**Must we Weep for Sentimentalism?**

**Preliminary:** the major part of this text is due to go into a volume edited by Jamie Dreier on the current state of moral philosophy. I was asked to respond to a ‘rationalist’ piece by Samuel Kerstein. I hope I put Kerstein’s central point here in a way that makes it apparent what that part of the debate is about. Christopher Peacocke’s discussion is already published. Taking shelter behind the legendary stamina shown by participants in this seminar and its parent in New York, I have added some material that will not appear in the Dreier volume, for the sake of rounding out the overall paper for this occasion.

1. A misunderstanding

Hume said that the distinct boundaries and offices of reason and taste are easily ascertained, including under the heading of ‘taste’ the moral sentiments.¹ Alas, he proved over-optimistic. I doubt if any question in moral theory has proved more vexatious. The area is confounded by difficulties over the identification of attitudes and beliefs, over the distinction between senses of the word ‘reason’ that sentimentalists can admit from those they must deny, over the relation between properties and concepts, over the metaphysics of the categorical imperative, and over much else besides. In this brief essay I can therefore not attempt a full-scale defence of sentimentalism. I shall simply defend the theory against various recent assaults, one of which is mounted in Samuel Kerstein’s defence of rationalism in this debate. My impression is that Kerstein does not stand alone, but is a spokesman for a whole phalanx of people, perhaps calling themselves ‘Kantians’,

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who would sympathize with his assault, or at least fail to understand how a sentimentalist could withstand it.

It is fortunate, then, that the misunderstanding that permeates Kerstein’s treatment of sentimentalism is highly visible, and I shall concentrate on one particularly exposed passage. After giving an account of my own neo-Humean description of the emotions and attitudes that underlie our propensity to go in for ethics and morals, he considers the issue of justice to strangers or outsiders. He writes that on my view:

It is a person’s displeasing sentiments, ones such as unease or shame, that form the basis of her obligation to acquire the character trait of being just to strangers, or at least to act in a way that a person with this trait would act.

He continues:

This last point is crucial to the issue of whether sentimentalism coheres with the idea that there are categorical imperatives. On this account the basis for an agent’s obligation to do something is a displeasing sentiment she has when, after taking the “common point of view,” she contemplates her not doing it or, perhaps, her not possessing the character of someone who would do it…If an agent does not have this sentiment, then she has no obligation. Of course, if an agent has no obligation to perform a certain action, then a principle commanding that action does not count as a categorical imperative. For it belongs to the concept of a categorical imperative that everyone within its scope is obligated to do what it enjoins. So in order for sentimentalism to ground a particular categorical imperative, each and every person, after taking the common point of view and so forth, must have a displeasing sentiment towards not doing what the imperative commands.

So, although Kerstein also chides me for failing to answer the question of how moral obligations ‘stem from’ the processes I have described, he supposes that such an account,
were it provided, would inevitably suppose that people without the sentiments are free of
the obligation: the ‘basis’ of her obligation is a sentiment, so that ‘if an agent does not
have this sentiment, then she has no obligation’. In a similar vein he imagines someone
with no sympathy for members of some minority within his society, and says that ‘on
Blackburn’s sentimentalist account, you have at this point no obligation to refrain from
abusing the minority’.

    And then, unsurprisingly, he can go on to point out that there are legions of
unhappily bad Samaritans, and what I called foreign-office knaves, when I was stressing
and lamenting the same sad fact about humanity. These people do not have the
appropriate sentiments. Hence, Kerstein concludes, for the sentimentalist, there are
people who lie under no obligation to universal justice. Hence, there are no categorical
imperatives, for the categorical imperative embraces everyone.

    Whatever else is to be said about it, we should notice that this argument is
remarkable for its scope. It can be directed not only against sentimentalism, but against
any theory that seeks to explain our moral capacities in terms of contingent and
potentially variable facets of human nature: language, culture, upbringing, acquired
‘second nature’, and so on. Even reason, insofar as it is empirically variable, or leaves its
possessors liable to partial and self-serving policies, will not be enough. Only a universal
birthright – and one strong enough to deliver commands to the will – could withstand it.
It is a pity then, that Kerstein himself is not confident of a Kantian story of this kind,
since it seems to be the only hope for a theory of the requisite standing.

    Why does Kerstein make the extraordinary supposition that on a sentimentalist
story, the knaves and villains not only fail to feel obligations, which they obviously do,
but are for that very reason exempt from them? Do you escape a debt if you do not care about it? I should have thought no moral philosopher, except perhaps Gilbert Harman, and certainly not Hume nor myself, could have been thought to suggest such a thing. In fact, it seems to me such a shocking thing to say, that I am at a loss to understand how Kerstein could have read Hume, or me, and perhaps others such as Allan Gibbard, as saying anything that implies it. For the record, I explicitly say the reverse, fairly often.²

The only explanation I can offer for the misreading is that it comes from conflating two different projects. One, the project of the anatomist, in Hume’s terms, is to give an accurate and complete account of the states of mind that gain expression in moral thinking. The other, a moralistic project appropriate to Hume’s painter, is to give an account of the ‘sources’ of our obligations. In my discussion of Christine Korsgaard’s account of ‘the normative question’ I voice some doubts about how to conduct this second project. Like other pluralists, I think obligations arise for different reasons, and I am not myself wedded to the idea that any one, clear, univocal concept, such as ‘utility’ or ‘self-legislation’ might have been thought to be, plays the same explanatory role when we try to describe why we lie under one or another obligation. But it is the anatomist’s project that occupies the bulk of my work, and that justifies calling me a ‘sentimentalist’, although of course other terms have also been found appropriate—expressivist, projectivist, quasi-realist. If you want a full-scale evening-dress term, I suppose ‘non representative functionalist’ would begin to serve, although even that needs careful parsing, since the non-representative bit applies more to the beginning—the foundations

of the explanatory story—and less to the end, where, since one can quite properly talk of
moral truth and the rest on my construction, one could also hear oneself talking of
representing the moral facts. But by then the work would have been done.

If you confuse these two projects, you might end up saying that moral obligations
‘stem from’ or ‘are based in’ psychological states, and thence infer that in the absence of
the psychological states, the obligations disappear as well. The anatomical view is then
supposed to lead to bad morals or bad painting. But it is not I who says that. I would say,
for instance, that your obligations as a parent stem from the dependency of your children,
their needs, and the absence of other social resources provide a substitute if you fail to
meet those needs. If you don’t care about your child, you are in breach of the obligation
that the child’s need places on you. The obligation does not come and go according to
your affections, any more than your debt comes and goes depending on whether you care
about it. And I think it shocking to suppose otherwise. The obligations you lie under, like
the debts you owe, don’t decrease or disappear when you stop caring about them.

I think, then, that parents of young children lie under a complex obligation, O.
According to the sentimentalist, I say this by way of expressing a complex of attitudes
and feelings towards the relationship between parents and their young children—what I
shall call ‘these sentiments’. Now let us say that someone who ignores or negligently or
deliberately falls short in fulfilling an obligation, fails O. Finally, suppose we say that
people who have no sentiments corresponding to feeling the weight of an obligation,
laugh-off O. Then we must recognize the distinction between:

3 If you (wrongly) think that we cannot lie under an obligation to feel various ways, perhaps because
‘ought’ implies ‘can’, read it as ‘behaving as though you care for the child’.

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If I (we) had not had these sentiments, I (we) would not have been condemning parents who fail O or even those who laugh-off O.

If I (we) had not had these sentiments, I (we) would have failed O or laughed-off O.

If parents X do not have these sentiments, then they are likely to fail O or laugh-off O.

If parents X do not have these sentiments, then they are under no obligation O.

The first three of these are true and harmless. The last is false and absurdly so. But it is the last that is being foisted upon the sentimentalist in the passages I quoted.

I think the transition from the harmless to the absurd is lubricated by careless use of phrases like ‘is based upon’, or ‘stems from’. If you ask me what moral thought itself stems from or is based upon, then, as an anatomist, I give the sentimentalist reply. If you ask me what a particular obligation or duty stems from or is based upon, then my painterly answer may vary, but will seldom cite the feelings of the agent. In this case it stems from the needs of the children, and the sociological structures that makes the parent the person responsible for meeting those needs. In the case of a debt, it will have arisen from past contract or past property rights of some kind. In the case of justice to outsiders, again it may stem from the needs of the outsiders, or our overall needs for accommodation with them, or perhaps it stems from fundamental rights to equal treatment. I am not sure: the relationship between justice and mutual advantage, and reciprocity, and equality, is obscure enough for me and many others to feel insecure about exactly how best to paint it. What I am sure about is that you cannot get rid of obligations by laughing them off.
2. Peacocke’s Hi-Tec Machinery

A trivial misunderstanding becomes worrying when you find it shared by enough people. As I have said, I fear that Kerstein is not alone. Christopher Peacocke has recently suggested that sufficient attention to two-dimensional modal logic conjures up a dependency claim which the quasi-realist must accept, but which offends against some conviction that we hold. So, contrary to what I have repeatedly claimed, there is a mind-dependency claim which causes trouble for any sentiment-oriented theory of value. The technology in Peacocke’s discussion will doubtless shock and awe enough readers for it to be worth some trouble to show that it is in fact a smokescreen. The matter can be put simply enough, and when it is, the objection disappears.

In a nutshell, the issue goes like this. Peacocke recognizes the general strategy I have repeatedly used. It is an integral part of our ethical lives that we can evaluate scenarios that are described to us, whether past, present, or merely possible or fictional. So if you bring me a story about people and their doings, I can train my thoughts on it, and according to the attitudes it elicits, I will admire it or condemn it, or hold a whole variety of more or less nuanced responses. If you tell me a story in which people fail to meet their childrens’ needs, I react badly, and I express the conviction that what they are doing is cruel and wrong. I hope we all do. If asked why I condemn their behaviour, at least a prime part of my answer is about the needs that are not being met. Perhaps this simplifies a little, since the indifference of the perpetrators also matters, and that is a feature of the perpetrator rather than of the children. But for clarity, and as a harmless

simplification, I shall say the verdict is appropriate because of the needs of the children: it is child-dependent. If you told me a story about people causing pain to animals such as dogs, my verdict would be dog-dependent.

So far so good. Now suppose your story is more complicated. You tell me a story in which people not only ignore their children’s needs, but also in which they fail to condemn such behaviour, or even admire it. Perhaps they are Spartans, and congratulate and esteem especially harsh or negligent parents. Their moral sensibilities are here the opposite from ours. What am I to say about this? It looks equally bad or somewhat worse to me. In the first story we could imagine some guilt attaching to the behaviour: perhaps it is mainly adolescents or criminals or failures who are bad with children, and their ordinary morality condemns it. But in the second story, there is no condemnation from the people who are described. They admire negligence or brutality. It is a horrible scenario, and I deplore it the more.

I have often stressed two further related points. The first is that someone could disagree with me about what I have just said. He could urge that the fact that they find it admirable makes all the difference, makes it admirable in fact. When in Sparta, throw yourself into the business of bringing up children by neglecting them! We have a moral disagreement, for I deny that. I hold that it is the sad life of a child that is so shocking, and in this imagined society, the parents’ self-congratulation at what they are doing takes none of that away, but actually adds to it, making it even more shocking. The second addition is that there might be examples—call them etiquette examples—where the structure looks similar, but my opponent would be right. For there are cases where the bad we do would not be bad at all were it not for the community’s unfavourable take on
it. I can imagine communities (perhaps there are some) where it is very bad form indeed to give a gift in return for a gift received. In such a community it would be insulting and wrong to do something which amongst us would be a normal expression of gratitude or reciprocated friendship, and it would be right to do something—omitting to reciprocate—which amongst us would be a breach of manners, and even insulting and wrong. In such a case it is true that had we had these different attitudes, different actions would have been right or wrong. Their value is due to the conventions of etiquette that people follow, and these might have been harmlessly different. In the child case that is not so; as I said, it is due to the unmet needs of the child. I am, of course, relying on there being a common enough core to human nature that children do have unmet needs in Sparta. An ideological cultural relativist might deny that, in which case he would turn the Sparta case into an etiquette case. Nothing in my position requires that it is not, although then, of course, one would have to find another example.

How does Peacocke hope to embarrass this analysis? He says some curious things about it. He says at the beginning of the discussion ‘it is very hard to see how it can be denied that, under (my) approach, the conditions under which someone is correct in asserting a moral proposition have something to do with expressed mental states’ And the intention is to show that although, as he recognizes, I claim not to have a ‘mind-dependent’ treatment of morality, in fact I do. Unfortunately these wordings, like

5 One could play with complexities introduced by the thought that in some sense ‘not giving a gift back’ in the described community is performing the same action as ‘giving a gift back’ in ours. Again, they do not affect the point.

Kerstein’s above, are ambiguous. Obviously an expressivist treatment of ethics is ‘mind-dependent’ in one sense—it starts from reflections on the kind of mental state that gets expressed when values are made public and exchanged. Obviously as well ‘the conditions under which someone is correct in asserting a moral proposition have something to do with expressed mental states’ in one sense, although the language is so imprecise that we have to struggle to find it. Still, were the expressed mental states different, the proposition would be different and would be correct under different circumstances. For example, if the sentence ‘kicking dogs is wrong’ standardly expressed approval of kicking dogs, anyone voicing it would be correct only in quite different circumstances, such as ones in which dogs have no conscious states. But there is nothing worrying to the expressivist (or anyone else) in thoughts such as those. The conditions under which someone is correct in asserting anything has something to do with expressed mental states, in this sense. It has to do with which beliefs are being expressed. Of course, in another sense it may have nothing to do with mental states: unless a proposition is explicitly about the mind, its truth condition will be world-dependent rather than mind-dependent. But similarly the truth (for I say it is a truth) that you have an obligation to your children is child-dependent, and the truth that you should not kick friendly dogs for fun is dog-dependent.

Peacocke pursues his discussion via an indexing of propositions, corresponding to reference first to the ‘world’ from which an evaluation is made, and secondly to the ‘world’ that is being evaluated. To this end he introduces the double index P(w₁, w₂), explained as:
Proposition $P$, when evaluated from the standpoint of psychological states in $w_1$, holds with respect to $w_2$. $^7$

Here $P$ is some moral proposition, such as ‘it is wrong to kick dogs for fun’ or ‘the infliction of avoidable pain is wrong’. The overall proposition $P(w_1, w_2)$ is, however, not entirely clear, because of the curious and treacherous word ‘holds’ (with its shades of Kerstein’s ‘based on’ and ‘stems from’). Suppose someone says that the proposition that the war in Iraq was justified holds from George Bush’s point of view. I can hear that as a contorted way of saying that George Bush believes that the war in Iraq was justified, and it is probably true. What I should not do is hear it as some kind of insinuation that the war in Iraq was justified. It’s a description of what George Bush thinks, not an endorsement of the way he thinks. Only a confused relativist of some sophomoric stamp would accept the transition from ‘the war in Iraq is justified from George Bush’s point of view’ to ‘the war in Iraq is justified’.

With that clear for the moment, we can turn to the ‘$w_2$’ variable. For that to do any work, there has to be some space between the proposition $P$ and the variety of worlds to which it applies, or in which it is evaluated. And this may be granted. ‘it is wrong to kick dogs for fun’ can be tested against this world, or, if we are imaginative enough, against slightly different worlds, for instance in which there are still dogs and people, but only dogs that are unconscious, or in which there are only people who can survive by nutrition from the pain of other animals. And then it may turn out that the moral proposition is only true contingently on aspects of our world, and would get a different

truth value were these other things different. Or of course, it may not. We may suppose that however worlds vary, it is always wrong to cause unnecessary pain, although even that may wobble if we bring in, for instance, apparently possible people who like pain.

With these explanations we can agree with Peacocke when he says that nobody can object to the employment of this doubly indexed proposition. Indeed, nobody can object to it, for P(w₁, w₂) can be the form of good enough propositions, that can be regarded as true or as false in various cases, although they will often be indeterminate, when we have not given definite enough interpretations of the variables. Given what I have said, the evaluation of such propositions goes like this. First we introduce a moral proposition P. Second, we introduce some possible people with attitudes. And third we present a possible scenario, and we imagine the people we just introduced evaluating what goes on in the scenario, in accordance with the attitudes we gave them. If the people introduced evaluate the introduced scenario in the way that would properly gain expression by P, then P (w₁, w₂) should be accorded T, otherwise not. It corresponds to ‘the people we have introduced evaluate the scenario we imagined them to be contemplating, in a way that could be expressed by saying that P’. More concisely, we can say that the people we have introduced evaluate the scenario we imagine them to be contemplating, in the P-way.

Not surprisingly, we can vary the people or psychological states introduced, and we can vary the scenarios we conjure for them to be contemplating. So P(wᵢ, wⱼ) can vary in two dimensions: there are two variables to be given interpretations before we turn it into a definite claim. And filling in one does not determine how we fill in the other. Or, of course we could quantify. (∀wᵢ)P(wᵢ, x) would mean that everyone from any possible
story evaluates some given scenario x in the P-way, and \((\forall w_j) P(z, w_j)\) would mean that
the introduced persons with the psychological states z, evaluate every possible scenario in
the P-way. \((\forall w_i) (\forall w_j) P(w_i, w_j)\) would mean that everyone, whatever their other
differences evaluates everything in the P-way.

This is the machinery in all its gleaming splendour, so what happens when it is set
in motion? Alas, nothing at all. We get a variety of rather cumbersome descriptions of
what different people think about different scenarios, and whether they would express
themselves as agreeing with some moral or ethical proposition. We get things like ‘we, as
we are, think that in the world, as it is, kicking dogs is wrong’ (true, I hope). Or, ‘we, as
we would be were we to become coarse and callous, would think that in the world as it is,
kicking dogs is wrong’ (false, no doubt). We can keep the people constant (‘us’) giving
what Peacocke calls the ‘vertical’ reading, or we can vary people and scenarios together,
giving what he calls a ‘diagonal’ reading, such as the true ‘we, as we would be were we
to become coarse and callous, would think that in a possible world in which dogs feel
pain slightly less than they do, kicking dogs is OK’.

Peacocke claims that since there is this diagonal reading, there is a ‘mind
dependency’ claim that the quasi-realist has not acknowledged. But that is not true.
Propositions such as this last one amounts to descriptions of how people of some
particular attitude (which we may or may not share) react to different scenarios. And
there is nothing in general in these descriptions to offend the quasi-realist (or anyone
else). It does not amount to giving our own verdict on those same scenarios, although if
we make ourselves the topic, and describe ourselves rightly, there will be the coincidence
that what we say about ourselves will be true just if we do assent to the verdict P.
The locutions that Peacocke uses clearly reveal him to be in the same swamp as Kerstein:

on the quasi realist’s theory the acceptability of basic moral principles depends on some psychological attitudes. However this dependence is formulated, it must be possible in thought to consider which propositions are correct when we vary the standpoint of evaluation; that is, when we vary the first parameter…

The first sentence is again ambiguous. On the quasi-realist’s theory the question of which basic moral principles are accepted by people indeed depends upon (is the same thing as) their psychological attitudes. Whether they are right to accept those principles is a different thing altogether, and we will only settle it by ourselves finding a verdict on their approvals and disapprovals. If people in outer modal space, or for that matter people in benighted corners of the earth, accept the principle that it is OK to cause unnecessary pain to sentient creatures for fun, then they are cruel and callous and it would be good if they would change. The second of Peacocke’s quoted sentences is therefore technically correct but highly misleading, for it implies that in general changing the first parameter, that is, it implies that considering different evaluative standpoints changes the correctness of a verdict. But it doesn’t. It only changes whether it is supposed to be correct, by whichever evaluators are introduced. Except in the cases that I called those of etiquette, it merely brings the evaluators into the embrace of our verdict, perhaps to their discredit, as in this case.

Peacocke continues:

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8 p. 214
Take a specific moral principle identified by its content, say ‘Prima facie, the infliction of avoidable pain is wrong’ (w,w). It seems to me that the quasi-realist, like other mind-dependent theorists, must say this is false. It is false at those entries in the diagonal for worlds in which we have different attitudes to the infliction of avoidable pain.

This is hard to follow, because in accordance with his own explanation of the notation, propositions of the form P(w₁, w₂), are not moral principles at all. First, they describe whether the evaluation from w₁, of the scenario of w₂, could gain expression by P: they are descriptions, not evaluations. And secondly, they are not even that until the variables are bound or replaced by actual values, so neither the quasi-realist nor anyone else has any business saying that P(w,w) is true, or false. It is an open sentence, not a closed one.

Perhaps Peacocke is thinking of the double universal quantification ‘Everyone, from whatever evaluative standpoint, and considering any scenario whatever, would agree that inflicting avoidable pain is wrong’ I do indeed doubt whether this is true, but that doubt has nothing to do with quasi-realism. It has more to do with pessimism about varieties of the wicked human heart, and if we are in outer modal space, the even more wicked Martian heart. And after all, Peacocke shares the doubt, for he allows worlds in which inhabitants have different attitudes to the infliction of pain. That’s the point on the diagonal that he is brandishing. Or perhaps it is not a double quantification but an anaphoric reference back to the world of the people with the evaluative standpoint: ‘everyone, from whatever evaluative standpoint, and considering the world they inhabit, would agree that inflicting avoidable pain is wrong’. Alas, the same pessimism is appropriate.
Peacocke’s ambition is clearly to get the quasi-realist both to treat some proposition of the form $P(w_1, w_2)$ as a genuine moral principle, and to evaluate it as false when we think of worlds in which the wicked hearts rule. But the noisy machinery takes him not one inch nearer to that goal. Worlds in which the wicked hearts rule are still worlds in which, prima facie, the infliction of avoidable pain is wrong. The wicked hearts may not agree with this, but then that is just what’s wrong with them.

I said that the word ‘holds’, as it occurs in the clarification of his notation, is treacherous, and by now we are compelled to think that Peacocke has actually been betrayed by it. It seems he really does want to index the question of whether a moral principle is true to the various worlds whose inhabitants either agree or disagree with it. I think that is preposterous. It would be like saying that the proposition that the Iraq war was a good thing holds—really holds—in Republican circles in America, and really does not hold in most of the UK. And if that is what it means the quasi-realist simply refuses to adopt the notation. It differs from the legitimate meaning we have so far allowed it, aiming at something more like this: ‘the people we have introduced evaluate the scenario we imagined them to be contemplating, in a way that could be expressed by saying that $P$ and as a result $P$ is true’ But the quasi-realist has no use for this dog’s breakfast of an assertion (it will be false except in etiquette cases). The Iraq war was a bad thing whatever other people think about it. It is not true in London but false in Texas. Nor is it a matter of etiquette, so that enough thinking it a good thing might make it one. That way lies sophomoric relativism, not sentimentalism. The criminality of the Iraq War is dead-innocent-Iraqi-dependent, not Republican-sentiment-dependent.
Far from taking him into the sunny uplands of rationalism, then, Peacocke’s machinery grinds to a halt in the swamp of a relativism of his own devising. But he finishes the discussion by considering the neighbouring case of colour, and the possibility that creatures with different perceptual systems might see physically different things and surfaces as red, and the case is interesting enough to deserve a visit.

Peacocke says that it is widely agreed that things would not stop being red if humans lost their colour vision and saw only in shades of grey. That may be so, although it ought also to be widely agreed that there is much more indeterminacy here than in the case of values. Jonathan Bennett’s example of phenol-thio-urea, which tastes bitter to some people and bland to others, led many people to think that if the former group breeds into a huge majority, the world becomes one in which the stuff is bitter, while if the latter group does, the world becomes one in which it is bland. In other words, the ‘response-dependency’ of secondary properties is a much better candidate for providing a genuine truth condition for ascriptions of them, than any similar attempt to provide a ‘truth-condition’ for ascriptions of value.

However, Peacocke is also correct that two-dimensionalism allows different formulations of the idea that colours are mind-dependent. Where Q is some underlying physical power, such as a disposition to reflect light of a certain wavelength more than other light, and we imagine varying perceptual systems, we could say that:

For any world, whatever perceptual systems its inhabitants have, Q objects are red, as they would be judged by us, as we actually are.

We would also want to say:
In some worlds, Q objects are not red, as judged by the inhabitants of those worlds.

And given Bennett’s case, we might remain ambivalent about whether

For any world, whatever perceptual systems its inhabitants have, Q objects are red.

Since we would be ambivalent about, as it were, sticking with our own judgements, or entering into the world-view of the people with the other perceptual system.

The reason this ambivalence is harmless is that once we bring other perceptual systems into view, the provided they are equally discriminatory, we lose any very robust attachment to the idea that ours is right and theirs is wrong. Similarly we do not maintain sceptical fears that perhaps our sense of smell, or sense of colour, may in general be letting us down, so that perhaps things really smell differently from the way we smell them, or have different hues from those we see them as having. People who taste phenol-thio-urea the other way are not wrong, just different. But there is no reason to suppose that this ambivalence extends similarly to the case of value. 9 People who are coarse and brutal are not ‘just’ different. They are also depraved, and as a result they are rotten judges of value. If we are invited to ‘see the world as they see it’ we can, perhaps, 

9 In her illuminating paper ‘History of Philosophy in Philosophy Today: and the Case of Secondary Qualities’ (Philosophical Review, 1992, pp. 191 – 226) Margaret Wilson comments on a constant tendency in ‘the modern philosophy’ to vacillate over whether colours are in the mind, are categorical or primary grounds in the atomic constitution of things and their surfaces, or are powers to excite human perceptual systems. The vacillation is more excusable if we reflect that in the case of colour we never have to decide on ‘what to say’ about the case when the same physical properties have different powers because of varying perceptual systems.
manage it, but we ourselves can attach no weight to the verdicts we would imagine giving as we do so.

Before leaving this part of the discussion, it may be useful to reflect upon a difference between sentimentalism, as a theory of the origin of the moral sentiments, and a partly parallel exercise of quasi-realism, attempting to see our verdicts of modal necessity as the upshot of various features of the shape of our minds that determine what we can or cannot imagine. Here there is a legitimate pressure to see a contingent source of imaginative limitation as an undermining or debunking account of logical or metaphysical necessity. If ‘we cannot think otherwise’ is sourced in contingent facts about us, an inference to ‘things could not be otherwise’ is compromised rather than explained.

Someone might be tempted to use the modal case as a Trojan horse, bringing the same worry into the theory of morals. But if so they would be wrong. The asymmetry lies in what we say about the states of mind in question and how it relates to the kinds of verdict we are making. In the modal case, if we find that the modes of thought, or the absence of alternatives, are only contingent, their source as an explanation of real necessity is compromised. But in the moral case, it would be not finding that they are \textit{metaphysically} contingent that would give them a parallel debunking power. The parallel would be finding that they are \textit{morally} indifferent. If it were morally alright to have the other sentiments—say, approving of cruelty to dogs or neglect of children—then it would be hard to believe that the ones we actually have could source a robust confidence in an

\begin{footnote}{Simon Blackburn ‘Morals and Modals’ in \textit{Essays in Quasi-Realism}, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.}\end{footnote}
obligation to refrain from cruelty and neglect. At least in general, if it is OK to think that some action is OK, then the action is OK.

But the sentimentalist is not saying that it is OK to have the contrary sentiments. As I have already said, the sentiments of those who would think otherwise fall within the scope of proper disapproval. We do not just disapprove of neglect of children, but perhaps even more so, and certainly just as much, we disapprove of those who approve of it or even tolerate it. We remain, I hope, horrified by Sparta.

And rationalists had better not find the metaphysical contingency of modes of moral thought unsettling. If rationalist moral conviction is to falter whenever it comes upon people who do not share it or do not feel its force, then it is a fragile thing indeed. For knavery exists. Indeed, it often rules, and this is why a robust conviction of its baseness is so important.

3. Justice and Gentle Usage

Kerstein is not the first to worry about the scope of justice on Hume’s theory. According to Manfred Kuehn’s biography, Kant himself was led to reject Hutcheson’s sentimentalism for a very similar reason.\textsuperscript{11} Reading Rousseau apparently convinced Kant that while the sentimentalist allows that we have duties of charity to the dispossessed of the world, this is not enough. The poor or excluded have a right to more than charity. It is not charity they want or need, but justice. If sentimentalism cannot deliver that, then it delivers an inadequate account of the actual nature of our moral thought.

Hume makes himself a target for this kind of outraged reaction:

\begin{quote}
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Were there a species of creatures intermingled with men, which, though rational, were possessed of such inferior strength, both of body and mind, that they were incapable of all resistance, and could never, upon the highest provocation, make us feel the effects of their resentment; the necessary consequence, I think, is that we should be bound by the laws of humanity to give gentle usage to these creatures, but should not, properly speaking, lie under any restraint of justice with regard to them, nor could they possess any right or property, exclusive of such arbitrary lords. Our intercourse with them could not be called society, which supposes a degree of equality; but absolute command on the one side, and servile obedience on the other. Whatever we covet, they must instantly resign: Our permission is the only tenure, by which they hold their possessions: Our compassion and kindness the only check, by which they curb our lawless will: And as no inconvenience ever results from the exercise of power, so firmly established in nature, the restraints of justice and property, being totally useless, would never have place in so unequal a confederacy. (Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals 190-191)

There are many things to say about this passage, and quite how Hume thought it related to the human cases he goes on to discuss, which are firstly European relationships to indigenous American people, and secondly men’s relationships with women. The clear implication is that the model applies in neither case, but only at best to our relationship with animals, or perhaps imagined animals.

Nevertheless we might want to modify the account to make justice clearly applicable, even in the circumstances of the thought experiment. I shall consider how that might be done in a moment. Meanwhile, the important point is that it is not Hume’s sentimentalism that leads him here, but his strict delineation of the circumstances of justice and its source in mutual advantage. Hume does not deny that we have obligations
to the creatures he presents. He explicitly says that we are ‘bound by the laws of humanity’ to give them gentle usage. The only issue is the way we are to understand this obligation. Remembering that for Hume the virtue of justice is both ‘cautious and jealous’ and above all artificial, it may not be so bad for these creatures if the source of that obligation lies elsewhere. But especially in this day and age, with rights bestriding the moral stage as they do, it is important to see that if we insist on the word ‘justice’, the sentimentalist can give it to us.

Hume mentions the resentment these creatures have, but which, because of their inferior strength and power, they can do nothing to visit upon us. This opens up a new sentimentalist vista, much more thoroughly explored by Adam Smith. As Raphael explains, for Smith the sympathy that lies at the bottom of our capacity for morals has a slightly different shape than it does in Hume. In Hume, we sympathize with the pleasure or pain that an action gives to a person. In Smith, we sympathize with different states of mind, including the motives of an agent, and more relevantly to the current case, with the gratitude or resentment of those affected by the action. Indeed our sense of justice, for Smith, is dependent on reactions of resentment or gratitude to actions, which need not vary as the actual quantity of harm or benefit they bring about.

The ‘sympathy’ that is so prominent in each of Hume and Smith is translated, by the one into respect for the general point of view, and by the other into the voice of the impartial spectator, the ‘man within the breast’ who represents the reactions of those

\[\text{(12) In the paragraphs that follow, on Smith, I am much indebted to work by Michael Ridge.}\]

without. There is, of course, much to be said about the ways in which each writer identifies and handles the mechanism, and the relation between them.14 There is also much to be said about whether either mechanism implies some concession to rationalism, bringing in as they do some notion of ‘corrected’ sentiments. I cannot rehearse all that needs saying about that here, but shall have to take it as given that neither writer betrays sentimentalism by their construction of the more complex sensitivity.15 So suppose we bring in the lynchpin of Smith’s sentimentalism, the ‘real, revered, and impartial spectator’ whose function is to bring home to us the resentment of those affected by our delinquencies. When the voice of this spectator is heard as it should be, we may recoil from our own contemplated or actual conduct. In Hume’s terms, we can no longer bear our own survey. Recognizing this resentment of our conduct, and feeling no defence against it, we admit the injustice.

Suppose, then, that we have been minded to take from one of Hume’s creatures something which they evidently cherish. They cannot visit their resentment upon us, but somehow we know that they feel it, and we know that we would feel it in their shoes. The man within the breast voices this resentment on their behalf, and we find we cannot


15 In Ruling Passions I argue that the idea of the general point of view involves no such concession, but only introduces what I call a ‘Hume-friendly’ notion of reason. See Chapters 7 and 8.
dismiss it (we cannot resent their resentment, as we sometimes can). This unpleasant impact is the same as guilty awareness of the injustice of our conduct. What more could the sternest moralist ask from us?

Smith’s modification of Hume may still leave us falling short of full-blown Kantian rationalism. But it is at least telling that the most fervent contemporary Kantians find it hard to do better. Korsgaard, for instance gives us the crucial moment in the genesis of obligation to others like this:

How does this obligation come about? Just the way that Nagel says that it does. I invite you to consider how you would like it if someone did that to you. You realize that you would not merely dislike it, you would resent it. You would think that the other has a reason to stop - more, an obligation to stop. And that obligation would spring from your own objection to what he does to you.  

Korsgaard goes on to employ a cognitive or rationalistic vocabulary, but it is hard not to feel that the central process is exactly the same as in Smith. The potential victim forces you to recognize his resentment, and to ‘put yourself in his shoes’. His fundamental question is: how would you like it if someone did that to you’ — and once you find that you would not, then, other things being equal, his not liking or resenting it translates into your own discomfort at your own behaviour. Of course, as Smith sensibly recognizes, things are not always equal. We have an abundance of defence mechanisms against this

incipient discomfort, including ignoring the impartial spectator, or more often convincing
ourselves the he would be on our side or ‘of our faction’.\(^{17}\)

At this point the sentimentalist will certainly face another familiar challenge. The
account finds the source of feelings of obligation and injustice in a certain emotional
identification: in this case a contingent (of course) capacity to internalize the resentments
of others. But might not this very notion of resentment itself import, and depend upon, an
unacknowledged cognitivism? Resentment, as Korsgaard says, is more than mere dislike.
Perhaps it is more like bitterness, but bitterness at the dispensation of some agent.
Anyone suffering a third summer holiday in succession blighted by continuous rain might
feel bitter, but only a theist can resent it. This quickly suggests that resentment is more
like bitterness at the injustice of the behaviour, in which case a perception of injustice
cannot be explained in terms of resentment and sympathy with it, but must be identified
in some pre-existent cognition. Similar objections may be made to sentimentalist uses of
notions like guilt, or even anger: if anger is the attitude or emotion of those who perceive
themselves to have been wronged, and guilt is the attitude or emotion of those who
recognize themselves to have done wrong, then we cannot understand the judgments by
citing the emotions.

There is a simple lacuna in this popular line of thought. The equations in question
are things like ‘anger is perception of wrong’ or ‘resentment is recognition of injustice to
oneself’. The objection implicitly supposes that these equations need to be read from
right to left, so that the apparent cognition explains the emotion. The sentimentalist

\(^{17}\) Smith: ‘The propriety of our moral sentiments is never so apt to be corrupted, as when the indulgent and
partial spectator is at hand, while the indifferent and impartial one is at a great distance’. p. 154.
tradition, by contrast, reads them from left to right, so that the emotion or attitude explains the thought of wrong or injustice in terms of which it gets expressed. Of course, as they stand the equations are absurdly simple. Anger is not perception of wrong, nor is resentment recognition of injustice to oneself. Each is both more in one respect and less in another. More, because the pure cognition leaves out the upheaval and the motivational force, so that in fact perception of wrong may not lead to anger, and recognition of injustice to oneself may not lead to resentment. Less, because each has a primitive identity in which ethical thought is not yet present. We should not forget that Darwin called his great work *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals*. The guard dog does a fair job of being angry at the intruder or afraid of a snake, and the pet which throws its food around the house on being left behind, does a fair job of resenting being neglected. Emotions and attitudes have a primitive aetiology, and are there to be socially harnessed and refined.

4. **Interlude about Attitude and Normative Belief: Anscombe, Scanlon, Velleman, Dworkin.**

(Since this issue constantly crops up, and since the work in which I have discussed it most closely may not be widely available, I include the text of a recent paper, mildly edited, here as an interlude: it originally appeared in Peter Goldie’s collection *Understanding Emotions* (2002))

If we are to get clear about the relation between attitude, or emotion (they are different, but at the moment this is not crucial) and normative belief, it is appropriate to start by acknowledging the work of the late Elizabeth Anscombe, whose *Intention*, written in 1957, has been perhaps the most influential work on the nature of desire and practical reason in my generation. It was also a work against which philosophers such as myself
needed to react, given that it was, I believe, seminal in turning people against expressivist
and emotion-orientated theories of ethics. It turned people, at the very least, away from
thinking that such things as desire or emotion could be understood as sources of value, or
sources of the practical stances associated with the recognition of value. It opened the
door explicitly to Aristotelian versions of naturalism, and implicitly to the more Kantian
celebrations of the demands of reason that fill much contemporary theory of ethics.
Certainly Anscombe herself, together with allies like Philippa Foot and followers such as
Rosalind Hursthouse never showed much patience with Humean theories.

Now we could worry whether there is a well-formed issue here. In his recent
book, Tim Scanlon talks of a wide class of judgments taking the form that one thing is a
reason for another. The things in question include beliefs, of course, but also different
states of mind, such as desires, attitudes and intentions, and also actions. All these are
things for which reasons can be requested or supplied. Contemplating the most general
kind of judgement that one thing is a reason for another, Scanlon asks a very good
question:

How much should we care about the difference between saying that these judgements express
beliefs, and saying that they express other attitudes for which there are clear standards of
correctness?

Scanlon had earlier expressed his view that:
For most purposes, including mine in this book, the choice between an [attitude] interpretation and a [belief] interpretation makes very little difference, as long as there are standards of correctness for attitudes of the relevant sort.

Scanlon’s sentiments here coincide with those of the character I have christened the quasi-realist, at least so far as the practical implications of a choice are concerned. The quasi-realist believes that the judgement that one thing is a reason for another is a normative judgement. He also believes that, whatever normative commitment is, it goes on just as well, or as badly, once its expressivist sources are recognized, as it did before. The quasi-realist also acknowledges standards for norms of the relevant sort. For where there are norms there are features in the light of which they get deployed and contested. These features are what we call our standards for deployment of the norms. A notion of the standards—God’s standards, possibly opposed to ours—for deployment of norms sometimes has a place in our thoughts. But it is only as a rather dramatic way of focusing the idea that we may be fallible, or that improvements may be on the cards.

Yet it is quite clear that many writers care a whole lot about Scanlon’s choice. It is often described as the difference that separates ‘non-cognitivists’ from ‘cognitivists’. But since those terms are misleading, in this paper I shall call it the difference between expressivists and rationalists. In either event, it separates those who who think that apprehension of reason is a stance or attitude or passion akin to desire, from those who see it as a self-standing example of genuine apprehension (and the characteristic glory of the human mind). The former philosophers applaud Hume’s treatment of the matter, and might take as a motto Augustine’s wonderful remark:
in the pull of the will and of love appears the worth of everything to be sought or avoided, to be thought of greater or less value.\textsuperscript{18}

Here the Bishop of Hippo at least appears to ally himself with the expressivist direction of explanation. It would take a better historian than I am to judge whether this is his considered opinion, but the remark is too good to pass over as it stands.

Anscombe, as I read her, opposes to St Augustine an Aristotelian thought. Aristotle does not depart from the Humean priority in the way that, for instance, modern Kantians often do. These philosophers dislike above all else the implication that they see in Hume (wrongly in my view) that there is no such thing, strictly speaking, as reasoning about ends, but only at best about means. Aristotle sides with, or perhaps outdoes, Hume on that score:

We deliberate not about ends but about means. For a doctor does not deliberate whether he shall heal, nor an orator whether he shall persuade, nor a statesman whether he shall produce law and order, nor does anyone else deliberate about his end. They assume the end and consider how and by what means it is to be attained…(NE 1112b).

I doubt if Aristotle is right about this, but then I do not think Kantians are either. I believe that we do deliberate about ends, and I believe Hume thought that too, but of course only by deploying other considerations that matter to us, in the familiar Neurathian enterprise

\textsuperscript{18} St. Augustine, \textit{The Literal Meaning of Genesis}, Bk 4, Ch 4, para 8.
of aiming at some kind of equilibrium. But that is merely an aside, although I return to it briefly later.

The relevant threat from Aristotle comes from the idea that:

…the wish for the end has already been stated; some think it is for the good, others for the apparent good. (NE 113a)

And this does introduce the leading idea I do want to discuss, which is that desire itself, or what Augustine calls the pull of the will and of love, presupposes value. Aristotle himself only goes on to discuss the choice between ‘the real good’ and the ‘apparent good’ as objects that figure in the agent’s deliberations. It does not seem to occur to him that it might be neither. His interest, rather, is in the attribution of responsibility for error about the good. But that is not the focus of our issue.

Our focus is the idea is to be that desire is itself the apprehension of reasons for action—fallible apprehension, of course, in that things we take to be reasons may not be. But apprehension, all the same. This may sound optimistically high-minded, or perhaps boringly middle-aged. Hence David Velleman’s jibe that the agents portrayed in much philosophy of action are ‘squares’, by contrast with those who are ‘disaffected, refractory, silly, satanic, or punk’. It is at first sight a powerful point, since for most of us it requires some chutzpah to think of our desires as beautifully in harmony with what we take to be the good. Whatever moralists choose to think of us, we love people who are

19 David Velleman, ‘The Guise of the Good’, Nous, 26, 1992, p. 3. It is nice to be able to express regret that I did not know of this excellent paper before writing about these things, particularly in my Ruling Passions.
flawed, sometimes for those very flaws, and we pursue courses that we know are wrong, sometimes because they are wrong. It can be delicious to succumb to temptation, and attractive to be mischievous. I see the good, says Virgil, I approve of it, but I follow the worse.

In fact, however, it is clear that Velleman’s objection is not well-directed at Anscombe. Her leading thought was that our valuations or reasons for action are revealed by our answers to ‘why’ questions. ‘Why did you do that?’ or ‘Why would you do that?’ or ‘Why are you tempted, or drawn or concerned to do that?’ or ‘Why do you intend to do that?’ are such questions, and in answering them agents need to show what was the favourable light in which they saw their action. However, their answer does not have to be something that would only be given, or accepted as a good answer, by a ‘square’. For Anscombe acknowledges that these answers can include such lighthearted replies as ‘because I felt like it’ or ‘it’s pleasant’ or ‘enjoyment’ or even ‘for the hell of it’. Even more liberally she also allows answers like ‘I just thought I would’, or ‘it was an impulse’, or even ‘for no particular reason’, explicitly denying that these count as rejections of the question. Finally, she does not find unintelligible the Satanic character, who flies under the heading of ‘evil be thou my good’. She only insists that he is subject to the question ‘what’s so good about being evil?’, and implies that the answer must come within a certain range. Immoralists typically celebrate evil as free-spirited and life-affirming, or condemn the good as slavish or inglorious, and then we can roughly see what they are about. So it follows that under Anscombe’s conception, rational agency is by no means confined to the boring or the square.

\[20\] P. 25.
Still, this does raise the question of what exactly Aristotelianism comes to at this point. Anscombe’s apparent aim is to show that the series of ‘why’ questions, asked of a desire or an intentional action, must end with a ‘desirability’ characterization. The favourable light I mentioned is one that reveals an ‘aspect of the good’ that the agent rightly or wrongly applies to the object of intention or desire. Now, it is at least clear that this aim may be more or less difficult to achieve, depending on how generous we are with ‘desirability’ characterizations, or aspects of the good. So how generous should we be? Anscombe’s best-remembered examples are ‘desires’ that are, to put it mildly, off-colour. This is because they are apparently disconnected from any conception of the good of the subject or anyone else: her cases memorably include the desire to carry a pin and the desire for a saucer of mud. Anscombe certainly does invite us to find these desires more or less unintelligible, and I think she is often followed in this. Scanlon for example argues that there is a great difference between a judgement of reason, and a ‘mere’ desire, when desire is thought of in an extremely bare way, as something like a disposition to do. Like Anscombe, he makes the point best with what appear to be strange, isolated, pointless urges. He chooses Warren Quinn’s example of a man who feels an isolated urge to switch on every radio he sees, but without seeing anything desirable about radios being on, or about the action of switching them on, and he justly remarks: ‘although we sometimes have such urges, the idea of such a purely functional state fails to capture something essential in the most common case of desire: desiring something involves having a tendency to see something good or desirable about it.’

Philippa Foot has made the same point.

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We clearly do have difficulty with off-colour desires. But the picture is quite complex. Thus, consider Anscombe’s discussion of the man who ‘just wants’ a pin. She imagines someone saying that this is indeed what they want, and, remarking justly that saying ‘I want’ is often instrumental in being given something, she imagines us gratifying the alleged want by giving him a pin. She then contrasts two cases. In the first, he takes it, says ‘thank you, my want is gratified’ and then puts it down and forgets about it. Anscombe reasonably asks of this man, ‘what reason have we to say he wanted a pin rather than: to see if we would take the trouble to give him one?’ In the other case, the man shows signs of cherishing the pin, for instance carrying it around. She says:

Then perhaps the answer to ‘What do you want if for?’ may be to ‘to carry it about with me’, as a man may want a stick. But here again there is a further characterisation: ‘I don’t feel comfortable without it; it is pleasant to have one’ and so on.

The problem now is this. Following Aristotle, Anscombe explicitly allows that the chain comes to a satisfactory end with mention of things like health and pleasure or of what we should do. It also comes to an end with more overtly ethical notions, such as saying what it befits one to do. But although this is the official position, implicitly such passages as this are much more generous. She allows, in the first of these pin cases, that the chain of questions comes to an end with ‘seeing if other people will take the trouble to satisfy one of my whims’, and in the second of these cases with ‘I don’t feel comfortable without it’. But consider this last characterization. Surely it is sufficiently generous to raise the worry that there is here nothing that need trouble those who want to

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give desires a life of their own, without seeing them as cognitions of reasons. For it may well be true that desiring something implies not feeling comfortable without it, given a reasonably generous interpretation of discomfort, of course. Desire need not always rage, but it does have to have some tendency to disturb the status quo. For otherwise it degenerates into idle longing, mere wishing or fantasy, and Anscombe is quite clear that she is not discussing those.

Anscombe is talking about the kind of desiring ‘whose primitive sign is trying to get’. But we could equally say that a primitive sign of discomfort is trying to get—trying to get away from the discomfort. So now there is a gap between where the case rests, and the aim of intruding something that deserves calling a conception of the good. The case rests with someone who is at least for a time uncomfortable unless carrying a pin. This person is strange no doubt, but not on the face of it someone with a conception of carrying a pin as an aspect of more Aristotelian goods such as health or even pleasure. Similar remarks would apply to Quinn’s subject. It is undoubtedly strange to feel sufficiently uncomfortable when a radio is off to want to switch it on. But it is not unintelligible that someone should be like that, and for no reason that either we, or even he, can make out. Perhaps a childhood experience or something like a posthypnotic suggestion brings it about that he fidgets and becomes distressed and eventually, without really knowing why he is doing it, turns on any silent radio he comes across. He is uncomfortable unless any nearby radio is on, or, equally, he wants any nearby radio to be on.

Scanlon is quite careful here, saying only that a wanton or arbitrary whim is unusual, or not the most common case of desire. Yet even that needs qualification. Much
may depend on our standard of wantonness or arbitrariness. Reactions to particular tastes or sounds can be quite powerful, leading to definite comfort or discomfort, yet by some standards they may be quite arbitrary, either through being quite idiosyncratic, or even when they are shared through being the upshot of a cultural propensity which, in turn, seems to have been an arbitrary winner from a space of alternative possibilities. For both the subject and the observer, the last word may be that sprouts or celery or diminished sevenths—or pinless walks or silent radios—just don’t appeal.

The pinless walk is a more unusual source of discomfort than brussel sprouts, but is it anything more than that? We might say that we ‘don’t understand’ its subject. But then we should remind ourselves of an ambiguity in our notion of understanding a desire. In one rather full-blooded sense, we only understand a desire if we can put ourselves in the shoes of anyone having the desire, and imagine ourselves so desiring. In this full-blooded sense our understandings of the desires of others may be remarkably limited. In this sense, someone may be unable to understand anyone wanting things that fall outside the restricted range of his or her own tastes, or failing to want things that lie within that range. We naturally employ this sense when we say, for instance, that we cannot understand what she saw in him, or cannot understand how anyone likes sweet wines/Jackson Pollock/atonal music/Brut for men, and so on. It is not only the man who wants to carry a pin that we may be unable to understand by this standard, but the man who wants to sleep with X, where X marks a person or kind of person whom we would not ourselves choose to embrace (or equally, the person who doesn’t want to sleep with X where X marks the focus of our own desires and urges).
Yet we understand perfectly well *that* people often want to sleep with such people, just as we understand that they like Jackson Pollock and the rest. This is, after all, why we represent Cupid as blind.

Velleman makes a diagnosis of the sources of the view that intentional actions are aimed at the good, or perceived good. In his analysis, the principal source is the desire to reconcile two stories about motivation. One is that we are motivated by the desire for an outcome, coupled with the belief that some action will promote it. The other is that we are motivated by apprehending propositions that have an action-justifying character and also by apprehending that character.

The agent’s attitudes are thus conceived as having propositional objects that intrinsically favor a particular action, and their favoring the action is conceived as crucial to their behavioral influence.

In a nutshell, having desires, we present ourselves as motivated by the apprehension of reasons, as reasons (where it does not matter too much, I shall drop the final two words and just talk of motivation by reason). So, for instance, the lover insists that in his case Cupid was not blind: rather, he alone has discerned traits of intelligence, beauty, and virtue, that are accepted reasons for admiration.

I think the phenomenon is real enough, but I doubt if it arises from a desire to reconcile two different stories about motivation. For this seems to be at best an obscure, theoretician’s ambition, and it is not likely to have moulded our language of practical reason in such a profound way. Rather, what seems to have happened is more direct. A
desire or intention or action is, as Anscombe and Scanlon (and Hume) rightly insisted, a potential object of public scrutiny. There is often a real voice asking the ‘why?’ question, and even if there is none there could be one, and in any case we can always imagine it. To answer this voice we look for features of things that are acceptable to it: features that in some way or another appeal to the actual interrogator, or the potential one that we imagine or whose inquiry we have internalized.

The voice can put its ‘why’ question as a request for reasons—an identification of the features that presented themselves to us favourably—so, of course, the answer to it takes the form of presenting ourselves as sensitive to reasons. Velleman nicely puts this as sensitivity to a ‘faciendum’ proposition, a proposition stating that something is to be done or is the thing to do, in that very wide, Aristotelian sense that, while it embraces the ethical is certainly not exhausted by it. So now the picture is that desire and motivation by desire are presented as the belief that an action (or intention or attitude) is faciendum, but remembering all the while that this belief is in place even when the favourable light in which the action is thereby presenting as being may be of the dimmest. It may be only the light cast by ‘I just felt like it’ or even ‘for the hell of it’. A lonely impulse of delight can fill the place as well as a fervent conviction of duty.

Some might want to fight the equation, as Velleman does. The people he highlights, who are not square, rejoice in desires that they like to regard as spontaneous, arbitrary and perverse or even evil. Certainly such agents might avoid the language of ‘faciendum’ although they do not have to, for they can present themselves as thinking that spontaneous, arbitrary, perverse or evil acts are the things to do. But we have already seen that this is not a good place to fight Anscombe. Even the worst of these perverse
agents, the one flying under the banner of ‘evil be thou my good’ needs interpretation. And the interpretation will, inevitably, consist in some attempt to say what it is about it that moves them to prefer the bad (what they see as the good of it, in Anscombe’s terms). We have already seen Anscombe conceding that her ‘why’ questions allow the kind of answer that spontaneous, arbitrary and perverse agents might give, or that could be given on their behalf. *Bonum*, she wisely says, *est multiplex*.

I want to move in a different direction, by asking why the association or even the equation between desire and belief in a faciendum proposition is supposed to be a problem for the expressivist. For it seems to me plain that a properly equipped expressivist should be quite happy accepting this equation. He need not fight Anscombe, or Aristotle, or Foot, or Quinn or Scanlon over it (conversely, in stressing it, they still fail to lay a glove on the expressivist position).

The reason is that the expressivist has available a story about the nature of the faciendum proposition that is not only consistent with the equation, but actually explanatory of it. He says, obviously enough, that belief voiced as acceptance of the faciendum proposition is itself a reflection of the pull of the will and of love, or of emotion, desire or attitude. The proposition ‘it was the thing to do’ is just the proposition that has the valency of desire built into it. Instead of expressing favour for X, by movements and heartbeats, we can now say ‘we believe that X is the thing to do, or that feature X provides a reason for choice’. The neutral word ‘believe’ takes away the valency of desire; a faciendum element in the proposition believed restores it. A faciendum proposition is one that is expressed by the words we naturally reach for, when called upon to justify the directions in which we are moved. Its truth is then the focus of
processes of justification and coordination, and it will be appealed to even when these processes have the flavour of persuasion, rhetoric and politics.

We can now see, in perfectly natural terms, why the equation is generally true. For, says the expressivist, those processes of scrutiny and self-scrutiny are part of our lives as intentional, social agents. The directions of our practical attitudes need discussion, and sometimes need to meet opposition and rejection. Such discussion is as natural to anything likeable or even recognizable as a human life as are health and happiness. But we cannot argue with movements and heartbeats without finding ways of talking. We can only argue with a propositional reflection of them: the proposition that the X we favour is indeed a reason for action, or is indeed a good.

This also helps to cast light on the wayward desires we have been talking about. We find Anscombe or Quinn’s agents strange at least in part because we do not see how their desires could survive the gaze of the man within (but then we can feel the same about well-known tastes and quite common whims). These agents are opaque to us insofar as we are unable to connect the apparent objects of their desires with normal sources of discomfort or normal sources of pleasure. But, as I remarked above, this does not mean that we fail to understand that they desire what they do, any more than we fail to understand that some people are panicked by what the rest of us regard as perfectly ordinary or perfectly safe, such as open spaces.

So it is not necessary to oppose Aristotle, or Anscombe at this point. It is simply a question of which comes first. Does the pull of the will and of love get reflected by the belief that some things need doing? Or does reason require us to believe that some things
need doing, a proposition with some intrinsic valency, and thereby exert rational control over the direction that the pull of the will and of love take?

Put like this, one might try to break up the monolithic nature of the question. Do we have to answer it the same way across the board? On the face of it there are motivations where something like a simple, even brute, desire comes first, and then there are others where reason seems to have a more active role. One might contrast, say, a spasm of appetite or lust, or fear or disgust on the one hand, with a long-term calculation of advantage on the other. Those of a neurophilosophical bent might introduce evidence that some things we do, or some reactions we show, are mediated by relatively primitive limbic centers of the brain, while others work only by way of the neocortex, responsible for ‘higher cognitive’ processes. There may be valuable distinctions to be made along these lines. But somehow they fail to dislodge the idea of a single big question. This, I believe, is because any detailed evidence looks to be too easily accommodated by each party. The defense of Anscombe’s priority will be to play up the element of ratiocination behind even the apparently spontaneous agency that results from the spasm of appetite (succumbing to temptation typically requires passing the spasm through an inner tribunal that asks some kind of faciendum question, such as ‘is this really OK?’, and that deploys apparent values to answer it). The defense of the Augustinian direction will play up the


24 This is said by Chris Korsgaard always to be the case, for mature human beings, so that the true ‘wanton’ is not in this respect human. See Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. I am not sure that is right, but it is certainly difficult and rare to escape our social natures. The reflective voice within representing potential criticism—criticism that one cannot just shrug off—is
role that ‘calm passions’ play even in long-term calculations of advantage. Our conception of advantage is not a neutral given, but the result of long acculturation. And what the culture played upon was our fears and hopes and vanity and ambition. Having engaged those, it also co-opts the word ‘reason’, of course, as I have been arguing it has to do. So the reasonable person, as well as pursuing health and happiness, pursues them in the particular guises of her place and time. It becomes only reasonable to need abundant material goods, success, looks, space, fame, privacy, choices, and leisure, for instance, and quite unreasonable to scorn any of the things on this list, or the lives devoted to them. It does not require the perception of a Mandeville or an Adam Smith to see here a victory for the pull of the will, however firmly the word ‘reason’ has become entrenched.

If the issue cannot effectively be joined simply at the micro-level, case by case, is there anything to be said for one priority over the other across the whole spectrum of action? Many apparently serious students of ethics suppose the rationalist answer to be the natural default. But as dissident writers, such as Richard Rorty like to stress, this fact in itself is of no more probative value than an attachment to the theological foundation of ethics, clung to with similar uncomprehending rectitude by earlier generations.

I think the right answer stands out, and my reason for this is handsomely confirmed by most serious recent writers on the rationalist side. Writers on that side as otherwise diverse as Nagel, Putnam, Stroud, Korsgaard, McDowell, and Hampton, to certainly not often off-duty. For this reason I have no concentrated upon animals or pre-linguistic children here, although they seem to me to be clear cases of creatures with desires, but who do not apprehend things under the heading of the desirable, unless that is just another way of putting the same thing.
mention only prominent recent examples, find that they need to associate their rationalism with the rejection of naturalism, or as they might call it ‘bald’ naturalism. ‘Bald’ naturalism, the shallow philosophy of post-Cartesian thinkers about nature, finds that what there is all belongs to the ‘realm of law’, which means of scientific law. In other words, it supposes that the ontology of nature is exhausted by what science tells us nature contains. By contrast naturalism with a full head of hair contains, as well, elements in the space of reasons. It contains the normative order which, when properly apprehended thereby directs our wills. Some of these writers, Nagel and Hampton for example, admit that the rejection of bald naturalism is a very serious cost, demanding that we wrap our minds around something truly supernatural: a cosmic order of reason parallel to the scientific order of causation. I believe they are right, but in this paper I do not want to explore all the problems facing any conception of a genuine metaphysics of enchanted nature. I want instead to mention writers who acknowledge no serious cost, for it is worth sketching how this insouciance comes to seem attractive.

Dialectically the rationalist line I have in mind seeks the protection of minimalism, denying that anything is being suggested that even requires a theory, or requires the cashing out of physical metaphors (such as that of bringing enchanted aspects of nature into view, or resonating in harmony with them). A patronizing note is apt to creep into rationalist discourse at this point, it being only the interlocutor who is clumsy enough to press for an explanation, so that the right-thinking philosopher can brush aside the demand by repeating that there is nothing mysterious about the

apprehension of *reasons*. After all, we must remember, it is a phenomenon under, or behind, our noses all the time. Thus some rationalists go on the attack, lampooning their opponents, charging them with requiring quasi-physicalist mechanisms whereby the rational order impinges on us. In this spirit Ronald Dworkin imagines a cognitivist being asked to provide a mechanism for apprehension of values in terms of flows of enchanted normative particles, or ‘morons’.*26 This isn’t what was intended! Thus, for example minimalist rationalists will be quick to reject Mackie’s argument from queerness, insisting that only an inappropriate attempt to model enchanted nature on physical nature results in anything queer at all.

I think it that this stance, rationalism together with minimalist condescension, misunderstands the dialectical position. Before us there are two different suggestions. One is that the faciendum proposition is a self-standing description of an enchanted, non-physical nature. The other is that it is intelligible as a reflection of the unenchanted mental states of unenchanted animals. The minimalist rationalism that sits pat on the fact that we are talking about a common phenomenon, the apprehension of reasons, simply fails to address this choice. It merely locates the subject matter, about which the choice is to be made. To confront the choice it is no good repeating a list of the phenomena acknowledged by all parties: that we recognize facts as reasons for beliefs and actions, that we respond to requests for justification, look askance at oddball desires, and so forth. Confronting the choice does not mean reminding ourselves of the phenomena. It would mean, at the very least, doing something to unpack the physical metaphors of resonatings,

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or seeings, or disclosures, that troublingly infest the rationalist side. Some of the trouble they cause is precisely located by the idea that discovering an enchanted nature is discovering that the metaphysics that takes the physical to be all that there is, is itself ‘shallow’ and misguided.

Yet with enough minimalism we can suppose that once we have a particular proposition, we have without cost a coordinated fact. If putting a subject ‘in the space of reasons’ is describing them in a particular way, and if such descriptions are ones we make, then in making them we can talk without blushing of a coordinated kind of fact. Difference of sense, automatically, engenders difference of reference. So, in the presence of minimalism, there is no issue about normative facts. And this seems to squeeze out expressivism. For the expressivist accepts or rather celebrates the peculiarity of sense, arising when we describe things normatively, or equally when we describe people as sensitive to reasons. These are peculiar families of description. But the expressivist also insists that this does not require a parallel peculiarity of fact. For we are not to be understood as being in the business of representing facts when we talk in the space of reasons. We are speaking in a different voice, and to be understood in a different way. We are speaking in ways that reflect the pull of the will and of love. This means, of course, that an expressivist cannot be a wholehearted minimalist. If he is a minimalist about truth, he has to be something else about the realm of sense—that is, about the propositions believed true.

The topics I have treated have not, primarily, concerned emotion, at least as that is often understood. I haven’t talked of the central or primary emotions, often listed as:
happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise, and disgust.\textsuperscript{27} I haven’t talked about ‘higher cognitive’ emotions, such as guilt or shame, pride, embarrassment, jealousy, or envy.\textsuperscript{28} The dictionary gives under ‘emotion’:

A mental ‘feeling’ or ‘affection’ (\textit{e.g.} of pleasure or pain, desire or aversion, surprise, hope or fear, etc.), as distinguished from cognitive or volitional states of consciousness.

happily building in their distinctness from cognitive states, but also building in distinctness from volitional states. We might mention in passing that this last clause is a little strange. Since desire and aversion are given as examples of emotion, it is difficult to think what might be meant by distinguishing between emotions, including desires and aversions, and ‘volitional states of consciousness’. Perhaps the idea is that a volitional state is something like a choosing or willing, and not all desires or aversions give rise to those. But surely choosing is not a state of consciousness at all, but an action. And the only sense in which willing might be a state of consciousness seems to be that in which we say, for example, that a racing fan stood there willing her horse to win, which is hardly a paradigm of bending oneself towards something, or intending it.

Be that as it may, emotions matter. I take it this is because they share the valency of desire: they consist in feelings towards things, and those feelings are typically bound

\textsuperscript{27} This is the list given by Antonio Damasio, \textit{The Feeling of What Happens}, p. 50.

up with the desire that things be one way or another. This being so, the prevalence of rationalism remains surprising. It is a prevalence visible not only in the Aristotelianism I have been discussing, but even in work which might seem to be distanced from it. For example, it is visible in writers who take very seriously the importance of emotion—but then immediately scuttle back under the skirts of cognition, conceiving of emotions themselves as no more than cognitions. For such writers, if emotions matter to rational agents such as ourselves, it has to be because emotions themselves are perceptions of value, or servants of value, and thereby validated. Here rationalism, perceiving that emotions are, in fact, respectable, seeks to colonize them rather than to war with them.

This rationalist imperialism may mainly be a topic for the social historian. Clearly the Western tradition from Descartes onwards includes rich deposits of mistrust of anything emotional or passionate. A prominent theme is that confronted with emotions we become helpless and passive and overwhelmed; caught by gusts or whirled by tornadoes. This is surely just a mistake of overgeneralization. If, when we think of emotions, our principal focus is on wild fear or deep depression, we may indeed be inclined to subscribe to the notion of our passivity under them. Similarly, when we think of external causes affecting our beliefs, we will panic if we focus on examples like a blow on the head making us think we are Napoleon. The panic disappears if we remember examples like the cheese in the fridge making us think that there is cheese in

29 This does not imply an ‘add-on’ theory, in the sense of Peter Goldie, *The Emotions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 40. Emotional feelings are not desires plus, on the side, visceral or other feelings. I agree with Goldie that the feeling is itself a feeling about someone or something: it has its own intentionality.
the fridge. Here the causal route is one of genuine sensitivity: in the case of the blow on
the head it is not. The similar panic about emotion disappears when we remember the
way in which the nasty dog causes fear and the filthy food causes disgust, or when we
remember the ways in which the most ordinary decision-making of people who lack
affect responses, or lack any way to attach them reliably to objects of feeling, entirely
collapses.\(^{30}\)

Emotions are of course responsive to reason, not only in the familiar case in
which a change of belief initiates or terminates an emotion. Rather, our propensity to take
a belief emotionally can itself be changed, at as the huge deposit of our culture’s
homiletic literature on the subject shows. Those who preached so enthusiastically against
envy, malice, greed, fear, depression, and the rest had a purpose in mind. You might not
be able just to ‘switch off’ fear of spiders, envy of your neighbour, or greed for fame. But
you can learn to set your mind in ways that are inhospitable to them. Emotions are not
much different from beliefs in this respect. You may not be able to will away a belief, or
in any way get rid of one without a deal of practice, help, and time. And notice that this is
most certainly true of beliefs whose content concerns what is a reason for what. I would
regard the fact that someone has spat in this mug as a decisive reason against drinking
from it, and that opinion is (exactly) as immutable, and as little responsive to reasonings,
as my disgust at the idea. So passivity cannot be the issue. Yet nobody in the rationalist
tradition worries that such beliefs assail us, as it were from outside, and thus undermine
our autonomy or dignity.

\(^{30}\) Anonio Damasio, *Descartes’ Error* New York: Putnam, 1994. I suggest the amendment about reliable
attachment in *Ruling Passions*, p. 126.
There is another reason for the rationalist tradition. We are apt to think of emotions not only in terms of being overcome, but also solely in connection with cases where things have gone wrong. We are panicked by things that are harmless, or we are helpless victims of melancholy, subject to sudden rages, or hopelessly envious or jealous. Hence it becomes possible to think of emotions as purely ‘irruptive motivational states’, apt to interfere with our cool or prudent or long-term goals.  

But this prejudice arises simply from skewing the sample class. We forget the substrate of non-irruptive, protective, emotions that are involved in our attachment even to cool or prudent or long-term goals: the emotions uncovered by Mandeville or Hume or Smith. Emotions are adaptations, and in the case of the primary emotions, subserved by the same neural mechanisms in us and in other animals. They are far older than society and language and anything recognizable as values, except in the sense in which nutrients or integrity of bodily tissue are values. They play a clear functional role in the preservation of their possessor. What we might call proto-emotions are arousals indicating something about the state of the animal system. But in percipient animals they can become aroused via perception of the environment, as well as by expectation and memory (although they may continue to indicate something about the state of the animal system, as the James-Lange theory suggests). A dog can be pleased or frightened or enraged, even if it cannot be pleased at what happened a week ago, or frightened at what it foresees for the winter, or enraged at a jibe. In other words, the role of emotion has been expanded and adapted by human beings in concert with the ways in which our

overall conceptual capacities expand the temporal and spatial extent of the environment to which we can respond, and the responses we make to it.

There is a more respectable place in which cognition may be involved with emotion. In the James-Lange theory emotion is indeed a kind of cognition, but a cognition of the state of the animal system. This is one interpretation of the truth that the feeling of emotion is engendered by the states of arousal or depression of the brain and body. But it is not a compulsory interpretation, and I think it should be resisted. After all, the seeing of a tree has, as a proximate cause, states of the visual cortex and many other areas of the brain, but it is not a cognition of them. It is a cognition of the tree. We might gloss this in part by saying that the function of the perceptual state is to direct attention to the tree, not to the brain. And then, similarly, the function of an emotion is to give a direction to our response to the world around us. It concentrates us on the dangerous dog, not on our brains and bodies and viscera. I do not advance this as an objection to the valuable insights of the James-Lange story, but only to the equation between causal and cognitive processes that would be required for this application of it.

5. End of Interlude: Return to Justice.

A different strand in Smith is the idea that unlike obligations of benevolence, obligations of justice can be exacted from us. They bring in the potential force of the community or the civil power: ‘the person himself who meditates an injustice is sensible of this, and feels that force may, with the utmost propriety, be made use of both by the person whom he is about to injure, and by others, either to obstruct the execution of his crime, or to punish him when he has executed it.’32 Applied to Hume’s example, this suggests that the

32 Smith, pp. 79-80.
question of whether there is an obligation of justice may hinge on whether we think a spectator, contemplating a breach of ‘gentle usage’, could permissibly use pre-emptive or retaliatory force on the perpetrator. I am not sure whether we do think this in general. If we can take the case of animals as indicative, our actual animal welfare legislation suggests we think that if the breach is severe enough then the criminal law has a say, but at least in our jurisprudence, if not in our studies, we seem prepared to let a fair amount of not so gentle usage go on unprevented and unpunished.

However we solve this issue, if we stand back for a moment it should be obvious that this particular issue about justice is not a promising basis from which to attack sentimentalism. The structure of the case disqualifies it from that task. The idea is to arouse our sense of what is due to these creatures, and to encourage shock and outrage at the base behaviour to which Hume’s agents might be led, or to excite us to lament the outrages which they might get away with, and to wring our hands over the sad plight of the poor defenceless creatures. All this is excellent. It shows us sympathizing with the downtrodden and their resentment, perhaps desiring or wishing for a civil order in which the powerful would be punished, feeling that things are out of joint unless they are brought to account for their crimes, and so on. In other words, it shows that our sense of outrage and injustice is mobilized, not merely our benevolence. But it cannot show more than that. It cannot show that what is mobilized lies outside the sentiments altogether. Hume’s example may make us hot under the collar about the indignities the powerful may visit on the weak, but it does not afford any evidence that getting hot under the collar is anything else than feeling an attitude and emotion, directed upon a particular social structure and the situations it looks set to allow.
6. Where This Leaves us.

I have not, in this paper, been exclusively defending expressivism. Other views which stress the place of sentiments, or imagination and culture, in the genesis of our ethical thought were equal possible targets of Kerstein and Peacocke’s attacks. Some of these others, perhaps a naïve subjectivism less deft with the notion of ‘mind dependence’, might even fall to such attacks, for instance by giving the moral judgement a truth-condition that is not child-dependent or dog-dependent, but genuinely mind-dependent. Others may avoid them only by inappropriate reliance on ‘actually’ operators and other pieces of doubtful machinery. If so, I am glad to part company with them.

The popularity of rationalism, and the general feeling that there ‘must be something to’ the kinds of argument I have been discussing, are very deep-rooted. Partly, they represent a noble dream. They answer a wish that the knaves of the world can be not only confined and confounded, but refuted – refuted as well by standards that they have to acknowledge. Ideally, the will be shown to be in a state akin to self-contradiction. Kerstein acknowledges that Kant and neo-Kantians have not achieved anything like this result. But it is still, tantalizingly there as a goal or ideal, the Holy Grail of moral philosophy, and many suppose that all right-thinking people must join the pilgrimage to find it.

We sentimentalists do not like our good behaviour to be hostage to such a search. We don’t altogether approve of Holy Grails. We do not see the need for them. We are not quite on all fours with those who do. And we do not quite see why, even if by some secret alchemy a philosopher managed to glimpse one, it should ameliorate his behaviour, let alone that of other people. We think instead that human beings are ruled by passions,
and the best we can do it to educate people so that the best passions are also the most forceful. We say of rationalistic moral philosophy what Hume says of abstract reasonings in general, that when we leave our closet, and engage in the common affairs of life, its conclusions seem to vanish, like the phantoms of the night on the appearance of the morning.  