§1. Recap: what is sentimentalism?

T1 ‘There has been a controversy started of late… concerning the general foundation of Morals; whether they be derived from Reason, or from Sentiment; whether we attain the knowledge of them by a chain of argument and induction, or by an immediate feeling and finer internal sense…’

(David Hume, Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, p.562)

Metaphysical Sentimentalism About Morality

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

Justificatory Sentimentalism About Morality

Moral beliefs are justified (at least partly) by facts about our emotions and desires.

Epistemological Sentimentalism About Morality

Moral knowledge is dependent upon facts about our emotions and desires.

§1. Shaftesbury

T2 ‘…not only the outward beings which offer themselves to the sense, are the objects of the affection; but the very actions themselves and the affections of pity, kindness, gratitude, and their contraries, being brought into the mind by reflection, become objects…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, p.200)

Is Shaftesbury a Metaphysical Sentimentalist About Morality?

He describes himself as a Realist About Morality.

T3 ‘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*

In this passage Shaftesbury appears to commit himself to P1 of the following argument. If he is a *Metaphysical Sentimentalist*, then he is committed to P2.

P1 The fact that God wants (or commands us) not to torture babies for fun is dependent upon the fact that torturing babies is morally wrong.

P2 The fact that torturing babies is morally wrong is dependent upon the fact that torturing babies produces a particular negative emotion in us.

C The fact that God wants (or commands us) not to torture babies for fun is dependent upon the fact that torturing babies produces a particular negative emotion in us.

Perhaps he is instead a *Justificatory Sentimentalist About Morality*.

How does he explain the fact that our negative/positive (second-order) emotions are reliable indicators of virtue and vice? Pre-established harmony? Natural selection?

§3. Hutcheson

T4 ‘...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.’

*Inquiry Concerning the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*

So if Hutcheson takes the same view about virtue that he takes about beauty, then he is a *Metaphysical Sentimentalist*.

Careful with the secondary quality analogy!

T5 ‘Such qualities, which are in truth nothing in the objects themselves, but powers to produce various sensations in us...’

*John Locke, Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

§4. Hume

T6 ‘...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.’

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

Hume is a **Metaphysical Sentimentalist**. But his view is not the same as Hutcheson’s.

T7 ‘...it is evident, that *reason* must enter for a considerable share in all decisions 
of this kind; since nothing but that faculty can instruct us in the tendency of 
qualities and actions, and point out their beneficial consequences to society 
and their *possessor*...’

*(Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, p.594)*

T8 ‘But... *reason*... is not sufficient to produce any moral blame or 
approbation... It is requisite a *sentiment* should here display itself, in order to 
give a preference to the useful above the pernicious tendencies. This 
sentiment can be no other than a feeling for the happiness of mankind. Here, 
therefore, *reason* instructs us in the several tendencies of actions, and *humanity* makes a distinction in favour of those which are useful and 
beneficial.’

*(Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, p.594)*

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<th>Shaftesbury</th>
<th>Hutcheson</th>
<th>Hume</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moral facts are independent of facts about what God (or the Queen) wishes or commands.</td>
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<td>Moral knowledge is not dependent upon facts about the causal tendencies of actions.</td>
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<td>Moral actions cause happiness; immoral actions the reverse.</td>
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§5. **Costs and benefits of sentimentalism**

Some versions of *Metaphysical Sentimentalism About Morality* (e.g. those defended by Hume and Hutcheson) score highly in terms of *ontological parsimony*. They avoid the *queerness* concerns associated with John Mackie (1977).

T9 ‘The weakness of our reason, and the avocations arising from the infirmity and 
necessities of our nature, are so great that very few men could ever have
formed those long deductions of reasons that show some actions to be in the whole advantageous to the agent, and their contraries pernicious. The Author of Nature has much better furnished us for a virtuous conduct… He has made virtue a lovely form, to excite our pursuit of it, and has given us strong affections to be the springs of each virtuous action.’

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

Both varieties of *Sentimentalism About Morality* score highly in terms of explaining moral motivation.

There is a concern for *Metaphysical Sentimentalism About Morality* about the necessity of moral facts.

P1 There is a possible world at which we have completely different emotional responses.

P2 If *Metaphysical Sentimentalism About Morality* is true, then any possible world at which we have completely different emotional responses is a world at which the moral facts are completely different.

P3 There is no possible world at which the moral facts are completely different.

C *Metaphysical Sentimentalism About Morality* is false.

A related concern for Metaphysical Sentimentalism has to do with the objectivity – i.e. the non-relativity – of moral facts.

T10 ‘…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*, p.562)

Suppose there is a person who doesn’t have ordinary human emotions. Suppose this person claims that torturing babies is *not* morally wrong. Can a *Metaphysical Sentimentalist* claim that this person is mistaken?

**Bibliography**