in *memory* (if the idea regains some of the initial vividness, or at least approaches the same intensity as the first experience) or in *imagination* (if the idea is vivid, but perhaps not to the level of a lived sensory experience). It is also worth noting that while ideas of memory do

maintain the same composition with respect to how the components are ordered, the imagination does not have this sort of limitation. In the imagination we can also combine a variety of ideas or reorder their components such as when we revisit past arguments in the shower, only to emerge much wittier and victorious. Curiously, the distinction between the two is not clear, even for Hume himself; in one breath, he reports that a memory is simply clearer, which is coherent with his previous arguments:

Since, therefore, the imagination can represent all of the same objects that the memory can offer to us, and since those faculties are only distinguish'd by the different *feeling* of the ideas they present, it may be proper to consider what is the nature of that feeling. And here I believe every one will readily agree with me, that the ideas of memory are more *strong* and *lively* than those of the fancy. (Hume 2000, 60)

And just slightly further he offers this:

And as an idea of the memory, by losing its force and vivacity, may degenerate to such a degree, as to be taken for an idea of the imagination; so on the other hand an idea of the imagination may acquire such a force and vivacity, as to pass for an idea of the memory and counterfeit its effects on the belief and judgment. (Hume 2000, 60)

He acknowledges that it is possible that an idea in our imagination could be more convincing than the memory of actual events. We see this in countless psychological studies of memory. When we attempt to verify flashbulb memories of world events (e.g., asking people what they were doing when JFK was shot), it appears many people have memories that are as vivid as they are incorrect. We should also acknowledge the impact of searching for 'repressed memories,' which left countless individuals mistakenly believing they had suffered horrible acts



of abuse at the hands of their loved ones when these events did not happen. How is it possible that an imagined event can displace the truth from our memories?

Thus it appears, that the belief or assent, which always attends the memory and senses, is nothing but the vivacity of those perceptions they present; and that this alone distinguishes them from the imagination. (Hume 2000, 61)

It would seem the vividness of the imagined event, by Hume's account, would play a major factor. If it is possible that we can mistake a false event for a true one, we may also allow the false event to influence our feelings about elements that are associated with those 'memories'. What is still unclear is how that process works; how do our memories, real or imagined, come to influence the impressions and ideas we are presently entertaining? Surely, we do more with our impressions than collect them?

Beyond strictly acquiring impressions there are other means of acquiring knowledge for Hume. He has hinted at this in his distinction between the memory and imagination, and a little later when he discusses how the properties of an object relate to its identity:

After a little more practice of this kind, we begin to distinguish the figure from the colour by a *distinction of reason*; that is, we consider the figure and colour together, since they are in effect the same and indistinguishable; but still view them in different aspects, according to resemblances, of which they are susceptible. (Hume 2000, 22)

Essentially, while the properties of an object cannot be separated from the object itself, we can consider the properties singularly. When we describe someone's hair as being 'espresso' or 'inky', we do so with intention of communicating the idea of dark brown or black in colour, and not that it is dripping or contained in a vessel. We use language in this manner to identify similarities, which is one of the seven philosophical relations identified by Hume; 'resemblance,

identity, relations of time and place, proportion in quantity or number, degrees in any quality, contrariety, and causation' (Hume 2000, 50). From these seven, he identifies that certain relationships can be changed without altering the idea itself (resemblance, contrariety, degrees in quality, and proportions in quantity or number) (Hume 2000, 50), which is most obvious when we make a comparison like 'I live in a smaller house than my best friend' or 'that lady in the checkout looks just like Aunt Linda.' This does not have to be the case; your friend could move into a small condo, and Aunt Linda could secretly undergo rhinoplasty. The fact that we could make different statements and still reference these qualities (of size, and resemblance) tells us that these qualities are somehow bound together with our ideas about the home of our dear friend and favourite auntie. Therefore, Hume argued we could feel confident in the knowledge gleaned from these relations.

At the same time, some relationships are contingent on the properties of the ideas (identity, situations in time and place, and causation) (Hume 2000, 52). While all relations operate by means of a comparison, some relationships are contingent on properties of the ideas we are considering. Presently, my next-door neighbour is a man named Roger; he is a doctor. If Roger left his practice so he could move to a small town and open a pottery studio, his real passion, he would suddenly neither be my neighbour nor a doctor. It is becoming clear that relations of time and space and those of identity are bound up with the context in which we encounter them such that it would be a mistake to view them as a means of knowledge with certainty.

## 1.C.ii. -- Causing Problems

Hume argues that causation is a relation made known to us by experience rather than reason. He begins this argument by identifying the obstructions of reason's path to claim causation as a principle of its own. While certain relations operate quite successfully without drawing from experience (such as contrariety or proportion,) others like identity seem to require at least some experience to draw from (I might not recognize Aunt Linda's face after her secret rhinoplasty, but I might recognize the bangle-watch she has worn since I was a child). 'Right at the start of his investigation of the causal relation, he has *contrasted* causal inference with "demonstration." "Probability" judgments, however certain they may be, do not give "knowledge"' (Baier 1994, 63). If reason were our only means to obtain knowledge, we would also need to restrict our thoughts to the associations that depend on the ideas themselves:

All certainty arises from the comparison of ideas, and from the discovery of such relations as are unalterable, so long as the ideas continue the same. These relations are *resemblance, proportions in quantity and number, degrees of any quality, and contrariety*; none of which are imply'd in this proposition, *whatever has a beginning also has a cause of existence.* (Hume 2000, 56)

Causation offers us something other relations do not: the perception of a relationship that persists beyond our immediate sensation, which is how we might recognize Aunt Linda with her new nose.

If causation is not an association of reason however, we want to understand how it operates independent of experience. If we consider the two impressions, we simply must identify the way in which we connect them. Is it by means of some quality they have in common? He suggests that we turn the two on all sides, inspecting them, and ultimately, we

are left wanting. Perhaps the connection is made by means of some relationship? He suggests that the two objects must be sufficiently contiguous for a connection to be made, '[t]ho' distant objects may sometimes seem productive of each other, they are commonly found upon examination to be link'd by a chain of causes, which are contiguous among themselves...' (Hume 2000, 54). It is also vital that the presentation of one should precede the other in time somehow, else we have no means of discerning the cause from the effect: 'For if one cause were co-temporary with its effect, and this effect with *its* effect, and so on, 'tis plain there wou'd be no such thing as succession, and all objects must be co-existent' (Hume 2000, 54). When these two criteria (contiguity and succession) are met, we refer to this as constant conjunction.

Priority and proximity in time are definite requirements for establishing a relationship between events, but hardly sufficient; 'An object may be contiguous and prior to another, without being consider'd as its cause. There is a NECESSARY CONNEXION to be taken into consideration; and that relation is of much greater importance, than any of the other two above-mention'd' (Hume 2000, 55). Where does this idea of necessity originate? The basis for necessity however turns out to be as elusive as it is essential. It does not have a basis in the qualities of the impressions themselves, nor the relations between them. Necessity certainly does not feel arbitrary: an obstetrician could deliver hundreds of babies each year, yet nobody believes that the doctor is responsible for producing children. How does this feeling correspond to the truth of the matter?

The idea of necessity is one that we take for granted, and Hume points this out for us by demonstrating that arguments for necessity are often counterintuitive. When baking bread, our

symbol changes quite suddenly from 'dough' to 'loaf' to reflect that we believe something has happened to our ingredients: 'The first question that occurs on this subject is always, *whether* the object shall exist or not? The next, *when* and *where* it shall begin to exist?' (Hume 2000, 56) When pressed, we would have to admit that the point at which we substitute one for the other is entirely arbitrary. We also have to wonder how something golden-brown and light could come to be from sticky and squishy lumps of dough; for 'Every thing, 'tis said, must have a cause; for if anything wanted a cause, it would produce itself; that is, exist before it existed; which is impossible' (Hume 2000, 56). We do not assume it was a spontaneous event, because 'nothing can never be a cause, no more than it can be something, or equal to two right angles' (Hume 2000, 57). Our language also betrays that it is human nature to look for causes when we believe that we have discovered a relationship. Referring to something as an effect 'necessarily presupposes a cause; effect being a relative term, of which cause is the correlative. But this does not prove, that every being must be preceded by a cause...' (Hume 2000, 58). While we cannot articulate at what point dough is transformed nor how we expect the change to occur, we are still confident that it must be subjected to the heat of the oven to acquire bread. While baking bread is an intentional act, it clearly does not draw justification for each step in the procedure from reason alone. Hume suggests that it is from experience that we draw the notion of necessity.

The missing link between all these steps and the feeling of justification for the procedure of baking bread is our reflection on memories of past attempts. Baking is a skill we typically learn by combining the insights gleaned from observing others and our own trial and error experiments. When the results are displeasing (the center has fallen in our cake, the

cookies are black on the bottom) we tend to compare what sits before us with our previous experiences and plan accordingly: perhaps the next time you might reduce the temperature or add another egg. The justification here – that we can reduce an ingredient to its function (an egg is a binder, an egg adds moisture) – presumes that there is some uniformity to the process of baking. I defer to Ayer as a reminder that our use of language can obscure the line between observations from experience and truth on the matter, '[for] our definitions of things are not immutable. And if experience leads us to entertain a very strong belief that everything of kind A has the property of being a B, we tend to make the possession of this property a defining characteristic of this kind' (Ayer 1936, 135). If we insist that the word 'milk' must only refer to a product that can be extracted from udders of cows, not only does this exclude the readily consumed milks of other animals (goat cheese, anyone?) but also requires us to describe women as cows when they breastfeed their newborns, which is offensive and nonsensical. As more plant-based options appear, we seem to be required to revisit how we define various foods and the functions of ingredients.

Further, we must note here that reason alone cannot produce this insight, for '[from] the mere repetition of past impressions, even to infinity, there will never arise any new original idea, such as that of necessary connexion' (Hume 2000, 62). Whether your attempt to follow a recipe is a success or a failure is irrelevant to your insight into the properties and functions of the ingredients.

Our foregoing method of reasoning will easily convince us, that there can be no demonstrative arguments to prove, that those instances, of which we have had no experience, resemble those, of which we have had experience. We can at least conceive a change in the course of nature; which sufficiently proves, that such a change is not absolutely impossible. (Hume 2000, 62)

We may be asked to complete steps or include ingredients that are not to our liking, such as sifting the dry ingredients, or adding several eggs individually. Fortunately, experience tells us which deviations are forgivable and which ones will result in failure.

### **1.C.iii. -- Custom and Habit**

Custom and habit are the terms used by Hume to describe the associative pairing of events which are derived in an informal, experiential manner. Hume recognizes that humans are the type of creatures who enjoy patterns. We also employ our observations with varying degrees of success. How does this practice operate?

First, we need to acknowledge that these events or experiences do not pair arbitrarily; there is the expectation that the events will develop an association after several pairings, as Pavlov demonstrated when he paired a bell to the feeding of his dogs.

Now as we call every thing custom, which proceeds from a past repetition, without any new reasoning or conclusion, we may establish it as a certain truth, that all the belief, which follows upon any present impression, is deriv'd solely from that origin. (Hume 2000, 72)

Custom is the idea that we have identified a relationship between impressions which seems predictable and lawlike. Ayer notes that our propensity for making predictions is typically purposeful; we like to know what to expect so that we might prepare ourselves for the experience.

What is the purpose of formulating hypotheses? Why do we construct these systems in the first place? The answer is that they are designed to enable us to anticipate the course of our sensations. The function of a system of hypotheses is to warn us

beforehand what will be our experience in a certain field – to enable us to make accurate predictions. (Ayer 1936, 139)

If we are not taking the time to consider the relationships between the two experiences, how do they form a connection? This is especially troubling since the relationship is established without reflection. One might suspect the association is based in prior knowledge, but this requires us to arbitrarily attribute more significance to the similarities than the differences between our past experiences and the present. It is not merely because the relationship mimics one we have already identified, nor because the two events occur so near to each other in time; ‘There is no manner of necessity for the mind to feign any resembling or contiguous objects; and if it feigns such, there is as little necessity for it always to confine itself to the same, without any difference or variation’ (Hume 2000, 76). Certainly, our attention might be drawn to such a resemblance, and the nearest event in time may be our first suspect as to the cause of our experience, but resemblance and contiguity alone cannot produce new ideas such as a necessary connection between impressions; necessity attends causation.

Resemblance and contiguity may not be sufficient for necessary connection, but this is not to say they are inert. These associations offer a wealth of information about our impressions and ideas which can help us anticipate an effect of a newly discovered relationship:

‘betwixt those objects, of which we have had experience, and those, of which we have had none; and [as this requires us to assume the uniformity of nature, the very thing we are trying to demonstrate] therefore ‘tis impossible this presumption can arise from probability’ (Hume 2000, 63).



Many citrus fruits share common features (the pitted, leathery skin is discarded while the flesh is juicy and has a regular wedge shape) which can help you anticipate the similarities between eating oranges and grapefruit. The influence of resemblance and contiguity can also enliven the effects of causal relations: 'Mean while I shall carry my observation a step farther, and assert, that even where the related object is but feign'd, the relation will serve to enliven the idea, and increase its influence' (Hume 2000, 75-76). We need to be cautious about the effect of this enhancement however, as it will attend even false causal relationships. Causation pairs our impressions, and the enhancement of transitioning from one to the next is called belief.

#### **1.C.iv. -- Belief**

Belief is a curious property for Hume; 'I conclude, by an induction which seems to me very evident, that an opinion or belief is nothing but an idea, that is different from a fiction, not in the nature, or in the order of its parts, but in the *manner* of its being conceived' (Hume 2000, 68). Essentially, when we believe an idea to be true, it strikes us in a more intense, vivid, and clear manner than an idea we would consider to be fictitious. Hume suggests that belief functions by imparting force and vivacity into impressions, such that they have the capacity to move us as they become *believed* (that is, until they become our opinion):

'Tis confest, that in all cases, wherein we dissent from any person, we conceive both sides of the question; but as we can only believe one, it evidently follows, that the belief must make some difference betwixt that conception to which we assent, and that from which we dissent. We may mingle, and unite, and separate, and confound, and vary our ideas in a hundred different ways; but till there appears some principle, which fixes one of these different situations, we have in reality no opinion: And this principle, as it plainly makes no addition to our precedent ideas, can only change the *manner* of our conceiving them. (Hume 2000, 66)

A small child, ignorant of the needs of plants, may very well be convinced that the watermelon seed they accidentally swallowed will germinate and grow inside their stomach. A grown adult, conversely, will simply enjoy the piece of fruit without ever entertaining the idea. The difference between the two is that adults have acquired the requisite impressions to understand your meaning when you suggest that swallowing seeds will lead to watermelons growing in their stomachs. Children on the other hand have not, and will sometimes mistake your joke for truth telling, becoming fearful of the imaginary plants growing in their bellies.

Hume distinguishes ideas of memory from those of the imagination by suggesting that those of the imagination are incapable of creating ideas that carry similar force; 'But as it is impossible, that that faculty can ever, of itself, reach belief, 'tis evident, that belief consists not in the nature and order of our ideas, but in the manner of their conception, and in their feeling to the mind' (Hume 2000, 68). However, as cited previously, he says that these ideas of the imagination can counterfeit the effects of belief; 'This is noted in the case of liars; who by the frequent repetition of their lies, come at last to believe and remember them, as realities; custom and habit having in this case, as in many others, the same influence on the mind as nature, and infixing the idea with equal force and vigor' (Hume 2000, 60). We should note, this is very similar to the way Hume describes constant conjunction. Hume notes that belief is obtained when 'any impression becomes present to us, it not only transports the mind to such ideas as are related to it, but likewise communicates to them a share of its force and vivacity' (Hume 2000, 69). The event need not occur or be experienced, we simply need to meet these two conditions: 'To call a belief true, for Hume, is to say that it is correct, that it needs no revision, that it will not be found false, since it 'agrees' with the reality it purports to represent'

(Baier 1994, 62). This could potentially explain unusual associations such as if I developed obsessive compulsive disorder and vividly imagined a knife slicing flesh when I crossed the letter 't', or an eye being punctured when dotting the letter 'i'.

Belief then, attends ideas we repeatedly pair, corresponding better to what is popular than what is possible. It affirms the patterns we identify in our own experiences and those of the people closest to us but is not well equipped to incorporate novelty.

As belief is almost absolutely requisite to the exciting of our passions, so the passions in their turn are very favourable to belief; and not only such facts as convey agreeable emotions, but very often such as give pain, do upon that account become more readily the objects of faith and opinion. (Hume 2000, 82)

If you had grown up believing that the only edible portion of a banana is the soft, off-white fruit, you might find the recipe for chocolate cake published in the IKEA<sup>3</sup> cookbook (which makes use of the peels and not the fruit) quite jarring. How shall we distinguish between the possible, the probable and the merely imagined associations?

### **1.C.iv. -- I Can't Believe It's Not Knowledge!?**

The problems identified in Hume's critique of causation highlight two higher order concepts which seem to be mutually exclusive: object permanence, and causal inference. At the same time, we cannot help but recognize that our everyday thoughts accept both as true. This is a source of concern, for the imagination does not appear to have the faculties to identify its own contradictions, which leaves Hume considering if and how we ought to restrict its use.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ikea.com/ca/en/files/pdf/58/9f/589f2b5d/the-scrapbook.pdf> --- the recipe (on page 155)

We could attempt to filter the products of the imagination. We would have to somehow discern what makes some ideas believable and others fanciful. The process aside, we also need to consider the effects of screening our ideas. This practice is perilous:

One way to do that is to distinguish 'the trivial suggestions of the fancy,' totally undisciplined flights of imagination, from its 'general and more establish'd properties,' calling the latter 'reason' or 'understanding.' But to reject the imagination's trivial suggestions, while accepting its regular or disciplined suggestions, 'wou'd be most dangerous, and attended with the most fatal consequences' (T. 267). (Baier 1994, 9)

In effect, trying to screen our ideas would leave us looking foolish, making mistakes, and struggling to successfully navigate our daily life. Conversely, the rejection of the imagination comes with three major concerns; that it precludes any appeal to science, that the rejection is arbitrary, and that, paradoxically, the justification for rejecting the imagination is itself derived from the imagination.

For, as Hume conclusively showed, no general proposition whose validity is subject to the test of actual experience can ever be logically certain. No matter how often it is verified in practice, there still remains the possibility that it will be confuted on some future occasion. (Ayer 1936, 90)

I believe Ayer would agree with my assessment that the skepticism that Hume is endorsing is not pessimism about the possibility of knowledge but rather a rejection of a rigidity of thought when we have experiences that run counter to our intuitions. When faced with an unexpected outcome, we must proceed with curiosity and examine the circumstances which allow the exception to occur. Baier also advocates for curiosity in the absence of certainty:

For my purposes, its most surprising feature is its resolute adherence to faith in that familiar maxim that a cause is always necessary. Hume here gives us a causal, not a probabilistic, account of probability estimates, and he treats them as estimates of 'the

probability *of causes.*' Chance is treated not as absence but as ignorance of cause. (Baier 1994, 85)

We commonly consider the relationships we have identified as 'knowledge' on the basis that they continue to recur, but we do so with the understanding that they have fallen short of meeting the criteria of certainty. All knowledge acquired by causation is merely probable to some degree or another, but this is not to say it is unreliable. Hume lists a series of criteria<sup>4</sup> which explain why ideas do not connect (or appear not to, at the very least) in an erratic manner. We may not be able to obtain certainty, but these criteria make it obvious that there is a means by which we can mitigate unexpected outcomes. It is as if causes can be nested inside each other like a set of matryoshka dolls, and the void inside each grows successively smaller until you have one solid, little lady who in this case corresponds to one tiny little truth.

### **1.C.v. -- Causation and Morality**

It is important to note at this point that belief for Hume operates in a very similar manner to belief for Stevenson, in that it is restricted to associative content which is open to verification. Adults reject the idea of watermelons growing in their stomachs not only because we can identify reasons to refute the belief, but also because there seems to be no reason to support this idea: we have never seen such a thing with our own eyes, it has never been documented in a serious scientific text, and we know that plants need plenty of sunlight to grow, which you will not find inside a human stomach. When Stevenson states that an attitude identifies the 'relevant beliefs,' he is describing the mental act of identifying all our relevant

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<sup>4</sup> See 1.3.15, Rules by Which to Judge of Causes and Effects, p116

impressions and their various relationships to discern if we can complete a trail from impression A (swallowing a seed) through impression B (germination)... all the way to impression Z (the watermelon grows), our proposed end point.

Stevenson's criticism is that he believes Hume, too, argues that a disagreement in attitude can be resolved by attending to a disagreement in belief. The influence of belief, however, is impacted by the distance between impressions and ideas, strengthening relationships we observe and avail of most frequently. The problem Hume has not addressed is that our experiences are not uniform in nature, and we may be availing of different causal relationships to support our attitudes. Hume's explanation of sympathy also includes this assumed homogeneity of experience and appraisal:

When any affection is infus'd by sympathy, it is at first known only by its effects, and by those external signs in the countenance and conversation, which convey an idea of it. This idea is presently converted into an impression, and acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself, and produce equal emotion, as any original affection. (Hume 2000, 206)

Sympathy, which proceeds by this double relationship, is also the mechanism by which we develop esteem for the rich and powerful, as well as for riches and power: 'here then is a third rebound of the original pleasure; after which 'tis difficult to distinguish the images and reflections, by reason of their faintness and confusion' (Hume 2000, 236). That is, in situations where we might already feel motivated to cooperate, we cannot easily discern egoistic from altruistic motives (see 1.B.ii regarding means/ends distinctions). For this reason, I hereafter exclude from my concern cases where previous cooperative motives may exist, restricting my

interest to those instances where cooperative motives are absent and those cases where the motivation to avoid cooperation may be present.

Stevenson presents Hume's account to us as if Hume were arguing that virtue can be reduced to a single option rather than a range of options oriented towards a 'focal aim':

The hypothesis which we embrace is plain. It maintains that morality is determined by sentiment. It defines virtue to be *whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation*; and vice the contrary. We then proceed to examine a plain matter of fact, to wit, what actions have this influence: We consider all the circumstances, in which these actions agree: And thence endeavour to extract some general observation with regard to these sentiments. If you call this metaphysics, and find any thing abstruse here, you need only conclude, that your turn of mind is not suited to the moral sciences. (Hume 1983, 85)

Stevenson rephrases this statement as:

'X is a virtue' has the same meaning as 'X would be the object of approbation of almost any person who had full and clear factual information about X.' (Stevenson 1944, 274)

Stevenson offers that based on the definition provided by Hume, we could take two persons uninvolved with a dilemma, inform them of the particulars, and they would both agree on how the dilemma should be resolved. Early in the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Hume states:

The notion of morals implies some sentiment common to all mankind, which recommends the same object to general approbation, and makes every man, or most men, agree in the same opinion or decision concerning it. It also implies some sentiment, so universal and comprehensive as to extend to all mankind, and render the actions and conduct, even of the persons the most remote, an object of applause or censure, according as they agree or disagree with that rule of right which is established. (Hume 1983, 74-75)

This implies something about how Hume sees the nature of approbation; not only does it operate in the same way for all people, but it also directs our conduct towards the same goals and with reference to the same values.

This coheres with the way Hume describes the function of belief, which facilitates the causal relationships that we find ourselves engaged with most often.

As we have repeatedly seen in this chapter, those who make normative ethics a natural science have a seeming success only because they give a persuasive definition at the outset. This general rule holds for Hume no less than for other writers, though it is complicated by the assumption discussed above. (Stevenson 1944, 276)

Stevenson interprets Hume's belief as facilitating a particular relationship to the point of downplaying or dismissing other possibilities, which is clear when he suggests that persuasion need only a pleasant definition to be effective at this point. This is because Hume's wording suggests that being informed (sharing the same beliefs) will result in shared attitudes, which is not necessarily the case. We have no reason to believe that people will develop shared values, especially if the discovery of causal relations is dependent on experience.

Two people who disagree about whether schools should provide a free lunch to students, for example, may offer different types of justification. Those in favour may argue that offering a free lunch honours the worth of students as people, prevents bullying based on socioeconomic status, and ensures that each child can study without the distraction of hunger. Those who are opposed may argue that it will require a diversion of already limited funding, or that large volumes of food wastage are inevitable, creating a new problem in place of hungry students. These sources of justification (compassionate and practical, if you will) do not interact



with one another; in fact, anyone could accept all these beliefs and still support or oppose the idea of free lunch for students. We simply cannot reduce disagreements in attitude to differences of belief, nor can we expect to resolve a conflict in attitude by addressing disagreements in belief.

I believe Hume's assumption that our values (moral or otherwise) are shared by other people is mistaken but not entirely groundless. I would suggest that this belief draws synergistic support from his argument that humans are naturally selfish and of limited generosity:

But tho' this generosity must be acknowledg'd to the honour of human nature, we may at the same time remark, that so noble an affection, instead of fitting men for large societies, is almost contrary to them, as the most narrow selfishness. (Hume 2000, 313)

It may very well be the case that our values are informed by experience, and the greater the similarity between our experiences, the greater the similarity between our values. We do not need to have been hit by a car to know that we should not run into the street carelessly; the imagination is more than capable of synthesizing an approximation of how being struck by a vehicle might feel. It is important to recognize that while driving a vehicle might not be of interest to you, a working knowledge of the rules that govern vehicles such as the meanings attributed to traffic lights, street signs and the markings on the road are integral to your safety as a pedestrian. Norms, moral or otherwise, draw from many instances of similar experiences, either from the same person or groups of people, across time. We do all this not just because we were taught these things ourselves, but because we know that some norms exist for the purpose of safety (to avoid burns, or being struck by cars), and to promote cooperation.

## Summary

When we reduce our disagreements to matters of belief, we are operating under the assumption that arriving at the desired attitude is a matter of competence and not one of preference. Emotivists recognize disagreement does not always indicate a miscalculation or a knowledge deficit. Through Hume's description of impressions and causation, we know that while some beliefs are commonly shared, we must remain open to the possibility that others have had experiences that we have not or experiences that are incongruent with our own. The result of these differences is that others may hold beliefs that we do not, yet these same beliefs form and derive justification using the same process as our own.

Even if we somehow 'correct' other people's beliefs, we have yet another obstacle in resolving disagreements: these same beliefs may also establish different attitudes. Our attitudes are not formed solely by deriving the net sum of our beliefs; we also reflect on what we value. It would be a mistake to assume that all people share the same values and in the same order of priority (or that values have such a rigid hierarchy in the first place). Goodness is not an objective standard against which we measure all action; goodness is a matter of preference, like the perfect shade of toast or cup of tea. Even attitudes which lie outside established norms are legitimate because they are informed by beliefs that are also legitimate.

Emotivists emphasize where our disagreements originate because they recognize these assertions of correctness and their problems. While we certainly should be correcting our mistakes, we should also acknowledge that sometimes what appears to be a mistake to one individual is another's preference. Stevenson acknowledges this when he argues that on its

own, the imperative function of expressing our attitudes is insufficient to persuade others. He recognized that in the face of a command one desires to disobey, identifying beliefs to support or justify noncompliance is quite a simple task; ultimately, it is the emotive component that requests we adopt the speaker's perspective, which genuinely persuades. For this reason, Stevenson argues that normative discussions should concern how different values relate to one another rather than disputing which values are most significant or correct. Having these discussions promotes understanding how different people and their choices are interrelated, and successfully actualizing all types of values depends on cooperation and consideration for others.

## Chapter 2: Empathy

How do we make use of normative concepts if we do not assume that others will share our values? The answer lies in shifting perspective outside of ourselves; instead of asking how to convince others to care about our problems we need to ask ourselves, how do our problems impact the goals of other people? Recall that Stevenson indicated successful persuasion is not about making a particular focal aim a priority above others but indicating how they are related. We are not going to succeed in convincing someone to abandon themselves for our cause, nor should that be our goal; I am after all, seeking voluntary beneficence. Before we can address that, we need to ask, what is important to those around me? To understand the response and make this discussion intelligible, we need a way to communicate about our values which is clear. From there, persuasion proceeds by describing how our goals are interrelated. These are the priorities of Chapter 2.

### 2.A. -- Schroeder and Bifurcated Semantics

Emotivists deny that moral words are subject to truth conditions on account of their vagueness. Stevenson suggested that knowing what a moral word was about did not give us enough information to know the meaning of a moral sentence, and that we would learn more by attending to the intentions of the speaker. Unfortunately, meaningful communication can become challenging when we reject propositions, which is antithetical to our goal of learning from the experiences of others. These problems are not easily resolved by availing of

propositions in a weaker, deflationary manner. After identifying several of the problems that nondescriptivists face, Schroeder suggests that adapting our understanding of propositions is the most appropriate means of escaping these pitfalls. He also offers us his theory of bifurcated semantics, which provides a method to discuss the two roles he believes propositions typically play: the communication of representational contents (which indicate things like properties) and the issue of an imperative (a desire, wish, or command). Schroeder's bifurcated semantics does treat the descriptive and evaluative functions as if they were discrete processes. This is possibly incongruent with Stevenson's 'persuasive definitions,' wherein words that are typically considered nonmoral will acquire moral (and sometimes imperative) significance. I will offer a potential solution after discussing Schroeder's theory.

Schroeder identifies five problems for nondescriptivist theories (including emotivism) which result from rejecting propositions. These are not problems which can be resolved by speaking about propositions in a merely deflationary manner, 'their solution requires propositions to do real theoretical work, and therefore the problems themselves illustrate some of the important reasons why it is worth positing propositions in the first place' (Schroeder 2011, 409).

The first of these problems is compositionality. If we accept propositions and we understand what a given proposition means, we can also readily anticipate what the negation of that proposition would be and how complex sentences which include that proposition might be formed. The distinction between belief and attitude is collapsed, and a statement such as 'I think stealing is not wrong' can be understood as the negation of 'I think stealing is wrong.' Without the use of propositions, statements which indicate the negation of an attitude (i.e., I

think stealing is not wrong) leave us unclear about the true feelings of the person to whom the statement is attributed, in the same way that a statement like 'the yellow Starburst are not my favourite' does not indicate which flavour you do prefer. If, as Schroeder suggests, this is commonly interpreted by nondescriptivists as a state of toleration, then this would also suggest that certain conditions exist which could make the act tolerable.

The articulation of these conditions brings us to the second of Schroeder's difficulties, the problem of quantification and identity. Without propositions, it seems impossible to specify (or identify) what conditions would cause us to tolerate an act which we typically view as unacceptable, and over what range (or quantity) the conditions render the act tolerable. If we were to try to use propositions in the same deflated manner by which we identified the act as 'tolerable,' this results in a vagueness when communicating the limits of our toleration. Clarity about your boundaries is important because it explains the difference in one's reaction to 'I stole that to survive' with reference to a sandwich from a gas station versus 'I stole that to survive' with reference to thirty thousand dollars that you defrauded from senior citizens.

Schroeder notes that moral and non-moral beliefs share many properties. We can have varying levels of confidence in our beliefs. We cannot hold beliefs with incompatible properties, such as 'even when you are alone, driving through a red light at an intersection is wrong' and 'driving through the red light when you are alone at an intersection is a harmless transgression.' Further, both moral and descriptive beliefs have an important role in our motivations; if we believe that stealing is wrong, we will feel aversely towards stealing and feel motivated to avoid stealing. Descriptivist arguments make use of propositions to explain these similarities: they assert that in propositional statements, the act of believing functions as a common core,

whether it is a belief that lemons are sour or a belief that murder is wrong. While descriptivists can argue that believing is simply a verb that accepts both moral and nonmoral complements, nondescriptivists have described these common features as a coincidence, which is underwhelming, to put it mildly. The problem does not end there; these same similarities are also explained as a coincidence in the case of moral and nonmoral hopes, desires, and other types of attitudes. Recognizing that the problems identified by Schroeder are interrelated, I cautiously suggest that the difference lies in the *types of knowledge* required to support nonmoral statements (such as 'believing that the grass is green') and moral statements (such as 'believing that stealing is wrong') is the nuance which nondescriptivists struggle to articulate. Is stealing categorically wrong from a moral perspective, regardless of the circumstances, or are we willing to *tolerate* (recall the problems of quantification and identity) the theft of food by a person who is on the verge of starving to death?

It is a challenge to identify the full implications of the final problem that Schroeder identifies as it pertains to Stevenson's emotivism. This is the problem of modals, which typically apply to propositional statements:

A general way of putting the problem about modals, is that since a nondescriptivist theory about morality (for example) does not identify the meaning of any moral sentence, 'M', with that of any nonmoral sentence, 'D', it should not identify the meaning of any modal applied to a moral sentence, as in 'it might be that M' with the meaning of the same modal applied to any nonmoral sentence, as in 'it might be that D'. (Schroeder 2013, 416)

If this is the case, a modal applied to a moral sentence should produce a different effect than that same modal applied to a nonmoral sentence, indicating that the meaning is never attributed to the modal itself. I do not believe this interpretation is well suited for Stevenson's

emotivism. Stevenson suggests that we learn more about what moral words mean by the way they are used than we do by what they are about or by knowing the ideas they seem to reference. He also suggests that beliefs can be 'demi-proofed,' which could require us to avail of propositions in this deflationary manner previously described, so I would suggest that the most appropriate interpretation would be that the vagueness he has attributed to moral words is exclusive to the words themselves or at most, the sentences in which they are used.

Schroeder acknowledges these problems and suggests that we accept propositions, but with the understanding that they are serving two different functions simultaneously. On the one hand, propositions interact with moral content to guide our attitudes and our actions. When propositions are viewed as interacting with descriptive content, they inform us of connections between our ideas. His own theory of bifurcated semantics suggests how we might go about recognizing the dual nature of propositions. He distinguishes the roles as such:

In what follows I will therefore reserve 'proposition' as a name for the entities which are the objects of attitudes and the bearers of truth and falsity, and will use 'representational content' for the entities, whatever they are, which mark out distinctions in reality, are associated with metaphysical commitment, and are the appropriate objects of excluded middle. (Schroeder 2013, 420-421)

For Schroeder, belief forms a double relation (a common core) between propositions and representational contents; that is, it relates to both groups of entities but in different ways.

Insofar as belief is a relation to propositions, this is how we discern guidance from our interaction with things in the world, by desire or other means. Perhaps you have uncovered your barbeque after a long winter, and you believe a baked potato would pair well with your expertly seared steak. As you approach the pantry, a foul smell strikes you; you open the door



cautiously and spot a mass of roots sitting where you expect to see potatoes. This is the second relationship; your ideal potato (firm and rootless) has been replaced with one better suited for composting (smelly and squishy). Your decision not to consume this tuber is again a product of the first relation (sprouted potatoes are unsuitable for eating, therefore I should not eat this one).

Schroeder's theory of propositions is reminiscent of Hume's bundle theory, wherein an object may not be identified distinctly from its properties. If that is the case, what we are debating is whether our perception of a particular quality corresponds to the nature of the substance or is merely expressed by some relation to it. He builds on this idea with the concept of bifurcated attitude semantics, which suggests that sometimes our agreement in attitude is the result of different beliefs. The basic component of his theory he calls *being for*, which 'is conceived of as an attitude toward properties that an agent might have – for example, the property of disapproving of murder, or the property of performing an inference' (Schroeder 2013, 424). When we believe that pairs of properties seem to present with a degree of entailment (tennis balls are *green* and *fuzzy*) we can consider this a proposition. It may be the case that these propositions can be combined with others (tennis balls are *bouncy* and *hollow*) in a multitude of ways, such that properties imply one another (tennis balls are *fuzzy* and *hollow*). Schroeder dubs this *bifurcated attitude semantics* for the fact that this implied, compound proposition is derived from (at least) two others.

When we discuss morality strictly in terms of our sense of approval or disapproval for certain acts or outcomes, we may mistake the congruence of our final attitude for a proper agreement when in fact, the attitude does not account for our unshared beliefs. For you,

murder may inherently possess the properties of being disapproved of and inciting a desire to avoid committing a murder, and you may outwardly express or verbalize this when prompted. Perhaps I do not perceive murder to have the inherent property of being disapproved of, and yet I actively avoid committing murders due to other beliefs, such as the belief that the punishment for murdering someone is a type of pain I cannot endure.

This coheres well with Stevenson's conception of intrinsic and extrinsic value, which allows the possibility that common goals may be viewed either as ends in themselves or as means to further ends by involved parties. I do however have an objection to Schroeder's theory which stems from what he identifies as its virtue,

Which is that it allows us to maintain the distinction between propositions and representational contents. According to this theory, all beliefs consist in two states of being for, which have the functional role of leading the agent to acquire some property – that is, in the broadest sense, to do something. (Schroeder 2013, 425)

The idea that propositions and representational content are discrete is not entirely compatible with the emotivist notion that descriptive and evaluative speech have a reciprocal 'shaping' effect on one another. I am specifically thinking of Stevenson's concept of 'persuasive definitions,' words which essentially serve to incite an attitudinal change from an emotional rather than a logical or argumentative ground: 'It depends on the sheer, direct emotional impact of words – on emotive meaning, rhetorical cadence, apt metaphor, stentorian, stimulating, or pleading tones of voice, dramatic gestures, care in establishing rapport with the hearer or audience, and so on' (Stevenson 1944, 139). If I were to utter across the dinner table, 'you eat French fries with gravy *and* ketchup? That is absolutely criminal!' I would not in fact be indicating a legal violation committed by your palate, rather I would be expressing my

disapproval of the imagined flavour combination. By using the word 'criminal' to describe your choice to pair these condiments, I am attempting to persuade you that your choice of condiments warrants disapproval as a matter of principle, hoping it will discourage the practice. There is no intention expressed to change the descriptive meaning of the word 'criminal,' and we find the effect produced by playing on how the word is more typically used.

I believe many nonmoral words have acquired a moral property in this manner, and Schroeder does not seem to account for such in his theory. In racial or gender stereotyping discourse, describing a piece of artwork with notable African inspiration, e.g., as 'primitive,' carries negative connotations; yet the word itself is not moral. Using the framework of bifurcated semantics in conjunction with persuasive definitions, however, we can identify the distinctions between descriptive speech (as it pertains to representational contents) and propositions, moral or otherwise. In such instances, the intended meaning of the descriptive term offered is that of a more explicitly evaluative equivalent (in this case, 'primitive' becomes something like 'crude,' 'unskilled,' or 'unrefined'). This practice would indicate that few words, if any, are purely descriptive or purely moral, suggesting the distinction is socially constructed and not natural. While Ayer seemed to believe such a feat was impossible, this could potentially provide a means to discuss the properties of moral virtues if they exist dynamically rather than statically in the world:

Whatever question their authors may think that they are discussing, what they are really discussing most of the time is the question 'What makes a proposition true or false?' And this is a loose way of expressing the question 'With regard to any proposition p, what are the conditions in which p (is true) and what are the conditions in which not-p?' In other words, it is a way of asking how propositions are validated. (Ayer 1936, 124)

In a similar vein, Schroeder's theory also provides us the opportunity to begin discussing how representational contents may acquire significance in a moral dilemma (that there is some difference, e.g. between sending a trolley hurling toward one stranger to save five others and sending it hurling towards your own child to save five strangers.) Without providing the words to express the significance of something like a prior relationship, we may be forced to accept terms which neither follow from our beliefs nor align with our values. If moral properties are real and dynamic, then we should not be discounting the context in which they are encountered; to do so would be nothing short of impaired judgement.

## **2.B. -- Edith Stein and the Process of Empathy**

While developing her own theory of empathy, Stein noted two common themes in the theories proposed by her contemporaries. First, that we could somehow infer how others will react by examining the details of the dilemma; this presumes a type of uniform relation between an experience and a response. Second, that knowing how you or I would respond to an experience is sufficient information to know how other people would respond; this presumes uniformity in our motivations. Neither of these assumptions are justified. Stein herself offers a solution to these shortcomings which requires us to investigate the relationship between causation and motivation. Her theory of empathy allows us to both have knowledge of the world and still experience it as individuals, which is why communicating both our ideas and ideals is vitally important if we hope to foster understanding or cooperation.

Stein explored several theories of empathy put forth by her contemporaries and identified their limitations by producing counterexamples and identifying flaws in their logical structure. Consider how empathy is described using the theory of analogy: 'There is evidence of outer and of inner perception, and we can only get at the facts that these perceptions furnish by means of inferences' (Stein 1989, 26). This theory operates under the assumption that since I know what would make me feel happy (or angry or scared etc.,) insofar as you and I share commonalities (human, adult, cognitively well etc.,) I can expect you would respond similarly. Stein points out that the consciousness of others is simply ignored here, which is contrary to our goal. This theory has no mechanism to cope with novelty, in that we could never hope to understand an experience that does not resemble one of our own.

Consider next the theory of association, identifying how the outward signs of expression relate to the inward experience of emotion: '[The] feeling is now experienced not as our own, but as foreign, because (1) it faces us as an object, (2) it is not motivated by our own previous experiences, and (3) it is not expressed by a gesture' (Stein 1989, 24). She provides us with the example of a sign to which we have attached a meaning, someone stamping their feet<sup>5</sup>, and suggests that we might assume this person is fuming with anger, as we might imagine a time when we stamped our own feet in such a way as an expression of our own anger:

I see someone stamp his feet. I remember how I myself once stamped my feet at the same time as my previous fury is presented to me. Then I say to myself, 'this is how furious he is now.' Here the other's fury itself is not given but its existence is inferred. By an intuitive representation, my own fury, I seek to draw it near. By contrast, empathy posits being immediately as a perceived act, and it reaches its object directly without representation. Thus the theory of association also fails to reveal the genesis of empathy. (Stein 1989, 24)

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<sup>5</sup> The theory of association is perhaps the most like Hume's conception of sympathy (see page 46).

The problem here is that we have not considered the experience of the other person: the visual cue has merely reminded us of our own experience. An empathic process would have offered an explanation as to how this person came to feel anger, and why they express their anger by stamping their feet as opposed to another means such as shouting or swearing.

Going one step further, we could consider a more ambiguous sign, as Stein does; a flushed, sweaty face. 'I blush in anger, for shame, or from exertion. In all these cases I have the same perception of my 'blood rising into my face'' (Stein 1989, 53). When we consider the cause of this sign, we could ascribe this to anger, exertion, the experience of pain, or even a spicy meal. All these explanations are potentially justifiable and yet none of them are confirmed by the facial expression alone. This is not very helpful, and it is easy to imagine how we could misread such an expression.

Slightly removed from this is the theory of imitation, proposed by Theodor Lipps. He asserts that we can successfully empathize with another person when we imagine ourselves into their position, but Stein demonstrates how that is simply not the case. Stein demonstrates a significant shortcoming of the theory of imitation as she explores Lipps' example of the acrobat and the observer: 'I do not actually go through his motions but *quasi...* But neither is what 'inwardly' corresponds to the movements of the body, the experience that 'I move,' primordial; it is non-primordial for me' (Stein 1989, 16). That is to say, the experience proceeds by means of our own associations, not the relations of the person with whom we are empathizing. We might believe that swinging from great heights is effortless because the performer gives the appearance that this is so, but we do not have knowledge of the many

hours of practice (let alone the mistakes and injuries that happen during that time) that this person has endured to obtain this level of skill. Further, if we are making the effort to dissolve the boundary between self and other as proposed by Lipps then we have no way of knowing the problem exists. In this way, our act of imitation is more like constructing a puppet which resembles your impression of that person than becoming that person themselves. Ultimately, we are still simply affirming our own judgments and not attending to the experience of others.

Her observations make it clear that we cannot simply reason our way through empathy; even when we agree in attitude, it may be for different reasons, as our own perspective is simply one of many. Now that the theories of her contemporaries have clarified what empathy is not, Stein offers us several helpful comparisons to understand the structure of a true empathic experience. For instance, she offers that when we recall an event in our memory, the actual experience of remembering is primordial to us but the experience being remembered is in fact given to us; that is to say, regardless how vividly we can recall that day at the beach or the birth of our first child, we have not convinced ourselves that we are suddenly reliving that moment. The empathized experience is much the same in that it would be more appropriate to call ourselves a witness than the subject of that experience. In contrast to memories and fantasies, however, the details of empathized experiences do not issue from the self, the 'I,' but from the other.

This is the first step to understanding how it is possible that two people could share an experience yet disagree in their perception of the event. It is here that the distinction between mechanical (or physical) and psychic causality becomes important because it is by this means that knowledge of the world becomes possible. Physical causality is the more familiar variety,

and it governs bodies in the natural world; relationships such as gravity, momentum and chemical reactions like photosynthesis are all governed by physical causality. Psychic causality governs the experiences of living bodies: these are governed by forces she calls 'life feelings.'

'Life feelings,' or 'feeling states' include sensual feelings, general feelings, and moods. While a sensual feeling may have an identifiable cause, general feelings and moods are non-somatic in nature. Sensual feelings are localized (such as the soreness of a stubbed toe) while general feelings fill one's body (think about how much harder everything feels when you are exhausted). Moods, by contrast, are a special kind of general feeling with no place in the body: they range from 'seeing the world through rose-coloured glasses' and 'having a bad case of the blues,' and everything in between.

Feeling states can influence the properties we identify when we interact with the world around us: When you are overtired, your partner's nail biting or knuckle cracking can become irritating when you typically do not notice it happening. When you are overjoyed, those habits probably will not register as you share the source of your elation. This is to say, feeling states have a role to play in the properties which come to the foreground, but we can turn our attention to other details by choice or when prompted; these map well onto both the descriptive function of propositions proposed by Schroeder, as well as the 'beliefs' of Stevenson's emotivism. When it comes to psychic causation, we can attribute differences in how we describe events to the influence of life feelings.

While the aforementioned are all body-bound feelings, Stein also describes 'spiritual feelings,' which have an accidental psychic component. Stein herself notes that while many of



these feelings are described using idioms, we can abstract away the body and still comprehend the meaning in its entirety. This is complicated by the fact that spiritual feelings can present simultaneously with general feelings, as when your 'heart is in your throat,' and you find yourself filled with a sense of anticipation or dread. I find it useful here to note that these feelings are often connected to judgments (or 'attitudes,' as Stevenson dubbed them,) as when "my head spins for joy' so that I do not know what I am doing and do pointless things' (Stein 1989, 50).

It is important to note that two distinctions are being made at this point; between physical and psychic causality, and between the feelings associated with psychic causality and the feelings associated with motivation. As previously stated, physical causality is the more familiar form; it governs bodies in the world in the uniform, predictable manner that Hume has noted humans find pleasing. There is also psychic causality; it is influenced by feeling states, such as sluggishness and vigor, and this shapes our perception of events by determining what details will garner our attention and what qualities we will associate with them. This is what accounts for the difference between having a fixation on evading slow-moving traffic as you hurry to the airport, in contrast to the importance you place on good music as you cruise to the cabin for a weekend getaway.

Finally, there is the distinction between feeling states that affect our perception of the world, and those which impact the interpretation of our experiences. These are the feelings which are connected to motivation; that is to say, spiritual feelings serve the second function of propositions proposed by Schroeder, which is to provide some type of imperative: 'A feeling by its meaning motivates an expression, and this meaning defines the limits of a range of possible

expressions just as the meaning of a part of a sentence prescribes its possible formal and material complements' (Stein 1989, 96). This distinction is important because spiritual feelings are not connected with causal relationships: A feeling of fright does not indicate having had a particular experience, nor does it necessitate a panicked response. We can also express curiosity about why a particular thing causes us to feel afraid, or approach the source of our fear with defiance, but we would not identify this relationship as a source of comfort.

It is important that we maintain the distinction between feelings which offer motivation from those which offer descriptive insights, the latter of which function in causal relationships. It is on this basis that Stein objects to Max Scheler's suggestion that our experiences continue to shape each other in the form of a continuous chain of events, because this fact precludes the possibility of 'same causes, same effects' from being applied to the psychic domain the same way it operates in the physical domain. The most everyday example of this would be buyer's remorse: just after committing to a large purchase like a new car, we find a more desirable option that leaves us filled with regret. Two feelings present here. The first is descriptive (this new vehicle has luxury features our purchase may not, or perhaps a lower price point) and the second is evaluative (the regret of committing to our purchase instead of this new car). Stein argues that this feeling of regret does not linger, but the memory of that negative experience will be reproduced and exert influence the next time we find ourselves searching for a new vehicle, causing us to be more diligent to evade that same negative feeling.

How do these different distinctions pertain to empathy? First, the accounts of others can serve as an affirmation of our own experiences, which is ultimately how we gain knowledge of the world around us. Our knowledge of the world is fleshed out in a vivid and rich way when

we engage with people in a variety of feeling states because they may notice things that we do not, allowing our descriptions of objects and events to complement each other:

But this possibility is demonstrated as soon as I cross these boundaries by the help of empathy and obtain the same world's second and third appearance which are independent of my perception. Thus empathy as the basis of intersubjective experience becomes the condition of possible knowledge of the existing outer world, as Husserl and also Royce present it. (Stein 1989, 64)

While feelings provide us with information about the different ways an event is perceived, by studying the motivations they can induce in others, we also learn about their values. While a statement like 'I love a good tomato, don't you?' seems unambiguous on the surface, ultimately the goodness of that tomato depends on many factors, such as how we intend to consume it. You may describe many qualities of this tomato: a particular colour, shape, size and firmness. For a sandwich, an heirloom tomato which is large, textured and very juicy might be ideal, while I may also be picturing a type of cherry tomato, recalling a satisfying snack that included a small pot of ranch dressing.

This shows us that value is indicated by the context, not known *a priori*, and why Schroeder's bifurcated semantics is quite useful. It allows us to discuss these differences in perception and how they relate to our desired goal: this is more likely to lead us to success than assuming that our goals are shared and that our meaning is already clear to other people. When we empathize with others, we will experience instances in which the values of others feel familiar and recognizable. We will also experience times when the values of others are closed off, seemingly unintelligible to us. Further, we may recognize that someone else shares a value with us, but at a different level of priority. Two people may both value honesty and kindness,

for example, but there are times when hearing the truth can be painful. While you may choose to tell the truth, believing it is wrong to willingly mislead others, I may choose to tell a lie if I believe that telling the truth will only cause hurt feelings.

In some ways, many people in relationships already engage in a crude form of this practice when they develop code words or phrases to indicate 'I am no longer enjoying this, and I would like to stop/leave this party/etc.'. When we struggle to agree on the proper course of action, and it becomes clear that we are interacting with those who do not share our goals, persuasion is important. We can now communicate the ways in which our experience differs from those close to us. Successfully navigating those differences can look like a compromise; 'I know you said that you enjoy being close to the stage, but I am five feet tall and asthmatic. I will spend the night with my neck craned and wheezing from the artificial smoke; can we please book tickets even a few rows back?' We can acknowledge the values of others while asking for accommodation at the same time.

## **2.C. -- Hume Explains Moral Motivation**

If we compare Hume's account of the will with that of Edith Stein, there is a notable overlap; both argue that our motivation is a product of our sentiments. While Stein continues to say that our actions are not determined by our emotions, but instead a complex relationship between our feelings, our values and our desires, Hume offers a more straightforward account: we pursue our pleasures and evade our discomforts. His theory of the will plays a pivotal role in his understanding of morality as Hume argues against the idea of *a priori* moral concepts,

favouring the influence of moral sentiments to guide our conduct. I think a hybrid position between these two accounts accurately describes the emotivist position; moral words are vague, serving as something like a landmark towards which we ambulate without the expectation of arrival. They are approachable from many angles because justice, goodness, honesty, etc., have meanings attributable not only to the speaker's intentions, but also the context in which we encounter them.

Hume describes the will as the force which connects the experience of perception with the experience of motivation: "Tis obvious, that when we have the prospect of pain or pleasure from any object, we feel a consequent emotion of aversion or propensity, and are carry'd to avoid or embrace what will give us this uneasiness or satisfaction' (Hume 2000, 266). With a touch more clarity and concision, we see the singer Ariana Grande expressing a similar sentiment in the music video on YouTube for her hit song 'Seven Rings' (2019): 'I see it, I like it, I want it, I got it.' Hume notes that while reason brings awareness to the abstract relationships between our ideas, they are not the source of our motivation. Much like Stein's body bound feelings, or Schroeder's representational contents, we can say they offer descriptive information (such as how many coins one possesses). Rather, it is the passionate feeling that arises within us as we consider what causal relationships are relevant to our circumstances which directs our activity.

This is not to say that reason has no role in our motivations: in the pursuit of our pleasures, our passions make instrumental use of the relationships that reason lays bare for us. It is for this reason that Hume describes reason as a 'slave' to the passions. Further, Hume says

that reason cannot contradict the will, but he does offer two circumstances where reason may influence its course:

*First*, When a passion, such as hope or fear, grief or joy, despair or security, is founded on the supposition of the existence of objects, which really do not exist. *Secondly*, when in exerting any passion in action, we choose means insufficient for the design'd end, and deceive ourselves in our judgment of causes and effects. (Hume 2000, 267)

If reason indicates our methods will not lead to the satisfaction we seek, or if reason indicates that our goal is not truly the satisfaction that we believe it to be, then our will would redirect our motivation on a new path or towards a new goal respectively. This is different than reason producing a new motivation of its own, which would have no connection to the will and be important but undesired, or reason redirecting the will.

Hume revisits his discussion of the will when exploring morality because he believes them to be intimately related. Hume is arguing against a particular characterization of rationally derived moral value:

[T]hat there are eternal fitnesses and unfitnesses of things, which are the same to every rational being who considers them; that the immutable measures of right and wrong impose an obligation, not only on human creatures, but also on the deity himself. (Hume 2000, 294)

Rationality has an influence on our motivations yet it is insufficient. Morality is not the product of reason as reason is only instrumental. Arguments suggesting that reason is the source of our moral knowledge assume that we are motivated by moral knowledge exclusively. These arguments might be able to explain the way we act on impulses we recognize as morally wrong, but they do not account for our motivation: children who have been told they cannot have

sweets before dinner sometimes sneak away with treats to eat in a hiding place to avoid detection. Conversely, reason cannot explain why knowing the morally right thing to do is not sufficient to motivate us to act accordingly, which explains the nature of problems like littering, wherein we minimize our contributions (it is just a bottle/chip packet/etc.) to massage away our guilt.

We must also avoid mistaking moral knowledge for conformity to reason because these are distinct properties. Hume's arguments here are echoed by emotivist logic: 'A feature of this theory, which is seldom recognized by its advocates, is that it makes statements of value unverifiable. For it is notorious that what seems intuitively certain to one person may seem doubtful, or even false, to another' (Ayer 1936, 156). That our actions are congruent with reason is not sufficient justification for praise; this was Ayer's charge against moral intuitionists: those who believe that they can correctly identify the most relevant virtue but cannot produce an adequate demonstration as to how they determined this to be the case. We could just as easily assess the same dilemma and identify different properties and values by means of reason. This was noted by Stein: the 'genetic' theories of empathy proposed by her contemporaries rested on an ungrounded assumption that our response was somehow predetermined by the circumstances of the dilemma, as a gene is expressed in a trait. That is to say, these theories of empathy also rested on the assumption that what one believes is significant, all will find equally significant, again with no justification. As Stein indicated, we can share common values without holding them to the same level of priority, and we will also encounter people who do not share our values at all.

Hume is not alone when he concludes that we cannot use reason to define the boundaries of moral good and evil, nor indicate how morality is inherently compelling.

Thus it will be impossible to fulfil the *first* condition requisite to the system of eternal rational measures of right and wrong; because it is impossible to show those relations, upon which such a distinction may be founded: And 'tis as impossible to fulfil the *second* condition; because we cannot prove a priori, that these relations, if they really existed and were perceiv'd, wou'd be universally forcible and obligatory. (Hume 2000, 300)

There is no reason to believe that all people will perceive the same qualities and attribute the same significance to them when faced with a moral dilemma; as Stein indicates, our perceptions are influenced by feeling states, and our motivations are influenced by factors such as our values and past experiences. As Schroeder's bifurcated semantics helps us articulate, even when we see the situation exactly as others do, we can still draw out multiple (even conflicting) imperatives from those same details.

What hope do we have for cooperation with others if our knowledge of morality is so amorphous and vague? Here, I believe we can also count on Hume for guidance. He indicates that in all moral judgments, the common theme is not the reasoning which supports it but the sentiment which accompanies the judgment.

It lies in yourself, not in the object. So that when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it. Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compar'd to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind. (Hume 2000, 301).

Our moral judgments are feelings. When we use moral words, we are describing not whether an act is in congruence with reason, but whether an act is in congruence with a feeling that we



have come to know by a particular name (justice, temperance, etc.). This is what Stevenson meant when he said that moral words are vague; they have the meaning that we intend, rather than something fixed and eternal. Moral debate then asks us whether the feeling expressed in a moral statement is agreeable, to whom it applies, and what consequences will attend our choice to pursue (or evade) this sentiment. It is here that Ayer was ready to give up on moral truths because these terms do not have rigid, fixed definitions with demonstrable proofs, but I believe this is preferable because it allows us as thinking, feeling beings to govern our own experiences.

This is the type of moral normativity that is responsive to new information as Stevenson had described it. Consider the response to an unforeseen harm arising from a new form of technology, such as the drug thalidomide. This drug was marketed to treat morning sickness in pregnancy and proved to be highly teratogenic, causing thousands of people to be born with severe deformities, many of which were not compatible with life. In response to this, we can identify the expression of disapproval and redirection of motivation: thalidomide is no longer used for this purpose, there are safe alternatives for morning sickness, and we now have more robust standards for developing, testing, distributing and prescribing medications.

The medical community did not abandon the desire to alleviate morning sickness. Rather, they recognized that this desire could not be pursued at the expense of pursuing another; the desire to improve both successful deliveries and the overall health of newborns. This indicates that becoming aware of how our actions impact others is potentially sufficient to influence our behaviour, which can be an important consideration if we wish to persuade others to become more considerate or altruistic.

## 2.D. -- Gilligan, Nussbaum, and Acting Compassionately

Given that we now understand the process of empathy as well as how to improve the success of our bids to be persuasive, does this mean that we can convince people to act in ways which are immoral? Are we at risk of convincing others to compromise themselves and their values? I would say that truly depends on how you define compromise; if you mean, 'act in a way that is not entirely self-regarding,' then yes, I think the pursuit of moral goodness often demands this from us, and it is quite reasonable to do so. If you mean, 'act in a manner which contradicts one's core values or beliefs,' I would say no, to ask this of oneself or others is neither good nor reasonable. Learning the difference between the two requires that we learn to integrate the information provided by our emotions and our intellect, rather than understand them to exist in conflict. Stevenson argued that our beliefs inform our attitudes, and Hume tells us that while reason cannot redirect the will, it can influence the path our passions choose to take. When we do this, we see moral values are best understood as dynamic concepts which show signs of changing and maturing, like a fine wine, and not as the picture-perfect fruit which rots when left untouched.

Stein has made it clear that our moral values should not be assumed to be universally shared, indicating that they are cultivated by experience: 'Because they originate in this source, strivings have a secondary depth and constitutive significance for personality, namely, if personality's source first becomes visible in striving' (Stein 1989, 106). Carol Gilligan agrees that our values do not develop in a vacuum; it begins at birth, '[g]iven that for both sexes the

primary caretaker in the first three years of life is typically female, the interpersonal dynamics of gender identity formation are different for boys and girls' (Gilligan 2003, 7) and continues in the manner we socialize our children.

Traditional girls' games like jump rope and hopscotch are turn-taking games, where competition is indirect since one person's success does not necessarily signify another's failure. Consequently, disputes requiring adjudication are less likely to occur...

Thus Lever extends and corroborates the observations of Piaget in his study of the rules of the game, where he finds boys becoming through childhood increasingly fascinated with the legal elaboration of rules and the development of fair procedures for adjudicating conflicts, a fascination that, he notes, does not hold for girls. (Gilligan 2003, 10)

From the beginning, girls are encouraged to play games that promote cooperation, sharing, and turn taking, while boys learn to play games which are procedural, and rule based. As such, boys learn to defer to these same rules and procedures to resolve disputes, and girls learn to prioritize maintaining their relationships over winning.

Through play, boys learn to value rules as a means to facilitate both competition and cooperation, but the games girls play teach them to prioritize connections and friendship. This is partly because the games girls play (e.g. hop scotch, jump rope) may not require direct competition. For this reason, girls may define their success without comparing themselves to others because they also recognize individual differences. This is a theme explored by Nussbaum in her theory of capabilities as well, when she recognizes that social contract theories often assume that we approach from a position of mutual benefit: 'These classical theorists all assumed that their contracting agents were men who were roughly equal in capacity, and capable of productive economic activity' (Nussbaum 2006, 14). This assumption

precludes people who have disabilities or are elderly on the grounds that they may not be able to equally contribute or may not be able to recognize when something is to their advantage. The theory of capabilities is a mechanism which attempts to account for this disparity, and it is important because precluding exceptional circumstances, we will all find ourselves in a position of receiving benefits from society which we cannot reciprocate.

Gilligan identifies similar problems as Amy and Jake, two 11-year-old children asked to consider the dilemma of Heinz. Heinz' wife is gravely ill and without a particular drug, will surely die. Heinz cannot afford to pay for this drug, and the druggist refuses to lower his price. When the children are asked, 'should Heinz steal the drug?' we are presented with two very different ways of thinking about the world. Jake perceives the problem as one of rights.

Considering the moral dilemma to be 'sort of like a math problem with humans,' he sets it up as an equation and proceeds to work out the solution. Since his solution is rationally derived, he assumes that anyone following reason would arrive at the same conclusion and thus that a judge would also consider stealing the right thing for Heinz to do. (Gilligan 2003, 26)

Concluding that Heinz' wife has a greater right to life than the druggist does to profit, Jake decides that it is permissible to steal the medicine. Amy in turn recognizes the choice she is being asked to make and expresses dissatisfaction with the shortcomings of both alternatives; she asserts that Heinz' wife should not have to die and that it would be wrong for Heinz to steal on her behalf. While this may be construed as ambivalence or an indication that Amy lacks the concepts of rights and fairness, Gilligan asserts that Amy in fact sees the dilemma differently:

Seeing in the dilemma not a math problem with humans but a narrative of relationships that extends over time, Amy envisions the wife's continuing need of her husband and

the husband's continuing concern for his wife and seeks to respond to the druggist's need in a way that would sustain rather than sever connection. (Gilligan 2003, 28)

By offering suggestions like taking out a loan, repaying the druggist after the fact, and making it clear to the druggist that his wife was in dire need, Amy perceives the problem as one of relationships, not rights. When prompted 'should Heinz steal the drug?' she understands this to mean, 'will stealing this drug accomplish or frustrate Heinz' goal, namely, to care for his wife?'

By abstracting away the people involved as Jake does, we run the risk of callousness; we are calculating the rights of people, after all. Choosing to commit theft would also have a negative impact on the druggist that is not negligible. Amy also recognizes the practical aspects of needing to know how to administer the drug, the possibility of needing more than what Heinz can steal, and that Heinz might not be able to continue his relationship with his wife as a result of his actions. Amy suggests alternatives such as a payment plan or simply pleading with the druggist for a loan of the medicine, and her response is taken as evidence of inferior moral development when compared to Jake. The rationale for this is that Amy's judgment is influenced by her emotions and demonstrates exceptionalism as young girls do when they play games, but Gilligan clarifies that this is not an accurate understanding of Amy's worldview.

Gilligan presents us with an alternative model for the development of female morality in the context of an unplanned pregnancy. By identifying the concerns of women at each of three proposed stages, we can see how different people might resolve the same dilemma using different information.

In the first stage, the woman does not view herself as one who acts, rather as one whose actions are judged. The primary theme of her concerns at this level is survival, and she acts based on how this pregnancy impacts her ability to meet her own needs. Gilligan also notes that 'should is undifferentiated from would, and other people influence this decision only through their ability to affect its consequences' (Gilligan 2003, 75) which is to say that desires may be competing at this point; her decision may better reflect the desire to avoid a particular reaction from a family member, for instance, than it does her own will.

This is potentially where we see the origins of the second stage of female morality, when care and connection to others becomes a prominent concern. The idea of motherhood carries connotations of responsibility and concern for others, and women at this stage will sometimes find meeting the needs of others and affirming their femininity comes at the cost of self sacrifice. At this second stage, the dilemma centers around desires which feel contradictory; to whom does she owe her care and concern? Is it to herself or others? 'The woman at this point validates her claim to social membership through the adoption of societal values' (Gilligan 2003, 79). Resolution begins when the woman realizes that demonstrating your ability to care for someone else starts with taking responsibility for meeting your own needs.

Women in the third stage of development recognize that they too, deserve their own care and concern. The idea of being responsible for oneself is integrated into her values, which requires her to distinguish between choosing harm for others and choosing not to extend care to others.

To be responsible for oneself, it is first necessary to acknowledge what one is doing. The criterion for judgement thus shifts from goodness to truth when the morality of an

action is assessed not on the basis of its appearance in the eyes of others, but in terms of the realities of its intention and consequence. (Gilligan 2003, 83)

At this stage, a woman makes decisions based on her understanding of the outcome. Her decision is motivated by a principle of care, which may be as simple as the desire to do no harm to others, and judgment as to whether or not her actions are selfish is informed by her own internal standards.

We can understand the capabilities of Nussbaum's list to operate in a very similar manner to the guiding principle of care described by Gilligan at the third level of female moral development. They are understood to represent the minimum requirements for any person to live a dignified life. They include (but are not limited to) the right to bodily health and wellness, control over one's environment, and the right to form connections with nature, other people, and other species. They operate with the expectation that all people are entitled to their capabilities being met at a minimum threshold. Above average functioning in some aspect of one's life does not justify below-threshold functioning in another, nor is below-threshold functioning in one group of people an acceptable trade off for exceptional ability in a different group of people.

First, I consider this list as open-ended and subject to ongoing revision and rethinking, in the way that any society's account of its most fundamental entitlements is always subject to supplementation (or deletion)...

I also insist, second, that the items on the list ought to be specified in a somewhat abstract and general way, precisely in order to leave room for the activities of specifying and deliberating by citizens and their legislatures and courts. Within certain parameters it is perfectly appropriate that different nations should do this somewhat differently, taking their histories and special circumstances into account. (Nussbaum 2006, 78-79)

They are intentionally vague, for the purpose of interpretation, and describe the basic requirements to live a life that is dignified. The reason Nussbaum allows for interpretation is that she acknowledges that while 'play' (the ninth capability) may be interpreted as the right to splashing on the beach when you live in Florida, this is not a reasonable interpretation for people who live in Nepal; play would require an alternative definition in such instances.

One of the best examples of how learning to consider the impact our choices can have on other people can be observed in Nussbaum's narration of the decision to include students with disabilities in the classrooms of America: 'Stigmatized as either ineducable or not worth the expense, children with mental disabilities have been denied access to suitable education' (Nussbaum 2006, 200). Children with disabilities were also excluded from the classroom on the grounds that their appearance and behaviour was atypical, for fear that abled children might suffer from distress or distraction.

The change in attitude was contingent on two court cases, the first of which (*Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v Pennsylvania*) proceeds from the argument that a free education provided by the state is something to which all children, including those who have disabilities, are entitled, 'and that the school system therefore needed to show a "compelling state interest" in order lawfully to exclude children with disabilities' (Nussbaum 2006, 200). The second case, *Mills v. Board of Education*, was a victory won using a different type of argument: 'This group was broader than the group of plaintiffs in the Pennsylvania case: it included children with a wide range of learning disabilities, not just mental retardation' (Nussbaum 2006, 201). In this case, the argument proposed that just as racial segregation was a violation of the equal protections clause (citing *Brown v. Board of Education*), so too was the



exclusion of children with mental disabilities from the public school system: 'Moreover, very important for our purposes, the court held that this equal protection violation could not be reasoned away by saying that the system had insufficient funds and these children were unusually expensive to include' (Nussbaum 2006, 201). This is informed by a third case, *Goldberg v Kelly*, in which it was concluded that the interest of the state in its citizens (and, in turn, the education of its children) exceeds the interest of the state in preserving financial resources.

This position is strikingly similar to that of Amy when deliberating how Heinz ought to proceed; she does not believe that either party deserves to be harmed and believes the way forward lies in persuasion and mutualism. I believe Nussbaum would agree with this assessment:

They articulate a conception of social cooperation and the purposes of political principles that go profoundly against those embodied in the mutual-advantage type of contractarianism that I have criticized, supporting those articulated in the capabilities approach...

In other words, the purpose of social cooperation is not to gain an advantage; it is to foster the dignity and well-being of each and every citizen. (Nussbaum 2006, 202)

This is not to say that we must somehow accommodate the desires of everyone in our course of action, but that chasing our desires should not come at the expense of another person's ability to meet their basic needs<sup>6</sup>. This is the difference between the second and third stages of moral

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<sup>6</sup> Framed differently, Nussbaum's capabilities reveal by reason what is required to satisfy our complex desires. In order to avail of state provided education, I need to cooperate with other members of the state. As persons with disabilities, their loved ones, advocates, and caregivers are also members of the state, this means that educating students with disabilities is an intrinsic element of my own goal, not a case of special treatment. We are not being asked to find some external source of motivation (such as beneficence or charity) which would constitute moral

development proposed by Gilligan: in the second stage we find a woman who has been socialized to express nurture and care towards others and is at risk of compromising her own values. This continues until she reaches the third stage when she learns that she too deserves care, and that showing concern for others does not require this heroic level of effort<sup>7</sup>.

When presented with a dilemma, we can ask ourselves, ‘before I offer care to others, do I have the resources to meet my own needs and live with dignity?’ but also ‘will the pursuit of my desires interfere with the ability of others to meet their own needs and live with dignity?’ It is here that I believe we can draw the most appropriate concept of kindness; it is choosing to pursue our own goals by means that do not cause harm to others. This does not demand immense labour or sacrifice, only that we continually show interest in the experiences of others by acknowledging their personhood.

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fetishism. For more on the subject of internal versus external motivation, and the relationship to moral fetishism, see Zhang, X. 2021. ‘Why *de dicto* desires are fetishistic.’ *Ratio*. 34: 303–311. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rati.12317>

<sup>7</sup> The difference between the second and third stages is the difference between externalizing your source of motivation (to care for others to earn their praise and acceptance) and learning to internalize your motivation (caring for oneself to absolve others of the responsibility, without concern for whether this will earn praise or blame).

## Conclusion

My purpose was to demonstrate that it is possible to learn how to pursue our desires in a way that treats others with kindness and compassion. Emotivist theory shows us that disagreements in attitude cannot simply be reduced to differences in belief; different people do in fact differ in their value sets. The choice to explore this through emotivism was in part influenced by my views on human nature, which I did not explore due to constraints of time and page.

Hume offered us information about the relationship between experience and belief, but also the limitations of depending on our personal account of the facts. While Hume described the nature of belief as reinforcing causal relationships which are familiar, that does not mean we cannot introduce new information and introduce a necessary skeptical flexibility. From this we learn that a moral dilemma is not the time for judgemental blame and shame; we may soon realize we are the only ones who hold our point of view. Rather, this is when efforts to persuade become pivotal to success.

How do we persuade others to pursue a goal if we have established it is of no value to them? It begins by learning about the other as a person; a unique, dynamic individual who has goals and desires of their own. What is important to them? Understanding the perspective of another person means learning to experience the world as they view it, not as we believe they view it. This type of empathy is facilitated by Schroeder's bifurcated semantics, making discussions of our differences feel more accessible. By expressing curiosity about others, we come to understand that the process of relating beliefs and attitudes is lawlike, but the

connections themselves are cultivated by a myriad of factors, including our socialization. In this way, what matters to a person is much like their palate, as much a matter of preference as it is of their nature.

Persuasion then, proceeds by identifying connections which are ignored and overlooked; for example, how the pursuit of one desire may preclude the pursuit of others. I agree with Hume's assessment; humans are motivated by their desires, but this is not to say all desires are selfish and bad. Just as we want simple, sensual pleasures (like a pig at the trough) we can have complex desires, too. We can want to cooperate with others, and see them thrive, and I think desiring these things is easier when cooperation satisfies a more complex goal, such as a feeling of connectedness or community.

This means acknowledging other people for who they are: their beliefs, attitudes, and even their limitations. Cooperating means making the best of your situation: even when your values do not align, even if some relationships are unequal, even when some participants will never be able to reciprocate your efforts. Moral virtue and vice are not measures of self abandonment or indulgence; this is a lesson that comes with experience. We do not have to change our goals for other people, but we may need to change how we realize them. We can refuse to help others, and we can also refuse to harm them, too. Being kind to others is not about going through heroic motions to save another person; it often only requires us to acknowledge their humanity, and all that entails.

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