§1. What is sentimentalism?

Metaphysical Sentimentalism About Morality

Moral facts (at least partly) consist in facts about our emotions and desires.

Evidential Sentimentalism About Morality

Our evidence for our moral beliefs (at least partly) consists in facts about our emotions and desires.

Epistemic Sentimentalism About Morality

Moral knowledge is dependent upon our desires or emotions.

§2. Shaftesbury

T1 ‘…not only the outward beings which offer themselves to the sense, are the objects of the affection… but the very… affections of pity, kindness, gratitude, and their contraries… being brought into the mind by reflection, become objects [of affection]…’

(Shaftesbury, Inquiry Concerning Virtue, or Merit, R200)

T2 ‘…So that, by means of this reflected sense, there arises another kind of affection towards those very affections themselves… which are now become the subject of a new liking or disliking.’

(Shaftesbury, Inquiry Concerning Virtue, or Merit, R200)

Stage 1 I perceive somebody torturing a puppy by means of my senses….

Stage 2 This perception causes me to have positive emotions towards the puppy and negative emotions towards the puppy-torturer…

Stage 3 I perceive these emotions by means of reflection…
Stage 4

This perception causes me to have positive emotions towards both my positive emotions towards the puppy and my negative emotions towards the puppy-torturer…

T3 ‘Let us suppose a creature, who… being unable to reflect, has, notwithstanding, …courage, gratitude, or pity… It is certain that if you give to this creature a reflecting faculty, it will at the same time approve of gratitude, kindness and pity… And this is to be capable of VIRTUE, and to have a sense of RIGHT and WRONG.’

(Shaftesbury, Inquiry Concerning Virtue, or Merit, R205)

Is Shaftesbury a Metaphysical Sentimentalist About Morality…?

He claims to be a Realist About Morality…

T4 ‘…in respect of virtue… it is really something in itself, and in the nature of things… not arbitrary or factitious… not constituted from without, or dependent on custom, fancy, or will… not even on the supreme will itself, which can no way govern it; but being necessarily good, is governed by it and ever uniform with it.’

(Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times)

P1 The fact that God wishes us not to torture puppies is explained by the fact that it is morally wrong to torture puppies.

But the conjunction of this and Metaphysical Sentimentalism About Morality has a peculiar consequence…

P2 If Metaphysical Sentimentalism About Morality is true then the fact that it is morally wrong to torture puppies is explained by facts about our emotions…

C If Metaphysical Sentimentalism About Morality is true then the fact that God wishes us not to torture puppies is explained by facts about our emotions.

So Shaftesbury isn’t a Metaphysical Sentimentalist About Morality, but rather an Evidential Sentimentalist About Morality…

What explains the fact that our second-order emotional responses are a good guide to the mind-independent moral properties of actions/people/states of affairs…? Is it pre-established harmony…? Is it natural selection…?

§3. Hutcheson and the secondary quality analogy

T5 ‘…by absolute and original beauty, is not understood any quality supposed to be in the object, that should of itself be beautiful, without relation to any mind which perceives it… For beauty, like other names of sensible ideas, properly
denote the perception of some mind… so cold, heat, sweet, bitter, denote the sensations in our minds, to which perhaps there is no resemblance in the object just like our perception.'

(Frances Hutcheson, *Inquiry Concerning the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*)

T6 'The word MORAL GOODNESS… denotes our idea of some quality apprehended in actions, which procures approbation, attended with desire of the agent's happiness… MORAL EVIL denotes our idea of a contrary quality, which excites condemnation or dislike.'

(Frances Hutcheson, *Inquiry Concerning the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, R303)

Hutcheson is a *Metaphysical Sentimentalist About Morality*…

Hutcheson tells us that moral facts are analogous to facts about *secondary qualities*… But we need to remember that there is more than one way to think about the metaphysics of secondary qualities…

T7 ‘…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 compared to sounds, colours, heat, and cold… which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind.’

(David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, p.503)

To be *morally good* is to be disposed to cause in us a positive emotion/a desire for the agent’s happiness…?

To be *morally good* is to cause in us a positive emotion/a desire for the agent’s happiness…?

§4. *The costs and benefits of sentimentalism*

Some versions of *Metaphysical Sentimentalism About Morality* score highly in terms of *metaphysical/epistemological parsimony*…

*Evidential Sentimentalism About Morality* is compatible both with the view that moral facts are reducible to natural facts and with the view that moral facts are irreducibly non-natural facts…

*Sentimentalism About Morality* also provides us with a nice explanation of moral motivation…
Knowing that torturing puppies is morally wrong is intrinsically motivating.

A mental state is intrinsically motivating only if it is at least partly a matter of having particular emotions or desires.

Knowing that torturing puppies is morally wrong is at least partly a matter of having particular emotions or desires…

If Sentimentalism About Morality is true then knowing that torturing puppies is morally wrong is at least partly a matter of having particular emotions or desires…

There is a possible world at which we have positive emotions towards torturing puppies.

If Metaphysical Sentimentalism About Morality is true, any possible world at which we have positive emotions towards torturing puppies is a world at which we have a moral obligation to torture puppies.

If Metaphysical Sentimentalism About Morality is true, there is a possible world at which we have a moral obligation to torture puppies.

There is no possible world at which we have a moral obligation to torture puppies.

Metaphysical Sentimentalism About Morality is false.

‘…whether, like all sound judgement of truth and falsehood, they [i.e. morals] should be the same to every rational intelligent being… or whether, like the perception of beauty and deformity, they be founded entirely on the particular fabric and constitution of the human species.’

(David Hume, Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, R562)

Perhaps a Metaphysical Sentimentalist About Morality could resist P1 on the grounds that we could not fail to be human beings, and human beings could not fail to have negative emotions towards torturing puppies…

If moral knowledge is like mathematical knowledge, how come there is persistent, pervasive disagreement about moral facts, but no persistent, pervasive disagreement about mathematical facts?

If moral knowledge is like aesthetic knowledge, it is not surprising that there is persistent, pervasive disagreement about moral facts, since there is also persistent, pervasive disagreement about aesthetic facts…

References