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Emotions and Morality: is Cognitive Science a Recipe for Ethical Relativism?

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1. A substantial amount of evidence, in contemporary (neuro)cognitive science, suggests that moral beliefs are inherently dependent on emotions. Several studies have shown – or purported to show – that emotive reactions not only accompany moral judgments, but also decisively influence them. For example, it has been reported that research subjects tend to provide much more negative judgments, about the moral permissibility of some action, when they are under the influence of a negative smell, or when they are seated at a filthy, rather than a clean, desk[1]. In a famous study involving posthypnotic suggestion, subjects were primed to feel disgust upon hearing a morally neutral word, such as 'often', and this considerably worsened their judgments on morally wrong actions, compared to the neutral condition; some subjects, when in the disgust condition, even blamed behaviour that was not in any sense wrong[2]. Moreover, studies on psychopaths, and on patients affected by lesions in the ventromedial section of the prefrontal cortex, show that these subjects – whose emotive system is highly impaired, and who seem incapable of empathic concern – are unable to distinguish between conventional and moral transgressions, and do not seem to make full-blown moral judgments[3]. These data concur with famous studies using fMRI, according to which the tendency of

[1] S. Schnall *et al.*, *Disgust as Embodied Moral Judgment*, in «Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin», 34 (2008), pp. 1096-1109.

[2] T. Wheatley-J. Haidt, *Hypnotic Disgust Makes Moral Judgments More Severe*, in «Psychological Science», 16 (2005), pp. 780-784.

[3] J. Blair, *A Cognitive Developmental Approach to Morality: Investigating the Psychopath*, in «Cognition», 57 (1995), pp. 1-29; M. Koenigs *et al.*, *Damage to the Prefrontal Cortex Increases Utilitarian Moral Judgements*, in «Nature», 446 (2007), pp. 908-911.

"normal" people to give deontological answers to moral dilemmas is highly influenced by neural activations in areas related to the limbic system[4]. Finally, social psychologists have reported on the phaenomenon of 'moral dumbfounding', *i.e.*, on the tendency of research subjects, asked to support their intuitive, emotionally-dictated responses, to confabulate 'rational' justifications clashing with the available evidence[5].

According to many scholars, the data collected so far provide sufficient ground to claim that emotions are both necessary and sufficient conditions of moral judgments. In its most ambitious form, the 'necessity-and-sufficiency' thesis implies, on the one hand, that one cannot make a moral judgment unless he or she feels an emotional reaction of approval or disapproval towards some action or character; on the other hand, that feeling any such reaction is all that is needed for a moral judgment to be generated. In other words, moral judgments are uniquely caused by emotions and voice our affective states. On this view, the practice of moral reasoning is a *post-hoc* rationalisation of processes whose real nature is entirely emotional, and sometimes even a sort of confabulation, *i.e.* the mere invention of arguments that never played a role in the formation of the judgment[6]. In particular, "deontological judgments" are the direct product of neural activations in the emotive areas and have nothing to do with our reflective capacities[7].

These empirical results have promoted a new wave of ethical sentimentalism, that, in the spirit of experimental philosophy, claims to ground philosophical conclusions on scientific evidence[8]. One such relevant proposal was put forward by Jesse Prinz who, basing on the empirical data concerning the role of emotions in morals, suggested an original view on the nature of ethics, according to which a) moral concepts are essentially

[4] J. Greene *et al.*, *An fMRI Investigation of Emotional Engagement in Moral Judgment*, in «Science», 293 (2001), pp. 2105-2108; Id., *From Neural "Is" to Moral "Ought": What Are the Moral Implications of Neuroscientific Moral Psychology?*, in «Nature Reviews Neuroscience», 4 (2003), pp. 847-850.

[5] J. Haidt *et al.*, *The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment*, in «Psychological Review», 108 (2001), pp. 814-834; J. Haidt, *The New Synthesis in Moral Psychology*, in «Science», 316 (2007), pp. 998-1002. For a good synthesis of the empirical research in this area, see M. De Caro-M. Marraffa, *Mente e morale. Una piccola introduzione*, Luiss UP, Roma 2016, pp. 105-147.

[6] J. Haidt *et al.*, *The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail*, cit.

[7] J. Greene, *The Secret Joke of Kant's Soul*, in W. Sinnott-Armstrong (ed.), *Moral Psychology. Volume 3: Emotion, Brain Disorders, and Development*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 2008, pp. 35-79.

[8] S. Nichols, *Sentimental Rules. On the Natural Foundations of Moral Judgment*, Oxford UP, Oxford 2004.

related to emotions, so that the disposition to feel moral emotions is a condition to possess them and b) moral properties consist in emotional facts, that is, the property of being right or wrong consists in eliciting a sentiment of approbation or disapprobation relative to it in an observer. Prinz dubs thesis *a* "epistemic emotionism", and thesis *b* "metaphysical emotionism"[9]. This view singles out emotions and sentiments – the latter conceived of as dispositions to feel certain emotions – as the basic facts of morality. Contrary to old-fashioned emotivism, emotionism believes in the existence of moral facts and properties, but explains such properties with reference to the feelings and emotions of approbation and disapprobation caused in the observers: just as red is the property of causing a sensation of redness in a human perceiver, so rightness is the property of causing an emotion of approbation in a human observer. According to Prinz, then, morality is inherently subjective, since its concepts and properties refer to inner states of human individuals. This would not have relativistic implications, if one were to contend that human emotions display some substantial sort of uniformity (as modern thinkers such as Smith and even Hume suggested); however, Prinz insists much on the cultural relativity of human emotions and sentiments – a conclusion strongly suggested by the historical and anthropological evidence – and this, together with emotionism about moral properties, leads him to metaethical relativism, i.e., the view that «the truth conditions of a moral judgment depend on the context in which the judgment is formed»[10].

In sum, if a) moral properties, such as wrongness, consist in the fact that some observer feels an emotion of disapproval against it, or has a disposition to feel some such disapproval, and b) human emotions are essentially culture-dependent, than c) moral relativism is justified and moralities are sentimental cultural constructions. According to Prinz, if I say "cannibalism is wrong", I am saying that "cannibalism causes me an emotive reaction of disapproval"; but it would misleading for me to go on to say that "The Akamara people ought to refrain from cannibalism", because, while right and wrong relativize to the speaker's values, ought judgments and their normative authority relativize to the values of the agents[11]. Norms against cannibalism, therefore, have no authority against individuals who

[9] J.J. Prinz, *The Emotional Basis of Moral Judgments*, in «Philosophical Explorations», 9 (2006), pp. 29-43; Id., *The Emotional Construction of Morality*, Oxford UP, Oxford 2007.

[10] J.J. Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morality*, cit., p. 174.

[11] *Ivi*, p. 179.

did not internalize them. Thus, the scientific evidence on the role of emotions in morals, and the historical and anthropological research on past and distant cultures, give rise to a sort of naturalised genealogy of morals and suggest powerful arguments in favour of ethical relativism. In this paper, I will argue mainly against the epistemic thesis and, as a consequence, against the metaphysical one, suggesting that the scientific data provide no conclusive evidence for a negative conclusion on moral objectivism.

2. According to epistemic emotionism, having the moral concepts presupposes possessing the appropriate emotions; by acquiring the right kind of emotions, human individuals learn to manipulate the moral concepts. As hypothesized in the moral Mary argument[12], an individual lacking any education on the moral emotions could understand everything written by Kant and Mill on normative ethics, but would not have the concepts of right and wrong: she would not know that *x* is the right thing to do, even if she understood that *x* maximizes utility, or respects humanity as an end in itself, for she would lack the proper attitude to utility or humanity. One central piece of evidence for this conclusion is provided by the results of studies on psychopaths, who clearly fail to understand the distinction between moral and conventional norms, treating all norms as conventional[13]. The obvious explanation suggests that it is their emotional impairment that causes their cognitive deficit. Contrary to what others have suggested[14], according to Prinz psychopaths are an argument in favour of motivational internalism, because their lack of empathy, emotions and moral motivation causes their inability to make moral judgments in the first instance. It takes emotions to "see" the moral distinctions, which otherwise are as invisible as colours for colour-blind people.

This view, in my opinion, suffers from several problems. For one thing, it fails to demonstrate that the right order of causation is in all cases from the emotions to the judgments. Nobody can deny that we sometimes feel moral

[12] *Ivi*, pp. 38-42.

[13] J. Blair, *op. cit.* As a matter of fact, Blair found that psychopaths treat all norms as moral: but this finding is generally considered as biased, since the subjects wanted to make a good impression on the researchers. What is clear from Blair's research, is that the psychopaths fail to understand this distinction – which is notoriously vital for the acquisition of moral thought (E. Turiel, *The Development of Social Knowledge: Morality and Convention*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1983).

[14] A. Roskies, *Are Ethical Judgments Intrinsically Motivational? Lessons from "Acquired Sociopathy"*, in «Philosophy and Psychology», 16 (2003), pp. 51-66.

emotions popping up vehemently, and a moral judgment comes to our minds and lips without any cognitive interface. In these cases, the judgment is caused univocally by the emotions: however, these cases can hardly account for our whole moral experience. In many cases, in fact, we do not feel an emotion directly leading to a judgment, but, on the contrary, we have to collect a certain amount of information on previous facts – such as broken promises, false declarations and expected negative consequences – in order to reach the judgment that some action *x* is wrong or unjust: it is only when we have made up our minds on this complex structure of facts and reached the normative judgment, that we may (but not necessarily) feel resentment or anger. In such cases, to say that believing "*x* is wrong" expresses or involves an emotive reaction is quite unconvincing. Prinz would say that, in these cases, the reflective process leads us to categorize *x* under some rubric covered by an already internalised rule; such reference to the rule generates the negative emotion and this triggers the moral judgment. This story seems to me unpersuasive. In fact, even though some elements of our normative body may be constituted by rules directly linked to an emotive experience – perhaps summarising our previous emotional reactions – many others are simply learned through education: it is not that emotions give rise to the rules, rather that apprehending the moral rules shapes our emotional reactions. In many cases, babies are taught that something is unjust and this triggers certain patterns of emotional reaction. Of course, the emotive reactions associated to the 'perception' of injustice is a powerful means to reinforce the moral attitude, and therefore they are largely used in moral education; this is why the standard road to acquire moral competence passes through the development of a moral sensibility. However, the fact that emotive reactions are often associated to the moral judgment in this way does not entail that moral concepts such as 'right' or 'wrong' do not convey anything distinct from such reactions. What they convey is the fact that there are valid reasons to consider the respective actions as fit or unfit to be done, reasons that can be cashed out in terms of consequences caused for, or attitudes taken towards, other people; this is why these actions fall under a specific moral rule, and why certain emotive reactions to the actions or the acting people are appropriate.

Moreover, there are also cases in which we do feel emotions of approval or disapproval, but we realise that we lack sufficient reasons to ground them. For example, we feel disapproval for a certain kind of sexual behaviour, such as homosexuality, but then we reflect on our emotions and judgments, and realise that we have no good reasons to hold them. We embark

on a process of reflection, weighing reasons for and against our judgment, and reach the conclusion that, contrary to what our education led us to think and feel, that behaviour is *not* wrong, and our judgment is unjustified. Once we have reached this conclusion, we may still feel a negative emotion of disapproval towards homosexual people, but we strive to bring our emotional states in line with our normative judgments[15]. This clearly shows that, in many circumstances, the emotions accompany moral judgments without causing them; moreover, offers a good reason for disbelieving that to make a judgment of rightness or wrongness *is* to feel the respective emotion.

Prinz considers this objection in the context of discussing the view of other "sensibility-theorists", such as McDowell and Wiggins, according to which, unlike colour judgments, that are merely *caused* by their objects, moral sentiments are *merited* by their objects. On this account, moral rightness does not consist in eliciting approbation, but in meriting the approval of qualified observers; and moral judgment is not itself an emotional response, but a judgment that an emotional response is appropriate. Prinz replies that, if the appropriateness that we are talking of is moral appropriateness, then we move in a circle. His view, thus, is that, unless one feels, or has a disposition to feel, the correspondent emotions, his or her judgment is not authentic: in other terms, the homophobic who judges that homosexuality is not wrong, but still has sentiments of disapproval for it, does not really believe that homosexuality is right, but makes a metacognitive judgment on the appropriateness of his homophobia, a judgment that will eventually lead him to the 'right' moral judgment. However, when he says that something meriting an emotion means that «a person who fails to have the emotion could be held accountable»[16], Prinz is in fact accepting that

[15] That this influence of reasoning processes on emotions is not contrary to the empirical evidence is shown by research on 'moral disengagement', in which subjects who perceive a cognitive dissonance between some prospected action and previously held moral intuitions operate an 'anticipatory rationalization': they modify their beliefs relative to the existence of the dissonance in order to avoid guilty feeling and facilitate their preferred behavior (A. Bandura, *Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities*, in «Personality and Social Psychology Review», 3 (1999), pp. 193-209). It is important to note that moral dumbfounding was described with reference to other-regarding judgments, whereas moral disengagement occurs in self-regarding ones. Moreover, according to the findings of the Moral Identity Theory, moral reasoning need not be biased and self-serving, but can, at least sometimes, function as a disinterested judge (F. Hindriks, *How Does Reasoning (Fail to) Contribute to Moral Judgment? Dumbfounding and Disengagement*, in «Ethical Theory and Moral Practice», 18 (2015), pp. 237-250).

[16] J.J. Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morality*, cit., p. 114.

there are right and wrong kinds of emotions, that is, morally appropriate and inappropriate ones. This shows that the rightness and wrongness of actions do not depend on the emotions in the first instance, but on the goodness or badness of the reasons that we have for feeling certain emotions. Explaining this judgment passed on emotions by a meta-sentiment, or a second layer of moral emotions, obscures the fact that a cognitive belief concerning the appropriateness of emotions is needed, to make sense of such cases; in fact, a meta-sentiment lacks the authority that is conveyed by the words used when we say that you *should* or *ought* to change your emotions – for example, you should not have an emotion of disapproval towards homosexual behaviour: this 'should' or 'ought' cannot be an emotion.

A second observation is that Prinz's discussion does not rule out the possibility of expressing moral judgments without feeling the correspondent emotions. It is a fact that we often judge actions and characters in an abstract and detached way, perhaps simply applying some general norm or pattern of evaluation. Prinz himself acknowledges this possibility: according to him, however, when no on-line emotion accompanies the judgement a moral sentiment is nonetheless present, for to have a moral sentiment is to have a disposition to feel those emotions. To this, it may be replied that, in a moderate rationalistic approach, moral judgments are always accompanied by a disposition to feel some emotion: even in a Kantian view, the really virtuous man's affective dispositions are in line with the judgments of practical reason. This man believes that injustice is wrong, and is correspondingly disposed to feel anger towards the unjust: however, it is not this disposition that causes the belief, let alone that justifies it, but the other way around. The presence of a disposition to feel counts in favour of sentimentalism only if we believe that it is this disposition that grounds the moral judgment. But the very fact that we can dissociate the judgment from the emotion, and pronounce moral judgements on hypothetical cases, or discuss of individuals remote from us, with no emotional involvement, is evidence of the non-emotional character of the judgment. According to the sentimentalistic story, what we do in these cases is to reflect on the situation, which elicits no specific emotional reaction in us, and refer it to some other paradigmatic situation that did generate such reaction; it is thanks to this reference that we can make up our mind and formulate a judgment. But this story is uselessly complex. What we do, in such cases, is to reflect on the situation and apply some rule that we have internalised, to reach a moral judgment. And, as previously noted, the sentimentalistic story accounting for the generation of moral rules is far from convincing.

A third point that can be raised against strong emotionism is that it offers an unpersuasive explanation of the difference between conventional and moral rules. According to Prinz, moral wrongness is the property of eliciting a feeling of disapproval in an observer; however, it is clear that many actions which are definitely not morally wrong, do elicit some such feeling: these are the actions violating non-moral rules, based on convention or etiquette. Since both kinds of violation elicit negative emotional reactions, and since the emotional reaction is all that there is to the wrongness of the violation, the only consistent explanation that emotionism can offer of the difference between the two is based on the intensity of the respective emotions: according to Prinz, in fact, «When we think about hitting, it makes us feel bad, and we cannot simply turn that feeling off. Hitting seems phenomenologically wrong regardless of what authorities say. We are less emotional about conventional rules. Speaking without raising your hand is bad, but it does not elicit rage or guilt»[17]. Now, this is true in some cases, but definitely is not always so. For certain violations of the rules of etiquette are no doubt much more disapproved than some violations of the moral rules: for example, violations of conventional rules that arise emotions of disgust (e.g. those relative to behaving at the table, or to exhibiting bodily parts) may be much more resented than violations of fairness in cases of conflicts of interests, or violations of fidelity through the breaking of a promise. This shows that the distinction between moral and conventional rules cuts deeper than our sentimental reactions, having to do with the reasons grounding the two kinds of rules: universal reasons, referring to very general features of human life and relationships, in the case of moral rules, and contingent reasons, referring to historical and local features of a specific human community, in the case of conventional rules. Not by chance, in his later treatment Prinz offer a different explanation, linking the distinction to the fact that moral rules are grounding norms, that is, norms not needing any explanation, whereas conventional rules depend on an appeal to customs[18]. However, since, according to emotionism, also moral rules are based on sentiments grounded by custom or taste, and since grounding norms are conceived as preference-dependent rules on which no rational debate is possible and for which there is no need to argue ("just as I don't have to argue for the deliciousness of chocolate")[19],

[17] J.J. Prinz, *The Emotional Basis of Moral Judgments*, cit., p. 37.
[18] J.J. Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morality*, cit., pp. 126-127.
[19] *Ivi*, p. 125.

the distinction between moral and conventional rules is reduced to that between non-argued, preference-dependent principles and local principles, backed by traditions and authority. The rationalistic account, insisting on the principled reasons supporting the moral rules, compared to the contingent and historical reasons supporting conventional ones, is definitely superior in accounting for this psychologically fundamental distinction.

A fourth consideration against emotionism is the evidence provided by high-functioning autistic subjects, who notoriously show severe deficits in empathizing and simulating other people's moods and intentions, but nevertheless clearly distinguish between conventional and moral transgressions[20], and, in general, show the capacity for authentic moral judgments. Their moral capacity seems to be based on the mere acquaintance with received or observed rules; the evidence provided by empirical studies in this area seem to justify the conclusion that these individuals in fact develop a form of moral competence «by reasoning [...], on the basis of patient explicit enquiry, reliance on testimony and inference from past situations»[21]. This does not mean that their moral competence is quite "normal", for, in "normal" individuals, moral knowledge is accompanied by the moral emotions[22]; moreover, autistic individuals seem to base their judgments much more on the consequences of actions than on the intentions of agents, relative to typically developed individuals[23]. However, it shows that, although emotions are integral to the usual path through which humans acquire moral knowledge, they are not a strictly necessary condition for the development of moral competence. The two components may at least sometimes be dissociated, and, therefore, the competent manipulation of moral concepts does not presuppose moral emotions.

[20] R. James-R.J. Blair, *Brief Report: Morality in the Autistic Child*, in «Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders», 26 (1996), pp. 571-579.

[21] J. Kennett, *Autism, Empathy and Moral Agency*, in «The Philosophical Quarterly», 52 (2002), pp. 340-357, p. 351.

[22] Which, of course, also play a part in motivating actions according to our judgments. In the present context, I am not making any claim on the debate between internalist and externalist conceptions of moral motivation.

[23] J.M. Moran *et al.*, *Impaired theory of mind for moral judgment in high-functioning autism*, in «Proceedings of the National Academy of Science», 108 (2011) n. 7, pp. 2688-2692). The case of autistic people is somehow the opposite to that of psychopaths. According to most commentators, autistic people are better candidates for the title of moral individuals, even though some claim that psychopaths make authentic moral judgments as well (A. Roskies, *Internalism and the Evidence from Pathology*, in W. Sinnott-Armstrong (ed.), *Moral Psychology, Volume 3: The Neuroscience of Morality: Emotion, Brain Disorders, and Development*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 2008, pp. 191-206.

3. Although strong emotionism asserts both epistemic and metaphysical emotionism, the two elements can be dissociated[24]. However, it is clear that the truth of epistemic emotionism is a strong reason in favour of metaphysical emotionism: if the mastery of moral concepts presupposes the experience of moral emotions, then either you simply reject the existence of moral facts, or you accept that moral facts are emotional facts. If, however, there are reasons to reject epistemic emotionism, as I hope to have shown, then the case for metaphysical emotionism is seriously weakened. To be true, the rejection of the epistemic thesis does not entail the falsity of the metaphysical one, but it refutes the best argument in its favour.

Of course, beyond arguing against the epistemic thesis, it is also possible to provide positive arguments against metaphysical emotionism. I will only mention one central argument of this kind: the fact that metaphysical emotionism does not account for the claim to objectivity that is characteristic of moral judgment. Actually, metaphysical emotionism has a peculiar difficulty with this element of the standard conception of morality. Prinz declares that emotionism has «a major advantage over expressivism»[25], namely, the fact that, on this view, moral judgments are truth-apt. However, if Prinz's view is right, the moral facts making our moral judgments true, when they are true, and false when they are false, are the speaker's emotions of approval and disapproval. As it happens with any form of strict subjectivism, this has the problematic consequence that we cannot ever be wrong in our moral beliefs, since we can hardly be wrong in referring our emotions. And this, in turn, shows that, according to this view, there is simply no point in our discussing controversial moral issues, such as abortion or just war: in fact, since each participant in the discussion is making moral statements that refer to his or her inner emotive states, his or her judgments are made (almost always) true by adequately reflecting to those states. And there is simply nothing that we can do to avoid the conclusion that two or more contrary beliefs may simultaneously be true. Prinz, of course, tries to avoid this conclusion, by having recourse to a traditional strategy used by expressivists: he adds that we should refer not to our first-impression sentiments, but to our *idealised* ones, i.e., to those

[24] As noted by Prinz himself, classical utilitarianism accepts the metaphysical thesis, for it identifies moral properties with a kind of feeling or sentiment (i.e. pleasure), but rejects the epistemic one, refusing to link the use of moral concepts to the experience of moral emotions; emotivism, on the other hand, is epistemically but not metaphysically emotionist, since it radically disqualifies the idea of moral properties or facts.

[25] J.J. Prinz, *The Emotional Basis of Moral Judgments*, cit., p. 35.

moral sentiments that we have in conditions of perfect knowledge, careful reflection and absence of emotional biases. This is equivalent to saying, as emotivists since Ayer have said, that we should correct all the non-moral facts, in order to pave the way for "adequately" feeling about them. But of course, this still has the unpalatable consequence that, when all the non-moral facts are corrected, and our moral views are still at odds, there is nothing more than we can do, but to admit that we live in different moral worlds. In short, the truth-aptness of the emotionist account is seriously compromised by the mere subjectivity of moral sentiments: Prinz's account provides no real improvement on the emotivistic explanation of moral controversies, an explanation that renders spurious or apparent most of our debates on right and wrong.

Moral disagreement can be readily accounted for, on the other hand, if we accept some forms of moral objectivism, according to which our discussions concern not only the empirical facts, but also the normative significance of such facts, that is, the relation that they bear to our reasons for doing certain acts, or accepting certain principles. Accepting a moral judgment does express the belief that some such fact x counts as a reason for doing A in circumstances C. Although it may prove difficult, in many cases, to reach agreement on what our best reasons in fact are, moral concepts do refer to such reasons, including the reasons for feeling such pro-attitudes as emotions and sentiments.

4. Epistemic emotionism is certainly not true; and this weakens the evidence in favour of metaphysical emotionism. Nothing here said in the attempt to shake the foundations of these two theses, however, is meant to imply that the empirical research on cognitive processes in moral decision-making is not important and worth studying. It is highly plausible to believe that such research can perform the role of excluding certain kinds of philosophical approaches – extreme rationalism being one likely candidate. However, it is also worth stressing that all the evidence grounding present proposals of simple sentimentalism is perfectly compatible with a moderate rationalistic picture, as the one here defended. A moderate rationalist, in fact, may readily accept that emotions are necessary for moral judgments, since, without emotions, our moral thought would be blind: emotions can be conceived as defeasible reasons for normative judgments – that is, as the raw materials of practical reason. The rationalist must only add their susceptibility to reasoning, that is, that there can be good or bad reasons for feeling certain emotions. According to Hanno Sauer, the

moderate rationalist can even accept the sufficiency of emotions for moral judgments, provided that they cause the judgments in a way that is normatively acceptable for the subject: that is, the way in which they cause our judgments must be reflectively endorsed by the subject under conditions of full information and rationality[26].

Whether a non-extreme rationalism should be willing to accept such a weak version of the 'necessary-and-sufficient view', or should concede less to the sentimentalist, I leave it open here. However, I do believe that the specific form of strong emotionism defended by Prinz is highly doubtful and seriously undermined by the arguments offered here (among others).

Abstract

Discussing Jesse Prinz's views on metaethics, the author argues (1) that, as far as epistemic emotionism is concerned, this account does not demonstrate that the right order of causation proceed in all cases from emotions to judgments; does not disprove the possibility of dispassionate judgments; has no persuasive explanation of the distinction between moral and conventional rules; cannot account for autistic morality; and 2) that, as far as metaphysical emotionism is concerned, this account offers a much too deflationary account of moral disagreement. The latter can be best understood within an objectivistic account of the facts (including pro-attitudes such as emotions and sentiments) that provide the best reasons for action.

Keywords: epistemic emotionism; metaphysical emotionism; Prinz; ethical relativism.

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[26] H. Sauer, *Psychopaths and Filthy Desks*, in «Ethical Theory and Moral Practice», 15 (2012), pp. 95-115. Cf. also K. Jones, *Metaethics and Emotions Research: a Response to Prinz*, in «Philosophical Explorations», 9 (2006), pp. 45-53.