The Role of Emotion in Moral Decision-Making: A Comparison of Christine Korsgaard's Kantian Position and Peter Railton's Neo-Humean Position

by

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I argue that Christine Korsgaard's Kantian position and Peter Railton's Neo-Humean position have two distinct views regarding the role of emotions in moral decision-making. I begin by exploring each philosopher's view of normativity because a moral agent must be able to use practical reason to determine what morality requires of her. I argue that emotions play a mechanical role on Korsgaard's view, as emotions facilitate decision-making. However, emotions do not determine the content of morality. On the other hand, I argue that in Railton's view, emotions not only facilitate decision-making but they also have a role in determing the content of morality. In this thesis I examine recent neurobiological and psychological research into the role of emotions in decision-making. I conclude by demonstrating that this research serves to clarify the differences in Korsgaard's and Railton's respective positions, for each philosopher can use the research to defend their normative positions.

Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

One of the major debates in moral philosophy is about what constitutes good reasoning in moral situations. There are three components of being a good reasoner: first, being a good reasoner means knowing what is the correct conclusion; second, a good reasoner knows why that conclusion is correct; third, a good reasoner knows why that conclusion should matter to her. That is, she must be able to determine what is required of her from a moral point of view. So she must be able to recognize what morality requires of her and to accept that the requirement is binding. Two of the major figures in this debate are Immanuel Kant and David Hume. They conceive of practical reasoning in two very different ways.

Kant is concerned with intentions and ensuring that moral judgments follow from proper reasoning. Kant views practical reasoning as an exercise in determining whether an action is consistent with two formulas or laws. One is the Formula of Universal Law which is the categorical imperative "act only on maxims that could be willed to be universal law." So our decisions must be universalizable. The other is the Formula of Humanity or the moral law which commands rational beings to "treat each person as if they were a member of the Kingdom of Ends." So we may not treat others as means to our ends. We must respect the humanity of all individuals. Because Kant is concerned with intention, questions about consequences are not relevant. If a person develops a law for herself that adheres to the categorical imperative and follows through on that law, that is all that morality requires of her. If following this law has bad consequences, that is not something for which she is morally culpable. When faced with a moral problem, she must

determine whether a response is something that she could will all rational beings could act on and if the answer is yes, then she must follow through.

Christine Korsgaard follows Kant, but adjusts his view and shifts the focus from the categorical imperative to a view that focuses on agency and identity. On Korsgaard's Kantian view of identity, each person is an autonomous moral agent who has the capacity to develop an identity for herself and bind herself to the obligations that her freely chosen identity requires. As autonomous human beings we all develop various identities for ourselves. The core of each human's identity is her identity as a human being. As she must retain her identity as a human being, it requires her to respect her own humanity and, by rational extension, to respect the humanity of all other human beings. For example, a woman may be a wife, a mother, a business executive, a volunteer on the local school board and each of these identities carries various obligations. Many of these identities can be shed or readjusted as needed and nothing immoral will follow. So she can decide to shed her identity as a volunteer on the local school board without being at moral fault; however, she must do it in an accepted way – i.e., giving notice. But she cannot shed her identity as a human being and remain a moral agent. So she cannot decide to commit murder and retain her identity as a moral agent. The categorical imperative and the moral law remain important as tools to help determine what her identity requires of her. Finally, intentions, not consequences, remain the locus of morality on Korsgaard's view.

Hume, in contrast, is a naturalist and argues that morality is grounded in utility and sentiment. Hume thinks that we rely on empirical evidence from past experiences to make moral decisions. Hume is concerned with consequences and ensuring that moral

judgments enable individuals to lead useful and good lives. Hume views practical reasoning as an exercise in determining whether an action is useful and therefore beneficial. Usefulness is a basic value which promotes the happiness and well-being of the individual and those around her. Hume is primarily concerned with human flourishing and this includes the ability to make decisions that are useful to all members of society. He is concerned with what he calls the natural virtues (benevolence, generosity) and the artificial virtues (justice, allegiance) on the grounds that the former are always good and approved of, while the latter are approved of only in the context of a larger system. Benevolence is always good because it creates happiness and spreads good will which is useful because it promotes the interests of humans. Hume gives the example of giving food or money to a beggar. This naturally praised because it relieves her suffering and that is useful, not only to the beggar but to society as well because it promotes caring and compassion amongst its citizens.[1] On the other hand, allegiance is an artificial virtue because it is useful only in certain systems. For example, allegiance is approved of in an army because it generally leads to soldiers being able to work together as a team under situations of extreme physical and psychological duress and therefore increases their chances of survival. However, there are some contexts where allegiance is detrimental, such as in a cult where all members are expected to commit suicide en masse. For Hume, a virtuous act is not only intellectually satisfying but it is also emotionally satisfying as it creates feelings of warmth and happiness. Hume is concerned with consequences and thinks that actions and decisions which are likely, on the basis of experience to be useful, are to be pursued.

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[1] Hume *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* 3rd Ed. Selby- Bigge, L.A. and P.H. Nidditch Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975 p.180

When making moral decisions Hume thinks that we consider the problem from two perspectives. First, we consider our own self-interest and the interests of those close to us, such as family members and close friends. Then we look at the problem from the moral or common point of view, where we consider how others would think and feel about our decision. Our capacity to experience emotions and to sympathize with others allows us to enter into the common point of view. We are able to not only understand the common point of view intellectually but, most importantly, we are able to feel how others would feel about a decision. So if a person decides to steal an expensive suit from a large chain store, she may feel that it is okay from the perspective of her self interest - she cannot afford the suit but needs it for a job interview and she believes that the store can absorb the cost. However, by entering into the common point of view, she would be able to feel the disapproval of her action from others because it is wrong to steal. Our goal is to make a decision that would be approved of by the common point of view because such a decision would promote the happiness of all those affected by the decision.

Peter Railton, a proponent of a Neo-Humean view, is also concerned with ensuring that humans have a good life. On Railton's view, having a good life is the human interest that morality must satisfy. In order for an individual to have a good life, she must be able to make decisions that are socially rational; that is, they must be rational from the perspective of all potentially affected. Social rationality acts like the common point of view. Railton argues that humans receive feedback from the world in the form of emotional responses and intellectual responses. For example, if a person decides to make an inappropriate joke intended to humiliate a member of the social group then she might receive negative feedback in the form of silence and dirty looks. This negative

feedback (assuming she receives it), would not only have an intellectual impact - the realization that she had said something wrong - it would also have negative emotional feedback; she would feel uncomfortable and would get knots in her stomach. If she is able to learn from this experience, in the future she will refrain from such remarks. The common point of view in this situation is that she should not have made such a joke. However, in order for the common point of view to work, she must be able to enter into it and she does this through sympathy. Clearly, she thought the joke appropriate or else she would not have made it; but by witnessing and *feeling* the response of others she is able to understand that it was inappropriate.

In this thesis I look at the disagreement between Kant and Hume about practical reasoning. I do this by examining the disagreement between Korsgaard and Railton over the role of emotions in practical reasoning; in particular, their role in helping us determine what obligations we must uphold. Korsgaard does not think that our emotions determine the *content* of morality; however, they play a mechanical or executive role in determining what acts are in accord with our chosen identity. By "mechanical role", I mean that the role of emotions is to help us process information properly so that we may determine the content of morality. Our obligations are rationally determined by our chosen identity and our actions must adhere to the categorical imperative and the moral law. How we feel about those obligations is irrelevant. However, when faced with a problem, our emotions can help us determine whether or not an action is consistent with our identity.

Conversely, on Railton's view, emotions play a central role not only in helping us determine whether an action is consistent with our obligations but also in determining

the content of those obligations. Our emotions are central in developing the content of the common point of view. They are also central in providing feedback, either positive or negative, from our actions so that we have the ability to adapt and improve our behaviour. On Railton's view, emotions help determine not only whether an action is consistent with our obligations; they also help determine the content of morality which is the ability to have a good life.

In this thesis I look at empirical research from neurobiologist Antonio Damasio and psychologists Larissa Z. Tiedens and Susan Linton which helps to clarify how emotions are involved in decision-making. Damasio's research focuses on individuals who, as the result of a brain tumour in the ventromedial area, have lost the ability to have normal emotional experiences. Their capacity to experience emotions is greatly diminished so that they only have brief, unsustained, emotional responses under very specific circumstances. As a result of this severely diminished emotional capacity and in spite of normal intellectual functions, these individuals are unable to make rational decisions in everyday life. However, these individuals perform normally in laboratory situations, solving both moral and intellectual problems.

Damasio developed his somatic marker hypothesis where he argues that, through experience, we create somatic markers (physical body signals) of responses to situations. When we encounter a situation that is similar to situations that we have previously experienced, specific somatic markers are flagged and we either have a good feeling towards a response or a negative feeling. For example, when I see another person being humiliated, I get an uncomfortable feeling in my stomach which indicates that there is

something wrong with what I am witnessing. I have this experience because I have experienced similar situations of humiliation which created the same negative feelings.

In order to verify the somatic marker hypothesis, Damasio conducted a series of tests on the ventromedial patients. The ventromedial patients show that in laboratory situations which are closed (the problems encountered have no bearing on the individual's life outside the laboratory), individuals without normal emotional responses are able to make good decisions and good moral judgments. For example, one patient, Elliot, was able to achieve a high score on the Standard Issue Moral Judgment Interview, but the problem he had to solve had no bearing on his actual life nor did he have to face the consequences of his decision at a later point. However, outside the laboratory, the ventromedial patients were unable to make good decisions about any aspect of their lives even though previous to their tumours they were normal, functioning adults. Through a series of tests Damasio found that the only defect was in their experience of emotional responses to stimuli. Because they could not have normal emotional experiences, the ventromedial patients were unable to develop somatic markers and without somatic markers they were unable to make good decisions outside the laboratory.

Damasio's research serves to clarify Korsgaard's position because the fact that the ventromedial patients were able to make moral decisions in the laboratory situations indicates that Kantian agents devoid of normal emotional experiences are capable of recognizing what morality requires of them; however, they are unable to translate this knowledge into action. As a result, the ventromedial patients indicate that we should judge an individual's intention rather than the consequences of her actions. The failure of the ventromedial patients was a mechanical failure, not a moral one. Furthermore, it

clarifies that we are capable of recognizing what our identity requires of us without normal emotional experiences. The ventromedial patients show that, even without normal emotional experiences, we can determine what norms are binding on us. Korsgaard can use Damasio's research to show that emotions are not necessary for humans to recognize what norms are binding on them.

Railton, on the other hand, can use Damasio's research to show that we need normal emotional experiences in order to get around the world and to have a good life. The ventromedial patients were unable to use their emotions to develop the appropriate feedback mechanisms and so could not lead a good life. While the ventromedial patients were not moral failures, because of their tumours, they were unable to make good decisions. They show how normal emotional responses to the environment are required in order to make good decisions which are necessary to leading a good life.

Damasio's research further illustrates the differences between Korsgaard and Railton. The ventromedial patients illustrate how, on Korsgaard's view, emotions play a mechanical role in enabling us to carry out our moral obligations. However, our emotions do not inform the content of morality nor what our identity requires of us. On the other hand, Damasio's research illustrates for Railton the importance of emotions in order to develop feedback mechanisms so that we can make good decisions and have a good life.

Tiedens's and Linton's research clarifies both Korsgaard's and Railton's positions. Tiedens's and Linton's research focuses on psychologically normal individuals and explores the use of heuristics and the use of systematic thought processing. It clarifies, on Korsgaard's view, when a decision can be said to be a moral

decision. Heuristics is the use of environmental cues such as the authority of the person making an argument, or the use of stereotypes. In everyday language, heuristics are shortcuts which enable us to make quick decisions. Systematic thought processing is the evaluation of evidence through examining the facts and determining their relevance to the problem at hand. When we use systematic thought processing we are reflecting on the information and forming a conclusion. Tiedens and Linton found that when humans are certain about how they are feeling and why, they use heuristics to process information. On the other hand, when they are in an uncertain mood, that is they are unsure of the situation or how they feel about the situation, they use systematic thought processing. For example, if I am in a certain mood and judge a student athlete to have cheated on an exam simply because I accept the stereotype that student athletes are more likely to cheat, then my condemning him is the product of heuristics use. However, if I am in an uncertain mood and judge a student athlete to have cheated on an exam because there is empirical evidence (i.e. crib notes stored on her cell phone that was brought into the exam and she was seen using her phone), then it will be a judgment that is the product of systematic thought processing. The cheater's identity as an athlete will be deemed irrelevant.

Tiedens's and Linton's research is relevant to the disagreement between Korsgaard and Railton because it serves to further clarify their views. It clarifies Korsgaard's view because it shows that, when we are in an uncertain mood, we are capable of making a decision from a moral point of view because we are capable of reflecting on our identity. However, if we are in a certain mood and we use heuristics then the decision cannot, in Kantian terms, be considered a decision with moral worth

because it was made without reflection and therefore not from a moral point of view. Nevertheless, such a decision may well be in accord with one's moral duty. So it nicely captures when we are in a position to make a moral decision and when we are not.

On Railton's naturalistic view, Tiedens's and Linton's research provides evidence that humans employ a variety of strategies to navigate the world. When we are certain, we use heuristics because they are quick and easy and generally accurate. When we are uncertain, we use systematic thought processing in order to reflect on the situation and make a better decision. If our decision is incorrect then, on Railton's view, we may receive negative feedback and will alter future decisions accordingly.

Outline of Thesis

In chapter two I discuss the problem of normativity. Normativity is the aspect of any ethical theory which obligates individuals to adhere to norms which are moral rules, commands and directives. Normativity is relevant to discussions of moral reasoning because, in order to be a successful moral reasoner, one must know what norms she is bound to uphold. An appropriate theory of practical reason will enable the individual to determine her obligations. I argue that there are two components that an ethical theory requires to be normatively successful. First, a successful normative program will be able to explain why we are bound by norms that take the form of rules, commands, and directives. Second, a successful normative program has the capacity to motivate individuals to uphold those norms. I argue that Korsgaard's Kantian position establishes normativity through our agency: we create identities for ourselves and that these identities bind us to certain norms. I argue that Hume and Railton establish normativity

through the development of the common point of view. This chapter serves to establish Railton's and Korsgaard's respective normative views.

In chapter three I move from a discussion of how normativity is established to a discussion about how, when confronted with moral dilemmas, we are able to determine how to behave in accordance with our obligations. I use Damasio's study of the ventromedial patients to demonstrate the role that emotions play in the decision-making process. I will also show how his research is consistent with both a Kantian and a neo-Humean perspective but for two very different reasons.

I argue that the interest that informs morality on Korsgaard's view is the interest in maintaining one's agency through the ability to determine what is required of one's identity. In order to be able to determine what is required of one's identity one must possess the intellectual capacity to perform the test of reflective endorsement. The test of reflective endorsement involves determining if an action is consistent with both the categorical imperative and the moral law. If one has the capacity to perform these intellectual tasks, one has the capacity to reflect on what her identity requires of her. According to Korsgaard's normative view, we are required to adhere to our identity as human beings; therefore, we need to be able to determine what our identity requires of us.

I argue that the interest which informs the content of morality on Railton's view is the interest in having a good life. In order to have a good life, on Railton's view, an individual must consider what her objective interests are as a human being and what is required by the impersonal point of view which encompasses the interests of all other human beings. This is tied to his normative view where we are bound to respect the common point of view. When we make good decisions, we are acting not only in our own

objective interests but also in the interests of all other human beings. According to Railton, we have the capacity to learn from the feedback we gain from our experiences how to improve our decisions so that they are more socially rational.

I provide an in-depth exegesis of Damasio's research in order to be able to illustrate how it clarifies both Korsgaard's and Railton's respective views. I discuss the problems that the ventromedial patients encounter in their everyday lives and then I discuss how Damasio was able to determine that their problems arose from their inability to have normal emotional experiences. Finally, I discuss Damasio's gambling experiment that illustrates how somatic markers work. I then discuss how Korsgaard and Railton can each use Damasio's research to clarity their respective positions.

In chapter four I examine Tiedens's and Linton's research into how specific emotions affect how we process information. Like Damasio's research, Tiedens and Linton's research is consistent with Korsgaard as we retain the ability to evaluate our decisions and determine whether they are in accord with our identity. It does not matter if we use heuristics to make judgments as we retain the ability to step back and reevaluate those judgments. Unlike Damasio's research, Tiedens and Linton show how our emotions affect whether a decision is made from a moral point of view. If I make a judgment using systematic thought processing and in doing so reflect on my identity and determine whether the judgment passes the reflective endorsement test, that judgment is one that is made from a moral point of view. However, if I make a judgment using heuristics without evaluating whether the judgment passes the reflective endorsement test, then that judgment is not made from the moral point of view and has no moral worth.

As mentioned above, Tiedens's and Linton's research is consistent with Railton as it supports his naturalistic view that we develop different mechanisms to make decisions. Furthermore, nothing in Tiedens's and Linton's research suggests that humans are unable to step back and reevaluate their decisions to ensure that they are socially rational.

I conclude that while both Korsgaard and Railton are concerned with explaining how it is that norms are binding on us and how we are motivated to adhere to those norms, they provide two very different explanations. By examining the role of emotions in determining how normativity is established, I argue that Korsgaard assigns emotions a mechanical role where they serve to help us process information to make decisions. Railton, on the other hand, assigns emotions a central role not only in helping us process information but also in determining our norms.

Chapter 2

Normativity

Establishing normativity is a problem for all ethical theories as each must show that humans have an obligation to uphold the norms of that ethical theory. At the core of the problem of normativity lie two separate questions that need to be resolved in order for an ethical theory to be normatively successful. First, what makes a rule or a command binding on a person? Second, what is it about the ethical theory that is supposed to motivate an individual to follow a rule or a command? Christine Korsgaard and Peter Railton provide two very different responses to these questions. Korsgaard thinks that the solution can be found in our moral agency and our ability to create identities out of that agency. These identities, grounded in our obligation to value our humanity and the humanity of all others, serve to bind us to norms. Railton thinks that the solution lies in a society that acts rationally and considers the interests of all its members. Like Hume, Railton thinks that our norms are grounded in a common point of view and that our desire to have a good life motivates us to uphold the norms of the common point of view. Even though Korsgaard and Railton provide two different solutions to the problem of normativity, each has the same goal - to show why an individual ought to be motivated to find norms binding.

Normativity

Normativity is the aspect of any ethical theory which obligates individuals to act in accordance with norms that take the form of rules, commands, directives, etc. In order to have a workable society we need to be able make claims on others and expect that they will be fulfilled. As Simon Blackburn notes "... we grade and evaluate, and compare and

admire, and claim and justify. We do not just 'prefer' this or that, in isolation. We prefer that our preferences are shared; we turn them into demands on each other".[2] So when a mother tells her son that he should congratulate the members of the opposing soccer team on a good game, it is not merely a suggestion (although frequently it is treated as such). The mother is trying to instill the value of being a good sport and of respecting the achievement of others because those are values that we share with other humans and expect of them. We think poorly of those who are inconsiderate in the face of defeat. When we talk about normativity, we are talking about the claims and demands we make on one another. As Korsgaard puts it "When I say that an action is right I am saying that you ought to *do* it; when I say that something is good I am recommending it as worthy of your choice".[3]

There are two aspects to a successful normative program. First, a successful normative program must be able to establish some means to be able to claim that a rule or a command is binding on a person. Second, a successful normative program must establish some means so as to be able to claim that a person must be motivated to treat a rule or a command as binding on them. When we say that something is normative, we are making a claim on another to which they ought to respond. For example, if I tell a person to stop torturing a prisoner, I say to the torturer, "Stop! That is another human being that you are torturing". In doing so I am directing that person to recognize the humanity of the prisoner. I am making a claim that she ought not to torture another human being. While Korsgaard and Railton have different explanations as to why the torturer is then obligated to stop, each would agree that a claim has been made on the

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[2] Blackburn, Simon *Being Good* New York: Oxford University Press, 2001 p.4

torturer. Briefly, Korsgaard would argue that the torturer is violating her obligation to humanity and so is relinquishing her identity as a human being. Railton would argue that it is not socially rational to allow torture.[4] Regardless of how our claims, demands, directives, etc., are structured, we, as human beings, require certain standards of behaviour from others.

Moral monsters, individuals such as Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, Jeffrey Dahmer, Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka, who flagrantly disobey moral laws in order to pursue their own goals, can be seen as a problem for any moral theory as these individuals are able to ignore the pull of normativity. But these are rare individuals who have an abnormal psychology. Also, as it is highly unlikely that any valid ethical theory could affect such individuals, it is not necessary to require that the normative aspect of any theory be able to solve the problem of moral monsters. I am only concerned with normativity for the general population which does not suffer from large psychological defects.[5] To that end an effective ethical theory must be able to motivate and obligate individuals to adhere to the tenets of that ethical theory.

Korsgaard

Korsgaard argues that, through our moral agency, we develop identities for ourselves and that inherent in our identities are norms which we are obligated to uphold.

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[3] Korsgaard, Christine *The Sources of Normativity* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. pp. 8-9

[4] I will expand on their positions throughout the course of this thesis. I merely want to lay out their general direction here.

[5] It is very difficult to classify what constitutes a normal psychology. For the purpose of this thesis I will use the term "psychologically normal individuals" to mean individuals who do not suffer from any medically recognized psychological illness. For further reading it is probably best to look at what constitutes *abnormal* psychology. I recommend the following texts:
Carlson, Neil R. & Mary Carlson *Psychology the Science of Behavior* 4th Edition. Toronto: Allyn & Bacon, 1993.
Peterson, Christopher *Psychology A Biopsychosocial Approach* 2nd Edition. New York: Longman, 1997.

Our core obligation is to our humanity and if we violate our obligation to our humanity then we are no longer moral.[6] All of our other identities such as being a mother, a partner, a friend to so and so, a businessperson, etc., stem from our identity as human beings who value our own humanity and so, by rational extension, the humanity of all other rational beings.[7] On Korsgaard's view, our identity, which is tethered by our obligation to our humanity, is the source of our obligations and these obligations are binding on us. Furthermore, as our identities make claims on us and those identities are freely chosen, we are motivated to uphold those identities.

Korsgaard thinks that the solution to the problem of establishing normativity is a Kantian solution that will stop the regress of justification. That is, how can we say to a person that she is obligated to adhere to moral law regardless of her own personal opinion? Korsgaard thinks that the solution to the problem lies in the problem itself. In this case, the solution lies in our capacity for reflection which is the source of the normative problem. It is because of our capacity to reflect on our moral beliefs and actions that we can call them into question.[8] The test of reflection for Kantians is to evaluate each impulse to act and to see whether it really should be a law for us. If it is, then it is a reason to act. According to Korsgaard, "The test of reflective endorsement is the test used by actual moral agents to establish the normativity of all their particular motives and inclinations. So the reflective endorsement test is not merely a way of justifying morality. *It is morality itself*".[9] In order to show that the Kantian program

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[6] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* p.121

[7] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* p.121

[8] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* p. 46

establishes normativity, Korsgaard argues for two points; first, that autonomy is the source of obligation and gives us the ability to create obligations for ourselves; second, that we really do have moral obligations to humanity.[10] If Korsgaard can show that we do in fact have obligations to humanity, then this will be an effective answer to the question of normativity and she can stop the regress of justifying why we should be moral.

Korsgaard argues that we have a free will and that this free will is the source of our ability to create obligations for ourselves. According to Korsgaard, we are free because we have the capacity to make choices and decisions as "Freedom is the capacity to do otherwise".[11] Therefore, Korsgaard does not think that determinism is a problem because we make our decisions believing that we are free to choose otherwise.[12] Korsgaard notes that "He (Kant) defines a free will as a rational causality which is effective without being determined by any alien cause. Anything outside of the will counts as an alien cause, including the desires and inclinations of the person". [13] In order for us to act we need a law that will compel us to act; however, it must be a freely chosen law. According to Kant, the law that the will must abide by is the categorical imperative because it commands us to act only on a maxim that we could will to be a universal law. Therefore, the categorical imperative maintains the freedom of the will, as all that is required of the will is that it has to develop a law.[14]

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[9] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* p. 89

[10] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* p. 91

[11] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* p. 96

[12] I agree with Korsgaard here so I am not going to press the argument further as it is not the focus of this thesis. I will simply assume that we have a free will.

[13] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* p.97

[14] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* p. 98

Korsgaard does not think that the categorical imperative is enough to get us morality; however, it is useful because it can eliminate certain maxims.[15] For example, I could not will it to be universal law that torture is a permissible means of extracting information from others because I could not will that humans be subject to horrific pain. I could not do this as I could very easily be a victim and, more importantly, it would violate my humanity and, by rational extension, the humanity of all other persons to torture. Instead, Korsgaard wants to establish what she calls 'the moral law' which is "... to act only on maxims that all rational beings could agree to act on in a workable cooperative system".[16] What the categorical imperative tells us is that our maxims must be applicable as laws in the Kingdom of Ends. In order to establish normativity Korsgaard needs to establish that the moral law applies to all rational beings. Korsgaard, then, must establish the moral law to be the law of the free will. She does this by arguing that the domain of the free will is our chosen identities. At the core of our identity is the obligation to value humanity because valuing your own humanity rationally requires you to value the humanity of all other persons.[17]

Korsgaard argues that the reflective structure of our minds forces us to create a conception of ourselves and that it is this conception that binds us to accept laws we have created for ourselves. We develop conceptions of ourselves and these can be very specific - i.e. daughter of so and so, lawyer at such and such law firm, or very general - i.e. citizen of Canada, member of the human species. What these conceptions have in

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[15] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* p. 99

[16] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* p. 99

[17] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* p. 121

common is integrity and the desire to live up to internally generated standards because these standards are what make a person a person.[18] For a doctor to maintain her identity as a doctor she must adhere to professional codes of conduct. If she deviates through malpractice, then she loses her integrity as a doctor along with her identity as a doctor. In order to maintain our integrity, we must develop laws against which to judge our actions and these laws must reflect who we think we are. When we are reflectively looking at our options, Korsgaard thinks that we are stepping back from ourselves, while still being ourselves. There is something over and above our desires and this something is "us", individually speaking, someone who is choosing which desire to act on. Therefore, what laws we choose to live by express who we are as individuals.[19] Korsgaard thinks that the fact that humans have the capacity to reflect upon their desires and evaluate whether or nor those desires are compatible with their conception of themselves means that Kantianism is correct. Kantianism is correct because in such a situation there is a will reflecting upon itself enabling an individual to maintain her integrity. Furthermore, our ability to choose our identity means that our obligation stems from our autonomy. As a result, we come to our reasons for acting only after they have passed the test of reflection. External coercion in the form of desires and impulses must survive the test of reflection before becoming reasons for action. Once this is done, it can be said we are acting from a position of freedom as the external desires and reasons have become internal reasons. This freedom takes the form of making it our maxim to act on the desire as it has become

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[18] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* p. 102
[19] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* pp. 99-100

a reason for us.[20] Therefore, we have the ability to obligate ourselves to the obligations of our freely chosen identities.

Hume and Railton

Railton, following from Hume, argues that the impersonal or common point of view makes claims on us. Like Hume, Railton thinks that the interest which informs morality is the interest in having a good life and, for Hume, this means being useful to oneself and others. Before I discuss Hume's and Railton's respective positions I will look at their claim that morality is objective. This is a controversial claim because both Hume and Railton claim that we cannot have direct access to reality. According to Hume we are to base our beliefs about reality, including the reality of moral values, on the coordination of our beliefs with other humans.[21] Railton, on the other hand, acknowledges that we have access to reality in so far as we receive feedback from the external world; but we can never know from the feedback if the picture of reality we have is correct. All we can do is coordinate our feedback with others and try to determine if our assumptions based on that feedback is correct. However, there is a very real possibility that our socially determined beliefs are incorrect and because Humean and neo-Humean views locate the rightness or wrongness of moral propositions in how people feel about them, then it appears as if these views are subjective. If this is true, then such positions lack the ability to claim that a moral proposition is wrong independent of how human beings feel about them. In order to address this concern I will

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[20] Korsgaard *The Sources of Normativity* p. 94

[21] For a discussion on Hume's view of objectivity see the following: Swinburne, R.G. "The Objectivity of Morals" *Philosophy* vol. 51 (Jan. 76) pp. 5-20; Cohen, Mendel F. "Obligation and Human Nature in Hume's Philosophy" *The Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 40 no.3 pp. 316-341

look at Railton's view of social rationality. Then I will discuss the Hume's position on the common point of view and the role of sympathy in influencing individuals to conform to the common point of view.

1. Moral Realism

For Hume objectivity is social because he does not think that we have direct access to reality; instead, our thoughts and assumptions about the external world are verified or discounted by the sharing of knowledge among other humans. For example, we have access to facts such as the fact that the sky is blue but we can never establish with absolute certainty that the sky is in fact blue. We only have the testimony of others who also say that the sky is blue. This metaphysical view has implications for his moral system, as what is right is what is agreed upon by society. There are legitimate standards of what is right and what is wrong; however, as Hume is skeptical about our ability to directly access reality, it is a standard set by humans which comes to form the common point of view. As a result our moral standards are flexible. But this is not a form of individual relativism as each member of a society is held to the standards of their society. Furthermore, it is not subject to intra-society relativism as some societies may have developed immoral standards of conduct on the basis of false or incomplete information. Instead, individual societies through dialogue and other forms of communication are whittling away at beliefs and standards trying to focus and refine them into a system that most accurately reflects reality of moral life. However, we do not have absolute certainty that these moral values are correct. Analogously, scientists are constantly refining their hypotheses and theories on the basis of new empirical evidence and confirmations from the larger scientific community. For example, before Copernicus, the common belief

amongst the intellectual community was that the sun revolved around the earth. However, after Copernicus and later Galileo argued otherwise, slowly the old view died, and the correct view emerged.

Railton expands on Hume's view and argues for a moral realism that mirrors realism about the external world. Railton points out that an external world is posited so that we can explain how it is that in general humans have very similar experiences of the world.[22] We all think that an external world must exist because we all experience encountering other objects, we all believe that there is a sky, we all believe that water is necessary for our survival. However, the only evidence that we have for these beliefs is our own sensory experiences and the sensory experiences of others. We cannot know for certain that there is an external world; however, it would be inconsistent with our sensory experiences and those of others that such a world did not exist. That being said, it may be that we have an incomplete or biased view of the external world based on the functioning of our sensory apparatus. In addition to this realist belief in the external world, Railton argues that the reality of moral facts exists in much the same way. In order for this strategy to work, Railton argues that the reality postulated must have two characteristics:

> (1) Independence: it exists and has certain determinate features independent of whether we think it exists or has those features, independent, even, of whether we have good reason to think this;
>
> (2) *feedback:* it is such – and we are such – that we are able to interact with it, and this interaction exerts the relevant sort of shaping influence or control upon our perceptions, thought, and action.[23]

According to Railton, our access to reality does not mean that we will necessarily map directly onto the objective propositions, moral or otherwise. Even though we are able to

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[22] Railton, "Moral Realism" *The Philosophical Review* vol. 95, No .2 (Apr., 1986) , 163-207 p. 172

interact with this moral reality, there is no guarantee that we will interact with it in such a way so as to receive the appropriate feedback, nor that even if we receive such feedback, we are responding to it properly.

An example of a failure to respond correctly to feedback, if received, will illustrate how it is that we can have access to reality while being in error. Railton provides the example of Lonnie and Tad, two travelers who become ill.[24] Both Lonnie and Tad are traveling in foreign countries separately and both experience stomach upset (unbeknownst to Lonnie, he is dehydrated). Lonnie thinks that it would be best to have a glass of milk because he has often found this to be soothing. However, this is not the case and the milk further upsets his stomach and exacerbates his dehydration. In this case, it is Lonnie's objective interests to drink clear liquids because clear liquids have the function of relieving dehydration. So Lonnie, in virtue of his being human and being dehydrated, has the objective interest of drinking clear liquids. But based on the feedback he has received and on past experiences, Lonnie thinks it best to drink milk. Then there is Tad who is in the same dehydrated state as Lonnie. But unlike Lonnie, Tad likes to drink clear liquids because he has often found this to be soothing. So, in this case, Tad's desires mapped onto his objective interests. It could be by sheer chance that this occurred, as he really likes clear liquids. Or it could be because he has experienced dehydration before and knows that drinking clear liquids is the best solution. If this is the case, then his previous experience has provided him with feedback about the world, in particular about the human body and dehydration, and he is able to satisfy his objective interests. While on the other hand, Lonnie has not acted in his objective interests because

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[23] Railton, "Moral Realism" p. 172

his experiences and feedback have not mapped onto the necessary objective facts about the human body and dehydration.[25] So even though Lonnie has received feedback from the world, he has not interpreted that feedback properly. However, once Lonnie realizes that drinking milk upsets his stomach further he will try 7 – UP which soothes his stomach.

2. Normativity and the Common Point of View

Before I discuss Railton, I will explore Hume's position. In order to have a good life, we need to be able make correct moral judgments about our own actions and the actions of others as we need to live together in a common society. Hume thinks that when we make moral judgments of others and their actions, we do so from two perspectives. The first is from the perspective of self-interest while the second is from the moral sense itself, which is found in the common point of view. The method of determining the common point of view is twofold. First, we look at a person from the perspective of the person herself and of those close to her, so her friends, family, colleagues, those who interact with her. This results in us approving or disapproving of the effects of her character upon those with whom she generally interacts.[26] Second, we judge her characteristics according to what usually results from those characteristics and not from their actual effects.[27] So if giving money to charity usually results in others receiving help, then we will not judge someone adversely who gives money to a fraudulent charity. We bring these two perspectives together - the self-interest of the

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[24] Railton, "Moral Realism" pp. 174 - 180

[25] I will discuss how this view of realism becomes moral realism in subsequent sections.

[26] Hume, David *A Treatise of Human Nature* ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888 p. 591

person and the common point of view. As a result we judge with sympathy from the perspective of those involved with the person judged and according to general rules. By bringing these two perspectives together, along with our general rules, we come to share an objective, common ideal of good character.[28] We can use this common ideal of good character to judge the actions of individuals, including ourselves. This provides normativity as it creates a standard for us to adhere to and this standard obligates each member of society.[29]

Railton, following Hume, also considers the common point of view to be the source of normativity in his moral theory. Railton refers to his theory of the common point of view as the notion of social rationality. Railton describes social rationality as follows:

> Let me introduce an idealization of the notion of social rationality by considering what would be rationally approved of were the interests of all potentially affected individuals counted equally under circumstances of full and vivid information. Because of the assumption of full and vivid information, the interests in question will be objective interests.[30]

For Railton, the common point of view is impersonal and is concerned with the interests of all potentially affected. Because Railton is a naturalist, he does not think that we are always in a position of having full and vivid information, in fact we rarely are in such a position.[31] This concern forms the basis for the belief that part of being socially rational is being able, through the use of feedback mechanisms, to recognize when we, as a

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[27] Hume, *Treatise* p. 591

[28] Hume, *Treatise* p. 591

[29] Railton, "Moral Realism" p. 167

[30] Railton, "Moral Realism" p. 190

society, have made a mistake. This feedback may come in many forms such as social unrest, failure to achieve goals, etc.[32] Railton argues that the same feedback mechanism which allows us to learn about the postulated external world is used to learn about the moral features of that world.[33]

For example, if a democratically elected government embarks on a policy of placing a cap on the minimum wage with no mechanism to adjust for increases in the cost of living, the feedback the government receives will take the form of an increase in poverty, a likely increase in crime, an increase in social unrest, and the risk that that government will no longer be in power come the next election. However, at the same time the government may be receiving positive feedback from corporations who have benefited from the wage cap, pro-business associations, and lobbies. This feedback may take the form of votes from this sector and more importantly campaign donations. The government will have to navigate between both negative and positive feedback. However, there is the very real possibility that the government will discount the negative feedback for a variety of reasons; those protesting are not a desired voting group; those protesting may not of the same social class as those in power, thereby allowing politicians to make up other stories as to why they are not able to earn enough money; or those negatively affected by a wage increase are members of a desired voting group and frequent campaign contributors. Nevertheless, the negative feedback does exist and so hopefully it would be enough to dissuade the government to reverse the policy or the prospect of such feedback will be enough for the government to decide against it in the

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[31] Railton, "Moral Realism" p. 180
[32] Railton, "Moral Realism" p. 191

first place. However, this negative feedback will only have an effect if the members of the government are able to recognize the relationship between these particular social ills and their policies.

Those members of society who are affected negatively by the wage cap have a binding claim on the government to change the policy. The claim is binding because it could not be rationally agreed upon from the perspective of all potentially affected that such a wage cap could be put in place. Because no one could rationally desire that they should have to work for pay that does not allow them to function in society and because a business can operate successfully while paying living wages, it means that that the employees have a claim on a living wage. If the business cannot operate successfully without paying living wages then it should not exist. The resultant social discontentment is the negative feedback that the wage cap is wrong and that, indeed, individuals cannot function properly without a living wage. By interacting with the world, which, under this particular form of social organization, requires that individuals be paid a living wage in order to function in the world, the government will receive negative (and positive) feedback. By using this feedback as information to consider when looking at the problem from the impersonal point of view, the government should be able to recognize that it is not socially rational to continue on with this policy. From the impersonal point of view, the benefits gained by the wage cap are not permissible as it would not be agreed upon if the interests of all those affected counted equally. If the government does not reverse the wage cap, the government will have failed to recognize its obligations to the impersonal point of view.

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[33] Railton, "Moral Realism" pp. 184-185

A primary concern for both Hume and Railton's Neo-Humean position is that we can be mistaken about the content of the norms we are to uphold. However, because of its claim to be socially objective and, especially in light of Railton's willingness to admit that societies rarely exhibit social rationality, a problem arises because we have to recognize that the content of our norms can be mistaken. This is a problem because it does not appear to be coherent to say that we can be mistaken about our obligations to one another. The answer to this problem lies in our fallibility. Just as we can be individually wrong we can be collectively wrong. In his article "Passionate Objectivity," Corliss G. Swain provides four means by which humans can be either individually or collectively wrong on a Humean view:

> It should now be clear that particular judgments of morality can (sic) go wrong in a number of ways. (1) We can misinterpret the situation by failing to see that it is one that is indicative of a certain quality in a person. ... (2) We can fail to be properly affected by a quality in a person because we fail to sympathize with the person affected by the expression of that quality in a particular case. ... (3) We can fail to assess a person's moral qualities properly by failing to correct for variations in the intensity of feelings due to variations in sympathy. ... (4) We can fail to appreciate the tendencies of a quality.[34]

Most of these mistakes are due to errors concerning matters of fact.[35] As a result of any of the above types of errors, a society can endorse incorrect moral norms because that society has made a mistake about matters of fact. The mistakes that we collectively make are mistakes of consistency as we have different standards for different groups or individuals. Or we can make mistakes of means-end reasoning which can emerge either independently or from mistakes of means-end reasoning. For example, entire societies

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[34] Swain, Corliss G. "Passionate Objectivity" *Nous* Vol. 26, No. 4 (Dec.,1992), 465-90 pp. 486-87

[35] Swain, Corliss G. "Passionate Objectivity" p. 487

have made mistakes about the humanity of fellow members of society and this is a mistake of consistency. When these societies made rules concerning the treatment of these discounted members of society (such as enslaving black people) they were making mistakes concerning matters of fact. In the slavery case, the mistake was a rule that emerged out of society-wide error about the humanity of black people. As a result that society felt that it was acceptable to exploit black people for their labour because they made a mistake about their humanity.

Railton makes a similar claim when he argues that a society can fail to exhibit social rationality when a social arrangement fails to take into account the interests of a particular group; social unrest may follow.[36] Railton's idea of social rationality acts as a means of evaluating the common point of view, thereby allowing societies to establish moral norms. We can see examples of poor individual and social rationality by looking at situations where poor reasoning and judgment are in play on both the personal and social level. For example, if a person decides to drink to avoid their problems, it may work well in the short term but, over a long period of time, it may lead to more problems such as driving under the influence, arrests, loss of employment, family breakup, deteriorating health and certainly no solution to the problems which led the person to choose alcohol in the first place. Such a decision is the result of a mistake about matters of fact as the individual has decided that consumption of alcohol feels good and appears to remove the problem. However, it only removes the problem temporarily and requires more alcohol to maintain the illusion that one's problem no longer exists. Poor judgments about how to deal with problems often lead to even more problems. Just as

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[36] Railton, "Moral Realism" p. 191

individuals such as the alcoholic can make poor judgments based on a lack of full information, we can see the same problem occurring on a social level; poor social arrangements such as a lack of genuine democracy and good governance lead to widespread dissatisfaction. As dissatisfaction grows among individuals who no longer feel that their interests are being represented we often find that alienation and its accompanying social ills such as domestic abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, and criminal activity also increases.

Clearly, the above social ills are likely to remain a problem for some even if the society is acting rationally, but there is a correlation between societal breakdown and personal breakdown. When economic problems increase we often see an increase in the prevalence of alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, and crime. Railton argues that eventually there will be a change in the belief about the justness of society and then groups, usually those suffering from a lack of representation, will come to believe society to be unjust.[37] As a result, there will be social unrest where groups who feel that their interests are being ignored, or worse, repressed for the benefit of the ruling group may begin to mobilize and take action.[38] Railton thinks that when groups express their discontentment, the resulting feedback to the members of society that their current society is not maximizing its social rationality and current norms may begin to shift towards more rational social norms.[39]

One of the best examples of a recent change because of the recognition of an error in the common point of view that has resulted in a change in social rationality is the issue

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[37] Railton, "Moral Realism" p. 192
[38] Railton, "Moral Realism" p. 192

of equal rights for homosexuals. Over a relatively short period of time we have seen a dramatic shift in the common point of view of homosexuals. Twenty years ago the common point of view was that homosexuality was immoral and so homosexual individuals and couples were not deserving of equal rights and consideration under the law. While it is still a volatile issue for many, the common point of view is shifting because of social activism through events such as gay pride week and more and more homosexuals 'coming out' and refusing to be considered second-class citizens. Furthermore, the scientific and psychiatric community have provided evidence that homosexuality is innate and not a mental illness. Currently, in Canada, homosexuals enjoy many of the rights and privileges of heterosexuals such as spousal/partner benefits, the right to adopt, and soon the right to marry. Furthermore, individual tolerance for homosexuality has greatly increased, although hate crimes against homosexuals are still far too prevalent. For many heterosexuals, the idea that individuals are born gay or straight, or at least have those propensities, was a revelation that dramatically shifted their opinion of homosexuality from a deviant behaviour to that of a normal behaviour. The thought that they might have just as easily been born gay led many straight individuals to accept homosexuality.

Scientific information is not entirely responsible for the shift in opinion. The work of social activists and the increasing public presence of homosexuals, through the awareness of openly gay celebrities, writers, politicians, etc. has brought the reality of homosexuality closer to the heterosexual mainstream. So, in Humean terms, this shift has brought out our sympathy for persons close to us. When we believe that persons are not

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[39] Railton, 'Moral Realism" p. 193

psychologically close to us, it is easy to discount their feelings and emotions.[40] But as television programs show gay couples raising children in a loving environment or living a quiet suburban life it becomes much more difficult to cling to old stereotypes about homosexuals.

The response of the religious right to homosexuals is one that shows that empirical evidence alone cannot shift the common point of view. Within the smaller community of religious fundamentalists the biological basis for homosexuality has not been enough to persuade them that equal rights should be granted to homosexuals. The prevalence of programs designed by psychiatrists to turn gay people into straight people, indicates that at least some fundamentalists think that homosexuality still needs correction.[41] For example, when fundamentalists argue that homosexuals should simply remain celibate, they are indirectly recognizing that homosexuality is not a choice; however, they still think it is a sin which is not to be committed. Clearly, what is missing is sympathy, as fundamentalists do not recognize homosexuals as equal members of their community and fight to keep them out.

In order to maintain their position, and those of others who do not want to admit the equality of homosexuals, religious fundamentalists often make a concerted effort to keep homosexuals at a distance. The purpose of this effort is to prevent individuals from sympathizing with homosexuals. If heterosexuals sympathize with homosexuals and

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[40] Hume, *Treatise* p. 318

[41] It could also be argued that these fundamentalists think that psychiatric treatment will fix confused individuals as no one is born gay. Nevertheless, these psychiatrists are going against their own community as homosexuality is no longer considered a mental illness and no legitimate psychiatrist would 'treat' a person for homosexuality.

recognize their equality, then it becomes irrational to deny homosexuals equal rights. For example, when Ellen Degeneres came out of the closet on television and in *Time* magazine, the prominent fundamentalist Jerry Falwell called her Ellen "Degenerate" in an attempt to dehumanize her. Frequently the need to protect family values is invoked; however, this is suspect, as similar protests were not launched against sitcoms that also went against family values. For example, "Friends" has frequent references to extramarital sex, or "Seinfeld" which had episodes about masturbation, abortion, and general antisocial and sometimes cruel behaviour did not attract the same negative attention.[42] As these particular sitcoms did not seek to extend the rights of groups deemed immoral by religious fundamentalists, it was permissible to simply dismiss them as distasteful. However, the acceptance of Ellen would have meant that eventually society might alter its laws and more importantly, its conception of what constitutes a family.

Hume's common point of view and Railton's social rationality both express and create social norms which members of society are expected to meet. At the same time, these norms are subject to change when it becomes clear that they are not adequately reflecting the needs of all members of society. Within a neo-Humean framework it is perfectly acceptable for norms to shift over time to better reflect those. We get a better picture of how the world is actually constructed not only by our own beliefs but also through confirmations from others. The result is the coordination of beliefs. When we add empirical scientific evidence, we get an even clearer picture of reality. This also helps to clarify what it means for a norm to be mistaken. An incorrect norm can emerge when it is based on incorrect information or the incorrect assessment of that information.

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[42] These were on television as the same time as "Ellen" and so if the fundamentalist were really that concerned about immorality on television, presumably these shows should have also been boycotted.

Railton's social rationality is a necessary component of the common point of view as it is a means to recognize that change is necessary when it becomes clear that the established social norms do not correspond to the feedback we have received about these norms. This occurs when groups feel that their interests are being sacrificed and they have empirical data to back up their complaint.[43] Therefore, the goal of achieving social rationality leads us to adjust the common point of view so that it better represents objective values.

Hume and Railton both use feedback mechanisms to determine when an individual has made a mistake in what they are feeling about a norm and this is by judging it against the common point of view. However, the problem becomes how to judge if the common point of view is correct? According to Railton, the answer lies in the functionality of the groups' feelings and actions as the feedback is being produced will either be negative or positive. If the feedback is primarily positive and the negative feedback is being responded to, then it is a functioning society. But how are we to judge whether a group's relations are in fact functioning? According to his view of social rationality, there is not one single answer for how a society is to function; rather, it works

[43] Not all groups who feel their interests are being compromised have a claim. Members of racist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan or Aryan Nation are having their interests compromised but that is because they cling to empirically false stereotypes and beliefs about people of different ethnic groups. In order for a group to have a claim, they must demonstrate that their complaint is based on fact and that they are not putting their interests ahead of others. So white supremacists do not have a claim because they believe false information such as humans with dark skin are genetically inferior to humans with light skin. Furthermore, if societies were to give in and restructure society according to the desires of such groups, other members of that society would have their interests and freedoms severely diminished. So simply being dissatisfied and acting up does not mean that the larger society must listen. However, the fact that white supremacists actually feel the need to believe what they do indicates that there is probably another problem lurking in the shadows such as lack of access to economic resources which is causing them to lash out at others. Another, more problematic, example is when members of a powerful group promote racist beliefs to consolidate and maintain power. Examples of such behaviour are discussed in the subsequent section discussing the cold joke and racist stereotypes.

as a constraint.[44] As a result, a society may decide to pursuer a set of goals that are undesirable to another society; however, at the core lies his claim that a society must be socially rational and this places restrictions on what a society agree upon.

For example, a society could decide to adhere to capitalism but, because it must be socially rational, it must consider the interests of all potentially affected. As a result, there will be constraints on the economy through social and environmental regulations. On the other hand, a society may decide to be an egalitarian society and redistribute all its resources equally. Once again, provided that the society meets the requirements of social rationality and that negative feedback is being handled appropriately (i.e. concerns are voiced freely and legitimately addressed), then it is a functioning society. So a society can be considered functional if it is acting according to the goals that it has set for itself; however, any society is constrained by the fact that there are certain goals such as considering what is rational from the perspective of all those potentially affected that all societies must strive to meet if it is to be a functioning society.

3. The Role Of Sympathy

Our emotional responses to issues are crucial to determining whether or not a society appropriately responds to social unrest or to groups being targeted by a more powerful majority. Empirical facts about a situation are not enough to sway opinion if there is no sympathy for those whose interest are being compromised. The fact that the ruling group, especially if it thinks that its interests are going to be harmed by recognizing the value of the group protesting, often sets out on a campaign of dehumanization is evidence that sympathy is arguably the most important means of altering opinions about what is right and wrong. An unfeeling joke, also known as the

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[44] Railton, "Moral Realism" p. 165

cold joke, uses dark humour to oppress someone or groups already at a disadvantage. Jonathan Glover writes of the cold joke:

> The cold joke mocks the victims. It is an added cruelty and it is also a display of power: we can put you through hell merely for our mild amusement. It adds emphasis to the difference between 'us' and 'them': we the interrogators are a group who share a joke at the expense of you the victims. It is also a display of hardness: we are so little troubled by feelings of sympathy that we can laugh at your torment; but the display may be a clue that suppression of sympathy is not so easy and needs help.[45]

For example, Stalin frequently used the 'cold joke' as a means to maintain his homicidal policies. On the cattle cars transporting prisoners to the camps, guards would not label the cars as prisoner transport; rather, they would chalk phrases such as 'perishable goods' on the side of the car.[46] This served four purposes: first, it reinforced the superiority of the guards because it differentiated between them and the prisoners; second, it dehumanized the prisoners by objectifying them as mere 'goods'; third, it attempted to erase the possibility of sympathy on the part of the guards for the prisoners; fourth, it reminded the prisoners that they were thought not worthy of sympathy. Other examples of using humour to dehumanize targeted groups are the use of blackface, cartoons which represent black people as monkeys, stories of sexual impropriety, 'jolly nigger banks,' and so on. These were all used as a means of ensuring that the white public in the United States would never fully recognize black people as human and therefore worthy of equal respect and rights. Similarly, in the Second World War, the United States and Japan each

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[45] Glover, Jonathan *Humanity A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* London: Pimlico, 1999 p. 37

[46] Glover, *Humanity* p. 257

waged separate propaganda campaigns designed to convince their respective populations that the other was not fully human and therefore it was morally justifiable to kill them.[47]

Through our ability to sympathize with others and feel how they would feel, we are able to enter into the common point of view. This is important because the common point of view is the source of obligation on the Humean normative view. Korsgaard provides an example of what she thinks is a normative failure for Hume. I disagree with her critique but I think that it is a useful illustration of how normativity works for Hume.[48] The example is as follows: there is a lawyer whose wealthy client has passed away. In a previous will, this client had left all his money to medical research but in his last and final will has left all his money to his useless spendthrift nephew.[49] Korsgaard claims that the lawyer would disapprove of herself if she disregarded the more recent will but, at the same time, she recognizes that if she disregards it only good actions will follow.[50]

From the neo-Humean point of view the question for the lawyer is, would it be permissible for her to break the law and ignore the final will? The answer is no. She should not disregard the will because, even though it is her desire to do so, she, like everyone else, is able to tap into the common point of view. That is, she can easily step outside herself and see that others would disapprove if she were to ignore the desire of her client. Furthermore, she would *feel* our disapproval. The common point of view says

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[47] For a fascinating read about the use of racial stereotypes by both the Americans and Japanese during World War II read the following:
Dower, John W. *War Without Mercy* New York: Pantheon Books, 1986.

[48] I will not discuss Korsgaard's critique as it is not particularly relevant to the scope of this thesis

[49] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* p. 86

two things: do not destroy contracts; do not ignore the wishes of the dead. By entering into the common point of view the lawyer is able to determine that she is obligated to respect the will. If she ignored the will, she would be abdicating her duty to represent the will of her client. Furthermore, by ignoring the will of her client, she is usurping his property rights because she is denying his right to divest himself of his property as he sees fit, precisely the reason Hume argued for the necessity of a judicial system. Even though she could greatly help other humans by using the old will and giving the money to medical research, she would be doing so at the expense of her client's rights and the judicial system.[51] Therefore, she has an obligation to respect the will.

Sympathy, in particular the ability to enter into the common point of view and feel how others would feel, is also the source of motivation in the Humean normative program. Returning to the lawyer example, it is not merely the case that the lawyer would understand that others would disapprove of her action; instead, she would actually *feel* their disapproval. As feelings and we all share common emotions we know what it is like to feel shame, disgust, joy, boredom, etc. So, if the lawyer decided to disregard the will, she would feel the disapproval of her peers resulting in disapproval of herself and this would motivate her to respect the will. She may very well feel that it would be better to revert to the old will and give the money to research; however, in conjunction with those feelings she would also have the feeling of disapproval at disregarding her client's intention and this should motivate her to respect the will.

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[50] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* pp. 86-87

[51] Hume, *Enquiry* p. 184

Through the common point of view the lawyer is able to recognize her obligation to respect the will. Through her ability to sympathize and enter into the common point of view she is motivated to respect the will. Furthermore, she is obligated to respect the will even if her sympathy does not sufficiently motivate her by entering into the common point of view and recognizing that others will disapprove of her. Clearly, there will be, and there are, situations where individuals do not adhere to their obligations but that does not mean that this is a complete normative failure as later they may feel guilt and shame at their actions. Also, there are cases when an individual speaks out against the common point of view and breaks the moral law because he or she thinks that the moral law is wrong. This would be a situation where the society is then obligated to look at that person's claims and evaluate whether or not he or she is right and has brought attention to a flaw in the moral system.

Conclusion

Korsgaard and Railton are both interested in ensuring that psychologically normal individuals are able to recognize what norms they must uphold and that they are motivated to uphold those norms. However, they approach the problem of normativity from two different angles. Korsgaard is concerned with human agency and our ability to develop our own identities. When an individual adopts an identity for herself, she is obligating herself to adhere to the norms of that identity. Although humans may adopt a variety of identities, at the core of these identities is our identity as a human being. In order to be moral persons, we are obligated to meet our obligations to humanity. That is, an individual is obligated to value humanity and act only in ways that reflect that value.

Korsgaard argues that, when we are in a position to make a decision, we use the test of reflective endorsement to determine how we may act. An individual must consider if an act adheres to the categorical imperative and if that act could be endorsed by rational beings in a workable cooperative system. If the answer is yes, then she may proceed because her action will be consistent with her identity, the most important being her identity as a human being.

Railton, along with Hume, argues that normativity is established through the common point of view. Railton argues that when we are considering how to act we must ensure that any decision we make is socially rational; that is, it would be rationally approved of by all potentially affected. In order to understand what would be socially approved, we need to be able to enter into the common point of view and we do this through sympathy. We are required to sympathize with all potentially affected by our actions so that we may know what would be rationally approved. In order to understand what is expected of her, an individual must be able to sympathize with those potentially affected by her decision. On Railton's view, she is thus able to determine what norms are binding on her; this is another way of expressing the requirement to consider what is socially rational. Further, in order to be motivated to adhere to those norms, she must be able to sympathize with other humans in order to enter into the common point of view.

Chapter 3

The Role of Emotion in Moral Decision-Making

In the previous chapter I explained how both Korsgaard's Kantian position and Railton's neo-Humean position establish normativity. Now I turn to neurobiological evidence provided by Antonio Damasio to further elaborate the difference between them. Korsgaard and Railton disagree over which human interests inform the content of morality. Recent research into the role of emotions in decision-making serves to clarify this disagreement. Neurobiologist Antonio Damasio conducted research with individuals with a particular form of brain damage that resulted in a diminished capacity to experience emotions. These individuals performed normally on intellectual and psychological tests but their everyday conduct was flawed and disastrous to their overall wellness. While either Korsgaard or Railton to support their positions can use Damasio's findings, the findings serve to highlight the differences between these two positions.

Korsgaard could argue that Damasio's research shows that Kantians are correct to be concerned with the ability to conceive of an action and determine whether or not that course of action is consistent with identity. The ability, or lack thereof, to carry through and act on the decision is not relevant.

Railton could argue that Damasio's research is consistent with his view that it is precisely the ability to act on decisions and create a good life for oneself that is necessary for morality. Being a rational person is necessary for humans to be able to make good decisions in order to live well.

Korsgaard's Position on Decision-Making and Morality

Korsgaard's Kantian argument holds that agency, understood in terms of identity, is central to morality. Therefore when one is presented with a moral problem, an individual must determine whether she could endorse a particular course of action and still retain her identity. Korsgaard argues that one's identity, as a moral agent is the source of obligation.[52] In order to be a moral agent, her core obligation is to respect and consider the humanity of all others. We are obligated to refrain from committing acts that violate our identities. For example, we could not rationally agree to live in a world where it is permissible to physically harm others for pleasure as it violates our identities as human beings. In order to be a moral agent, a person needs to be able to determine whether or not an act is consistent with her identity. Thus, if she decides to physically harm another for her own pleasure, she has chosen to give up her identity. She has decided to give up her identity because physically harming another for pleasure is prohibited by her identity as a human being as it is treating another human being as a means to one's ends. Most importantly, however, is that by engaging in such behaviour, she would be acting irrationally as she could not rationally accept such treatment for her and so by extension cannot do the same to others. According to Kant and Korsgaard, our most central and overarching component of our identity is our humanity that requires us to consider the humanity of all other humans.[53]

As moral agents, individuals construct identities for themselves. A particular identity has many components and each carries with it certain obligations. For instance, I am a human, a female, a resident of Canada, and a graduate student; each of these components provides reasons for me to act in certain ways and obligates me not to act in

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[52] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* p.102

others.[54] One's specific identity is tied up in individually determined projects. Obligations differ among identities. For instance, Korsgaard provides an example of two students who give different reasons for taking a required math course for their degree in philosophy. The first student claims to be taking the course simply because it is required. The second student claims to be taking the course because he thinks that one cannot truly understand philosophy without understanding math. At first, it looks like the latter student's explanation is irrelevant to his identity as a student because taking required courses is a necessity not an option. As a result, he lacks the autonomy to freely choose that course. If one selects the identity of student, then one is obligated to take required courses or relinquish the identity of student. However, knowing that a course is required may force him to reflect on his identity and on his decision to become a student and thus help him understand his decision to become a student and what being a student entails. This understanding of why a particular course is required helps him understand why he chose the identity of undergraduate philosophy student.[55] In short, when we choose our identity, we choose our obligations.

The film Touching the Void is the true story of two climbers, Joe Simpson and Simon Yates, who meet with an accident and, as a result, Yates is forced to cut a safety rope holding Simpson, whom he presumes dead, in order to save himself.[56] This story illustrates the plurality of identity and indicates which identities can be shed and which cannot if a person is to remain a moral agent. The situation is as follows: at the beginning stages of their descent from the mountain Simpson breaks his leg descending a

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[53] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* p.121

[54] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* p. 101

[55] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* pp. 105-107

small face. Then they are struck by a series of mini avalanches. Yates attempts to rescue Simpson by attaching Simpson to himself by a rope and lowering him down the mountain. They are caught in a blizzard and Yates is unknowingly lowering Simpson off the edge of a crevasse. When Yates realizes he is being pulled off the edge of a crevasse by the weight of Simpson, he calls out to him but is blinded and deafened by the blizzard and so cannot receive any response. Yates has no idea whether or not Simpson is still alive and, as ten hours have passed, it is quite likely he has died from his injuries or exposure. He knows only that he is being pulled by the weight of his partner off the edge of the crevasse and that, if he does nothing, he will fall to his death. Therefore, he must decide whether or not to cut the rope and send Simpson to his death, if he is not already dead.

From a moral point of view, the question that Yates must ask himself is whether or not he could cut the rope and retain his identity as Yates. In order to retain his identity as Yates, he must maintain his identity as a human being. The answer to the above question is yes. He could retain his identity as a human being because it is absolutely necessary that he cut the rope in order to live. Yates is morally permitted to either cut the rope or not cut the rope because he is choosing between two rational agencies, his own and Simpson's. Therefore, whether he decides to stay with Simpson until they both die or cuts the rope and saves him is indifferent from a moral point of view. He is permitted to do either. If Yates had left Simpson to die after he broke his leg without attempting a rescue, it would violate Simpson's humanity and we would question Yates' identity as a moral agent. Yates decides to cut the rope (after agonizing over the decision) and returns to base camp. Miraculously, Simpson does in fact survive the fall down the crevasse and

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[56] See Simpson, Joe *Touching the Void* New York: Harper and Row, 1989

crawls, using his arms, back to base camp. Simpson is not angry with Yates for cutting the rope as he realizes it was his only chance for survival. Yates was able to maintain his identity as a human, even though he committed an act that he believed would ensure the death of another human whose death was already pretty much guaranteed.

Upon returning home Yates was met with a backlash for his decision to cut the rope. Even though he had met his obligation to humanity, it was questionable whether he had acted consistently with his identity as a climber. Simpson was not angry with him because he recognized that climbing is inherently dangerous and on this particular climb there was a high chance that neither would survive. Simpson respected Yates because he cut the rope only when it meant almost certain death for both to remain attached. However, a significant number of climbers were angry with Yates and felt that it was contradictory to his identity as a climber to cut the rope of a fellow climber and ensure his death. Therefore, while Yates was permitted as a person to cut the rope, it remains questionable in the eyes of many climbers as to whether or not his action was permissible as a climber. From a moral point of view, the additional identity of climber was one that Yates had adopted in addition to his identity as a human being. As Yates adopted the identity of climber then, out of duty to his own rational agency, he may be required to act consistently with that identity. However, whether one does so depend on the person and on her other identities. Some climbers felt that being a climber was a component of one's identity that cannot be shed and so condemned him. However, Korsgaard recognizes that some components of one's identity are more easily shed than others when they come in conflict with key parts of one's identity.[57] Therefore, I believe it is consistent with Korsgaard's view to argue that Yates could be described as maintaining his identity as,

being a human being; he had to cut the rope. He could have done the opposite and stayed with Simpson. However, morality does not require that he sacrifice his life but it certainly permits such a sacrifice.

The ability to deliberate and come to the correct conclusions is the key components of Korsgaard's position. She argues that moral agency consists in determining a course of action within the permitted boundaries of rational identity. For Yates to be an agent, it was not necessary that he perform the action of cutting the rope. All that was required was the ability to determine that he could cut the rope and retain his identity as a human being. He could also retain his identity and not cut the rope, although he would die. When deliberating about moral issues, Korsgaard argues that practical reasons must meet the internalism requirement: that practical reason claims must be capable of motivating rational persons.[58] Because cutting the rope was necessary for his survival, it was a practical reason claim and it is a claim that would be capable of motivating rational persons. If he had been paralyzed by fear, guilt, or shock, which is likely and understandable and was unable to make a reflective decision to cut the rope, he would still be a moral agent because, in theory, he had the intellectual ability to make a reflective decision.[59] However, in this case, his actual decision would not count as reasoned and so would not be an exercise of agency. Korsgaard recognizes that emotions may interfere with our ability to act on decisions. This is why she restricts considerations of moral agency to the ability to be motivated by practical reason claims

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[57] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* p. 102

[58] Korsgaard, Christine "Skepticism About Practical Reason" *The Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 83, No. 1 (Jan., 1986) 5-25 p. 11

[59] Korsgaard, "Skepticism About Practical Reason" p. 13

and to perform the reflective endorsement test to recognize what our identity requires of us.

Railton's Position on Decision-Making and Morality

Railton argues that throughout our life we receive feedback from the world about how well or poorly our actions have fared. If we are rational, we process that feedback and learn what is in our objective interests. We also rationally obligate ourselves to act only in a manner that is rational from the impersonal point of view.[60] On Railton's view, there are two perspectives to consider when dealing with moral issues. First, there is the personal point of view that concerns the objective interests of the individual that encompasses her interests as a human being. Second, there is the impersonal point of view that concerns the objective interests of all other humans. In order to know what is in the objective interests of all other humans, a person must be able to sympathize so that she may enter into the common point of view. Railton argues that it is in our personal interest to obligate ourselves to act in a manner which is rational from an impersonal point of view as to do otherwise may lead to conflict. This view mirrors the common point of view, whereby we consider the interests of the actor and of society at large. Over the course of our lifetime, we use what Railton calls the wants/interests mechanism, where, through experience, individuals learn self-consciously and unselfconsciously what is in their best interests.[61] While Korsgaard is focused on intentions, Railton is concerned with actions and consequences as our happiness is tied to good acts. Conversely, poor actions lead to unhappiness and, in some cases, are immoral.[62] Railton thinks that the

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[60] Railton, "Moral Realism" p. 204
[61] Railton, "Moral Realism" p. 179

role of rational thought is to help us determine how to behave so as to best achieve our goals. Railton is primarily concerned with human happiness and behaving morally is central to happiness.

Returning to the climbing example, the question for Railton is not whether Yates could cut the rope and maintain his identity as a human being; instead, the question is if he cuts the rope and survives could he continue with his life and live well? When on the mountain Yates has to think about his life when he returns home and whether, after dealing with the grief and horror of the situation, he could be at peace with his decision to end his friend's life. He also has to determine whether his life would carry on well upon returning home. Would he be able to find a new climbing partner? Would he be considered a social pariah for his actions? He also must consider how his friend's life would go if he indeed survived. For instance, would Simpson be willing to live with the effects of severe exposure such as the loss of limbs, potential brain damage from lack of oxygen and the like? In order to determine whether he could cut the rope, Simpson would need to consider what is in his interest. Clearly surviving is his primary interest and it is also an objective interest.

Yates must look at the issue from the impersonal point of view. So he must consider what would be rationally approved of provided the interests of all affected individuals were taken into account equally.[63] He might think about what it would be like if the positions were reversed. Would he want Simpson to forfeit his life if had the

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[62] As I will show later with the case of Elliot some individuals may be irrational and not be considered immoral because of an illness.

[63] Railton, "Moral Realism" p. 190

opportunity to survive with the result that Yates would be killed? Probably not, because in this situation the injured party is most likely going to die regardless of what the other person does. It would be irrational to want another human to die unnecessarily. It would be rational from an impersonal point of view to cut the rope as not cutting the rope serves no one's objective interest. (The fact that Simpson bore no ill will towards Yates is evidence that this is true: a rational person would not want someone else to forfeit their life when there is no hope of survival for the injured party). Therefore, Yates could make the decision to cut the rope and continue with his life.

The Difference Between Korsgaard and Railton

Korsgaard and Railton have fundamentally different positions about the role of decision-making in morality. Korsgaard argues that the violation of obligations is destructive to moral agency. So Yates has to ask himself whether cutting the rope and ensuring Simpson's death is compatible with maintaining his agency. Whether he would feel guilty or have psychological problems upon return is irrelevant from a moral point of view; his only concern is maintaining his identity as a person. So he may consider how he would feel about cutting the rope, but that consideration is not part of the moral evaluation of the act.

On the other hand, Railton is primarily concerned with whether or not a decision will contribute to good life or whether it would contribute to a poor life. A decision that is in the objective interest of the person and is rational from an impersonal perspective will contribute to a good life. A decision that does not meet the above requirements will contribute to a bad life. Therefore, Yates will be concerned about whether or not he could continue his life upon return and over time have a good life. In common terms he

would have to ask himself 'what kind of life would I have if I did this?' and if the answer is 'a good one' then it would be permissible for him to cut the rope. If he could not live well afterward then he should not cut the rope. If he made the latter decision we would question his rationality because not cutting the rope would be against his objective interests. It would also be irrational from an impersonal point of view, as it was highly improbable that Simpson could survive. As a result, it was really only a question of his survival.

Damasio and the Ventromedial Patients

The above differences can be made clearer and more precise by looking at the role of emotions in practical reasoning. In his research on individuals with damage to the ventromedial area of the brain, neurobiologist Antonio Damasio found that emotions play a pervasive role in the development of our consciousness and in our ability to make decisions. Emotions are rooted in the body as they use the internal milieu, visceral, vestibular, and musculoskeletal systems as their theatre that is why we feel emotions much like we feel injuries. Emotions also affect the mode of operation of numerous brain circuits. Emotions cause changes in both the body and brain landscapes and these changes form the basis for the neural patterns that become feelings of emotions.[64] When we are in the emotional state of anger, our body goes through several changes and we *feel* those changes and the emotion. The terms "emotions" and "feelings" are often used interchangeably but Damasio argues that they differ in the following way; Emotions are

[64] Damasio, Antonio *The Feeling of What Happens* New York: A Harvest Book Harcourt, Inc. 1999 pp. 51-52

physical and publicly observable phenomenon; feelings constitute the "... private, mental experience of an emotion"[65]

There are three levels of emotions. The first and most basic level of emotions is the background emotions, which denote what emotional state the person is currently experiencing at that exact moment. Background emotions are different from moods as moods exist over an extended period of time, whereas the background emotions are purely in the 'here and now.' Examples of background emotions are "tense," "calm," "enthusiastic" and are detectable by body posture, speed and contour of movements, and overall tone of the body.[66] The second and more complex level of emotions are the primary or basic emotions and these are fear, anger, disgust, surprise, sadness, and happiness. The background and primary emotions are identifiable across cultures and are found in non-human species. The third and most complex level of emotions are the secondary or social emotions and these are sympathy, embarrassment, shame, guilt, pride, jealousy, envy, gratitude, admiration, indignation, and contempt. The primary and social emotions are embedded within one another.[67] For example, admiration comes out of happiness. When we admire, it is because some part of what we are admiring makes others or ourselves happy. Admiration is a more specific and focused form of happiness although it may also contain other emotions as well.

Generally speaking, when we think of emotions and specifically emotions involved in ethics, we tend to think only of the primary and the social emotions. These are the emotions that we tend to be aware of through our feelings and the emotions that

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[65] Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens* p. 42

[66] Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens* p. 52

we use when making comments about behaviours. For example, we are sympathetic towards victims of crime and we feel anger towards criminals. It is important to note that emotions can be unconscious and that we need conscious feelings of those emotions to become aware of them. Background emotions are just that, in the background, and so we do not often think of them when discussing ethics. However, they play an important role in consciousness and are the base layer for our ability to consciously deliberate and think about issues using language.[68] Often the ability to experience the primary and social emotions is compromised as a result of brain damage; however, background emotions remain intact unless core consciousness (awareness of here and now) is compromised.[69]

1. The Somatic Marker Hypothesis

Damasio hypothesizes that when we are presented with a problem, we consciously or unconsciously receive bodily signals that either highlight or eliminate possible responses. He calls this the somatic marker hypothesis. A somatic marker is a body signal that flags the physical response and a feeling of that physical response. Through our feelings we become aware of our visceral and musculoskeletal state in response to the environment.[70] The physical response is either positive or negative and we have either a positive or negative feeling associated with a possible response to an option.[71] Over our lifetime we develop many somatic markers. Along with a healthy brain, our biology, education, and culture determine our somatic markers. The strength

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[67] Damasio, Antonio *Looking For Spinoza* New York: Harcourt Inc., 2003. pp. 45-46

[68] Background emotions coincide with the most basic level of consciousness and are necessary for us to have extended, or "normal" consciousness. See Damasio *The Feeling of What Happens* p. 53, 93, 123

[69] Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens* p. 53

[70] Damasio, Antonio *Descartes' Error* New York: Quill, 1994 p. 159

of a marker depends on how often it has been flagged. The more times an individual is faced with a similar problem, the more often the same markers will be flagged and consequently those markers will be reinforced. For example, if I have to decide what type of cake I would like for my birthday, unconsciously I will eliminate carrot cake, fruit cake, etc. from my list of options as I have had bad experiences with those cakes. I will only consciously deliberate about whether I want angel food cake or chocolate cake. (It is safe to say that chocolate cake would be my final selection).

The purpose of somatic markers is, when we are faced with a decision, to narrow the field of options considerably. When we begin to consciously deliberate, we have both conscious and unconscious somatic responses to various options. Damasio thinks, "... *somatic markers are a special instance of feelings generated from secondary* (social) *emotions.* Those emotions and feelings *have been connected, by learning, to predicted future outcomes of certain scenarios*".[72] Therefore, when deliberating, we have a few options laid out consciously for us as our somatic responses to a larger set of options have already been eliminated. When we begin consciously deliberating, again our somatic markers come into play and we have either positive or negative physical and emotional responses to certain options. Damasio argues that what we normally think of as reasoning; that is, conscious deliberation about various options and performance of a cost/benefit analysis to determine a response, is enhanced by our somatic responses. When these two functions are put together, we are able to make a decision upon which we can act.

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[71] Damasio, *Descartes' Error* p. 173
[72] Damasio, *Descartes' Error* p. 174

The deliberation process takes place in the theatre of the body. Damasio argues that when deliberating we make use of the "as if" body loop, whereby we have feelings about what it would feel like if we were actually going through the process. The "as if" body loop works by making alterations to the body maps located in the brain.[73] The images that the "as if" body loop creates are different from the images that the brain creates when we are actually in the situation. However, they are likely sufficient to create symbolic maps of body states in our brains and we can use those maps to "feel out" possible options. These images are not linguistic concepts about what we would think about a certain situation; instead, they are emotional responses, either positive or negative, about a possible situation. Think about when you are doing a thought experiment and you imagine how you would respond to a moral problem. Not only do you have a linguistic thought response to various options but also a physical response. You may be happily sitting in your chair but some options may make you queasy, or just 'feel wrong'. As the brain has the ability to run through various scenarios and alter the body map without actually requiring the physical experience, we have the ability to actually feel, not just intellectually think about, how our actions will make others feel. The "as if" body loops create "symbols" of potential somatic states. However, much more empirical study is needed to understand how often we use such "symbols". Damasio thinks that use of these "symbols" likely varies from person to person and topic to topic.[74]

2. Reasoning Without Emotion

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[73] Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens* p. 80

[74] Damasio, *Descartes' Error* p. 184

Antonio Damasio and his colleagues began investigating individuals with a specific type of brain damage, usually the result of benign tumours (which turned out not to be so benign) that left the individuals incapable of making good decisions. Before their tumours, they had been capable of good decision-making and were successful members of society. After their illness, they were unable to formulate and act upon solutions, to prioritize their responsibilities, make good career decisions, and to provide for their families. Furthermore, they were unable to recognize their responsibilities and make good decisions about how to meet those responsibilities. In short, they were unable to successfully navigate the world, socially and morally. As a result, these individuals could no longer function in society.

One of Damasio's patients was "Elliot," who in his thirties developed a benign tumour in the mid line area above the nasal cavities which spread, compressing his frontal lobe. The tumour was excised but not without damaging both the right and left frontal lobes (the right more severely so that a large component of the right frontal cortices were no longer functionally viable). The ventromedial sector, located in the underbelly of the frontal lobe, suffered the brunt of the damage. [75] After recovering from surgery, Elliot returned to work but was soon fired, as he was no longer able to manage time and could not be relied upon to complete tasks. He was unable to successfully navigate the world, as he could not make good decisions about his responsibilities. He needed to be told to get up in the morning and get ready for work and once at work he would become easily distracted. For example, if he was filing documents, he might begin to read one and analyze its contents for the entire day, or he might spend the day trying to

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[75] Damasio, *Descartes' Error* pp. 38-39

determine which principle of organization to use to sort the files. His workflow stopped completely and as Damasio noted;

> One might say that the particular step of the task at which Elliot balked was actually being carried out too well, and at the expense of the overall purpose. One might say that Elliot had become irrational concerning the larger frame of behaviour, while within the smaller frames of behaviour, which pertained to subsidiary tasks, his actions were unnecessarily detailed."[76][77]

He had previously been successful at his job before his illness. His personal life similarly fell into disarray as he divorced his wife, quickly remarried a woman that neither friends nor family approved of, and they subsequently divorced. He went into business with shady characters and in areas of which he had no experience and quickly went bankrupt.[78]

Elliot's intellectual abilities remained intact. In conversation with Elliot, Damasio found him intelligent. He was able to recall names, dates, and details, he could discuss politics and the economy and, aside from seeming emotionally detached, he was a good conversationalist.[79] Surprisingly, Elliot tested well on tests designed to bring out the disabilities associated with his type of brain damage, standard intelligence tests, and tests designed to indicate frontal lobe damage.

The most relevant series of tests that he passed were a series of tasks involving social convention and moral value. One task concerned the ability to generate options. Elliot was given four hypothetical predicaments and then he had to develop and discuss

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[76] Damasio, *Descartes' Error* p. 36

[77] As the results of the intellectual tests below will show Elliot was rational according to Korsgaard; however, on Railton's view he is not.

[78] Damasio, *Descartes' Error* p. 37

[79] Damasio, *Descartes' Error* p. 35

various options in order to resolve the predicament. In one situation the character in the story breaks his partner's flowerpot and Elliot had to develop actions so as to prevent the partner from being angry with him. Elliot performed normally.[80] Another task involved the awareness of consequences, including how a protagonist would feel about a particular action and what consequences he could expect as a result of his actions. Elliot's performance was superior to that of the normal control group.[81] He performed "impeccably" on the Means-Ends Problem-Solving Procedure that concerned the ability to develop efficient means of achieving a social goal.[82] He passed a test that concerned the ability to predict social consequences.[83] Most importantly, he scored a 4/5 on the Standard Issue Moral Judgment Interview. On this test Elliot was presented with a modified version of the Heinz dilemma where he was presented with situation that posed a conflict between two moral imperatives. Elliot was required to provide a solution for the problem and give a detailed justification for his solution. Eighty-nine percent of thirty-six year old middle class American males achieve a score of 3.[84] Therefore, in laboratory situations, Elliot was a good moral agent.

From the evidence supplied by the laboratory, Elliot should have been capable of making good decisions and should have continued his successful life just as he had before his illness. Yet, Elliot's reasoning abilities, or lack thereof, led to both social and moral failures. We can characterize Elliot as amoral because his inability to make good decisions stemmed from an illness, not from willful negligence or malice. However, if

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[80] Damasio, *Descartes' Error* pp. 46-47

[81] Damasio, *Descartes' Error* p. 47

[82] Damasio, *Descartes' Error* p. 47

someone behaved like Elliot willfully, then we would consider her a moral failure because she would not be meeting her obligations. The fact that he was unable to make decisions about how to best perform his work meant that he would lose his job. He knew that but persisted, and this meant that he was no longer able to financially support his family. His wife and children were made to live through financial distress because he could not support them. Furthermore, his poor social decisions meant that he and his wife divorced putting his family through severe distress. Eventually he had to rely upon family members for financial aid.

Damasio suspected that Elliot's inability to experience emotions might be the key to his dysfunction. Elliot reported that he noticed, in situations that previous to his tumour would have elicited an emotional response, now he felt nothing, he was completely emotionally flat.[85] In order to test this, Damasio hooked Elliot (and other patients with brain damage in the same area and same deficits) up to machines that would test their skin conductance responses to emotional stimuli. Then they would be subject to a series of images, some with content designed to elicit a strong emotional response but mostly with boring, benign content. The results showed that they had no emotional response to any of the images. On the other hand, normal individuals with no brain damage were subject to the same tests and they showed emotional responses to the images that were meant to evoke emotion and a minimal, but present response for the benign images.[86] What this shows is that there is a potentially significant correlation between a lack of emotion and an inability to make decisions, as it is the only area of

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[83] Damasio, *Descartes' Error* p. 48

[84] For a complete list of tests that Elliot passed see *Descartes' Error* pp. 41-48

[85] Damasio, *Descartes' Error* p. 45

cognition where Elliot differed from normal individuals. Upon further testing (discussed below), it became evident that the lack of emotion rendered Elliot unable to develop the somatic markers required for decision-making in the real world.

Damasio and his colleagues developed a test to see whether or not the somatic marker hypothesis was valid. They set up a fake casino and with play money (which looked real) and played a card game whereby moderate risk resulted in moderate gains or moderate losses and high risk resulted in high gains but also crippling losses.[87] Turning over cards in decks A and B resulted in large gains but carried a high risk. On the other hand, turning over cards in decks C and D resulted in minimal gains but also carried a minimal risk. The punishment for the high risk was higher than the potential gains. So, if one decided to take the high-risk route, one was much more likely to lose large amounts of money than she was to win. The game was set up like a real casino where the house always wins. The game was meant to mimic our experiences in the real world where life is uncertain and we never have full information. Damasio notes:

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[86] Damasio, *Descartes' Error* p. 210

[87] The game is played as follows: the subject sits in front of four decks labeled A, B, C, and D and the player is given a $2000 loan. The goal is to win as much money as possible while losing as little of the loan money as possible. The player turns the cards over one at a time from any one of the four decks until the experimenter tells him to stop. This way the player does not now how many turns is required to stop the game. The player is told that turning any and every card will result in earning money and that every once in a while the turning of some card will result in earning some money but also having to return some money. The amounts of gain or loss in any card, nor the cards' connection to a specific deck, nor the order of their appearance is disclosed at the outset. The amount to be earned or paid with a given card is disclosed only after the card is turned. The player is not allowed to keep a tally of how much they have earned or any other notes. The turning of any card in decks A and B pays $100, and decks C and D only pay $50. Cards keep being turned on any deck, and randomly, some cards in decks A and B require the player to make a high payment sometimes as much as $1250, while some card in decks C and D require the player to make a payment but less than $100 on average. The rules about payment are never disclosed nor do they change. Furthermore, unbeknownst to the player, the game ends after 100 plays. As a result, the player has no means to make predictions at the outset of the game, nor is he able to keep track of his gains and losses. pp. 212-213

> Just as in life, where much of the knowledge by which we live and by which we construct our adaptive future is doled out bit by bit, as experience accrues, uncertainty reigns. Our knowledge - and the Player's is shaped by both the world with which we interact and by the biases inherent in our organism, for example our preferences for gain over loss, for reward over punishment, for low risk over high risk (sic)". [88]

While a casino is not our normal habitat, our normal existence is full of uncertainties and partial knowledge, with experience as our only instructor and that is why the gambling experiment is a valid laboratory replication of real life circumstances. Furthermore, the uncertainty inherent in the game is closer to real life experience as is the ongoing nature of the game for the player has no idea when it will be over. In contrast, other tests have a closed system that results in the subject knowing when the test will be over. When taking such a test, the subject is able to easily determine the variables and so has a much higher degree of control over the situation than in real life.

When normal individuals played the game they often took the same path. First, they sampled from all four decks and at first they stuck with decks A and B because of the high reward but, within the first thirty turns, they switched to decks C and D. Generally they stuck with decks C and D until the end; only some self-professed high-risk players would return to decks A and B but quickly moved back to decks C and D.[89] According to the somatic marker hypothesis, when the normal subjects suffered a great loss they unconsciously had a negative somatic response. When faced with the decision to take a high risk with the possibility of great rewards or great loss or to take a moderate risk with the possibility of moderate reward or moderate loss, they would unconsciously

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[88] Damasio, *Descartes' Error* p. 213
[89] Damasio, *Descartes' Error* p. 213

have a negative somatic response to the great risk option. This translated into a conscious decision not to take a big risk and select the moderate option.

On the other hand Elliot, and all the other ventromedial patients, would at first make a general sampling of all decks and systematically moved towards decks A and B. They always took the big risk, even after several losses resulted in their having to borrow money from the house to keep playing.[90] Elliot had the intellectual ability to know that decks A and B resulted in great rewards and decks C and D in lesser rewards. If asked what the best strategy would be, he would answer that it would be to select from the low-risk decks. It was his inability to translate intellectual knowledge into instrumental knowledge that caused him to select the high-risk decks. He knew he was taking a bigger risk with decks A and B but he was willing to take those risks because he could not work out the long term consequences – i.e., bankruptcy. Furthermore, a few months later, the test was repeated with different decks and labels and he behaved in the same way. His test results reflect how he approached all decisions in life, impetuously and without regard for consequences.[91] It is Damasio's view that individuals like Elliot, with damage to their ventromedial and frontal lobe areas never develop the somatic markers necessary for them to stop and recall their previous negative experiences with taking a high risk.[92]

In order to substantiate his hypothesis that it was the inability to develop somatic markers that resulted in the irrational game playing, Damasio had to eliminate the

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[90] Damasio, *Descartes' Error* p. 214

[91] Damasio, *Descartes' Error* p. 214

[92] Damasio, *Descartes' Error.* The researchers also brought in other individuals with large lesions in other areas of the brain to play the game and as long as they can see and understand the instructions were able to perform just as well as the normal subjects. Even a patient with a language impairment which left her with

possibility that the ventromedial frontal patients had simply lost their ability to be affected by punishment or their capacity for medium terms memory. He determined this was not the case when the game was inverted and punishment came first and rewards were interspersed with the turning of some cards. So at first they had to make big or small penalty payments, then occasionally they would get rewards. Elliot and other ventromedial patients performed just as the normal healthy participants would as they stuck to low risk decks, thereby minimizing their losses.[93] Furthermore, their performance profiles from the first game were analyzed and it showed that, immediately after making a penalty payment, patients avoided the bad deck but, unlike the normal subjects, they soon returned to the bad deck. This too would suggest that they are sensitive to punishment, but that sensitivity does not last.[94] Damasio concludes:

> ... that the result of these patients' lesions is the discarding of what their brains have acquired through education and socialization. One of the most distinctive human traits is the ability to learn to be guided by future prospects rather than by immediate outcomes, something we begin to acquire in childhood. In frontal lobe patients, brain damage not only compromises the repository of knowledge pertinent to such guidance that had been accumulated until then, but further compromises the ability to acquire new knowledge of the same type (sic).[95]

The ventromedial patients were unable to learn from their experiences because they lacked the ability to create somatic markers. Their ability to acquire new knowledge was not compromised, as Elliot knew which decks yielded which rewards, but he was unable to make long-term predictions about future outcomes. He knew he might take a loss but

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a naming defect played the game worrying aloud in broken aphasic language that she could make no sense of what was going on performed perfectly p. 216

[93] Damasio, *Descartes' Error* p. 217

[94] Damasio, *Descartes' Error* p. 217

[95] Damasio, *Descartes' Error* p. 218

he was unable to formulate a long-term plan of action along the lines of 'slow and steady wins the race'.

How is this connected to emotions? Hanna Damasio suggested that they monitor the performance of both normal and ventromedial patients during the game by recording their skin conductance responses. Both groups generated skin conductance responses immediately following a reward or punishment.[96] Ventromedial patients can generate skin conductance responses under certain circumstances. "It is apparent that they respond to stimuli that are occurring now - a light, a sound, a loss, a gain - but that they will not respond if the trigger was a mental representation of something related to the stimulus but not available in direct perception".[97] As the card game proceeded, the normal subjects, when they were deliberating or had deliberated about picking from a bad deck, generated a skin conductance response and the magnitude of this response increased as the game continued. "In other words, the brains of normal subjects were gradually learning to predict a bad outcome, and were signaling the relative badness of the particular deck before the actual card-turning".[98] On the other hand, ventromedial patients did not have the same skin conductance response; that is, they had no anticipatory responses. They were not generating any somatic markers about the goodness or badness of any particular deck, even though consciously the patients knew which decks were which.

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[96] Damasio does not mention whether or not it is the same level of skin conductance but the context suggests that both normal participants and the ventromedial patients had the same immediate skin conductance response

[97] Damasio, *Descartes' Error* p. 220

[98] Damasio, *Descartes' Error* p. 220

Damasio's research shows that the ability to consciously tell ourselves what is good for us and for others and what is bad for us and for others, especially in the long term, is not sufficient to direct our action. We require an emotional response, usually as a result from a past experience(s) leaving an emotional imprint on us. We also require the ability to recall that imprint, to either endorse or send warning signals about a possible course of action. In order to make decisions in everyday life, we require somatic markers to help us successfully navigate the world.

Implications of Damasio's Research for Korsgaard

Korsgaard could take three main themes from Damasio's research and argue that her Kantian position is the correct way to approach morality. First, Elliot is an agent. Second, Elliot illustrates why morality should be conceived of in terms of the capacity to make the correct decision(s), not the capacity to act on that decision(s). Elliot has the intellectual capacity to determine whether a course of action is permissible under the reflective endorsement test and therefore, whether it is consistent with a person's identity. Third, the role of emotions in moral decision-making as Korsgaard conceives it, is a mechanical role. Elliot is able to conceive of the morally correct action but requires emotions to execute that action.

1. Elliot is an Agent

Elliot's ability to perform well on intellectual tests, especially on the Standard Issue Moral Judgment Interview, shows that Elliot has the ability to conceive of action in morally correct ways. The gambling experiment explicitly shows a split between knowing the correct action and being able to perform that action. Elliot had the intellectual capacity to recognize that he should pick from the low risk decks. In fact, if

you presented him with the facts of the card distribution (something which he learned over the course of playing the game) and asked him what was the best way to win as much money as possible, he would be able to answer that the best way would be to select from the low risk decks. Even if he would not be able to follow his own advice in the gambling experiment because it was an open-ended situation, what is important for Korsgaard is the fact that Elliot has the ability to come to conclusions when the situation is closed.

Korsgaard is first and foremost concerned with the ability to determine what is required of a person to maintain his agency. Elliot possessed that ability. In the laboratory he was able to recognize what norms he was required to uphold because he understood what his identity required of him. Consider his identity as a husband, father, and employee. If Elliot were asked what that identity entailed, he would respond that it would entail meeting his financial and emotional support obligations as a husband and father. Further, he would need to meet his obligations and the expectations of his employer. If asked how to meet those obligations and expectations, he would be able to respond in the following way: to meet his familial obligations he would need to be a caring and supportive husband and father and he would have to maintain employment in order to meet his financial obligations; in order to meet his financial obligations, he would be required to meet his employer's expectations. The extensive testing of Elliot's intellectual abilities, especially his moral judgment capabilities, reveals that Elliot would be able to determine what his identity required of him. As a result, for Korsgaard, Elliot would remain a moral agent.

2. Elliot's Failures are Morally Innocent

Korsgaard could use Elliot as a shining example of why she thinks that moral agency needs to be located in the *ability* to perform the reflective endorsement test (i.e., endorse or discount certain actions as congruent with a person's identity), rather than in the ability to *act* well. Clearly, Elliot had the ability to determine what was required of him; however, he could not act on that information because, through no fault of his own, it was not psychologically available to him. Furthermore, Elliot is able to meet the internalism requirement as he has the ability to be motivated by practical reasons in the laboratory setting. Outside of the laboratory Elliot's illness prevents him from being motivated by the internalism requirement. For Korsgaard to describe Elliot's actions as moral failures is to make moral goodness depend on something outside a person's control. Korsgaard recognizes that "rage, passion, depression, distraction, grief, physical or mental illness: all of these things could cause us to act irrationally, that is, to fail to be motivationally responsive to rational consideration available to us".[99] When they do, however, our actions cease to be the product of a decision and so cease to be something for which we are morally accountable. Because Elliot's defects were the result of illness and not an unwillingness to act on what practical reasons required in these instances, we can identify Elliot as amoral rather than immoral in his everyday life. However, he remained a moral agent as he had the capacity to determine what morality requires of him.

If Elliot were healthy and had never suffered the tumor but instead decided that he would not live up to his identity as a husband, father, and employee and devoted his life to following golf he would be considered immoral. If healthy Elliot decided to become a golf devotee under the complete knowledge that this would violate the reflective

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[99] Korsgaard, "Skepticism About Practical Reason" p.13

endorsement test, then he would be immoral. Healthy Elliot would have the capacity to recognize that he could not become a golf devotee and maintain his identity as husband and father and those particular instances of playing golf made him into a golf devotee. Since this is not an identity change that Elliot could make as he has made a lifelong commitment to his wife and most importantly his children, he would be morally culpable for shirking his obligations in this way. This healthy Elliot would be considered immoral because he has the capacity to determine how particular actions accord with his identities. However, the real Elliot lacked this capacity because of his illness and it seems odd to treat him as morally culpable.

3. Emotions Lack Moral Value But Are Not Forbidden

Damasio's research indicates that emotions are necessary for acting correctly upon moral decisions but are not required for decision identification. As the normal individuals show and as I will show in another chapter, emotions do play a role in the decision-making process for normal individuals. Elliot shows that it is possible to endorse a decision, as he did during the Standard Moral Judgment Interview, without emotionally endorsing his decision. Elliot is unable to emotionally endorse any of his decisions.

Elliot's inability to experience emotion combined with his ability to make moral decisions (in the laboratory) shows that on Korsgaard's view emotions play a mechanical role in practical reasoning. Emotions do not determine the content of morality, but they do determine our ability to make decisions in normal situations.

Implications of Damasio's Research for Railton

Like Korsgaard, but for different reasons, Railton would find much in Elliot's case to support his position. First, Elliot is unable to make decisions outside of the laboratory setting and this contributes to a bad life. Second, the gambling experiment shows that Elliot lacks the ability to implement what he has learned from bad experiences and apply it to future experiences and therefore is unable to improve his life. That the inability to learn from mistakes is directly tied to the lack of emotional feedback (in the form of somatic markers) indicates that emotions have an integral role in maintaining a happy life. Third, Elliot's poor decisions have detrimental effects, not only on his own life, but also on the lives of his family members and close friends. Strictly speaking, Elliot cannot be considered immoral because his poor decisions arise from his brain damage and he lacks the ability to make and act on his decisions in everyday life. That being said, Elliot is instructive because he illustrates how the feedback emotions provided through somatic markers are necessary to living a happy and moral life.

1. Good in the Lab, Bad at Life

Railton can use Elliot's inability to perform well on the gambling task to argue that in order to be a well-adjusted and fully functional human being, Elliot needs to experience emotions because our emotional system along with experience generate somatic markers which are necessary for the proper functioning of our feedback mechanism. Due to his tumour, Elliot is unable (in real life settings) to develop interests and actions and to act only on those interests that are objectively rational from both a personal and impersonal point of view.[100] Instead, Elliot makes poor decisions about what he thinks is in his personal interest and he cannot recognize the impersonal point of

[100] Railton, "Moral Realism" p. 204

view. For example, he thought that he should be married so he married a woman but did not know that they were completely incompatible. He did not take into consideration his family's warnings that this would not be a good marriage, or even a remotely satisfactory marriage. He thought he should have a job and so entered into a business. Unfortunately, it was a business that he had no experience with and so it failed. Elliot could not use environmental feedback to determine how to best meet his interests.

Railton argues that the human motivational system connects both the normative and explanatory roles of the instrumental conception of rationality.[101] Elliot illustrates that our somatic markers connect these two branches of instrumental rationality. In the laboratory Elliot is able to bring the two together because the problem to be solved is closed and so he can intellectually connect his obligations to how best to achieve the goal. In real life, on the other hand, the ramifications of our decisions are endless. As Elliot lacks the somatic markers to help him stop the branching off of options and come to a decision and act on that decision, he cannot *act* rationally. Part of being rational is being able to know when one has gathered enough information and what information is relevant. Elliot was able to do this in the laboratory because there was a limited amount of information. However, in the real world there is just too much information and Elliot was unable to classify this information as either relevant or irrelevant. Nor could he determine when he had sufficient information. Elliot's inability to prioritize tasks at work indicates that he was lacking in this aspect of rationality. It was not only Elliot's "emotional life" (his love for his family, enjoyment of films, pride in his career) that was compromised and eliminated but also his very ability to function in society. As a result of his brain damage, Elliot suffered a complete loss in ability to develop somatic markers,

along with his happiness (although fortunately he was unable to be unhappy with his situation).

2. The Importance of Experience

Railton argues that, in order to function well as a human being; we need to be able to use environmental feedback, negative or positive, to inform our experiences. Elliot was unable use environmental feedback to generate increasingly rational solutions to his problems. Simply put, Elliot was unable to pursue his rationally - reflected - upon objective interests because he could not properly process environmental feedback and therefore, he was unable to determine how best to serve his objective interests. He could not process environmental feedback because he lacked the ability to generate somatic markers. Furthermore, he was unable to determine what norms he was bound to uphold outside of the laboratory.

Elliot's irrationality had serious ramifications not only for himself but also for his family. As a result of his inability to properly process information and make good decisions, all of those close to Elliot were deeply affected. He could no longer meet his obligations. His wife had to watch her husband change drastically and become irresponsible which led to the deterioration and eventual dissolution of their marriage. Their children lost their father and had to watch their parents go through a divorce causing psychological upheaval in their own lives. His brothers and sisters had to watch their brother go from a responsible husband, father, and businessperson, to a person unable to maintain a marriage or a job, unable to select appropriate persons to enter into personal or business relationships, and finally a person entirely dependent upon siblings for financial support and shelter. As a result of Elliot's illness an entire web of

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[101] Railton, "Moral Realism" p. 188

individuals suffered emotional trauma and deep unhappiness, even while understanding that it was not his fault. Because Elliot could not act on his rationally reflected interests, it was not only his own life that ceased to function well. All those close to him suffered great unhappiness, frustration, and sadness.

What this shows is that on Railton's view, he is correct to argue that we need to use environmental feedback to make good or at least better decisions. Damasio's research indicates that part of that feedback is emotional and without that feedback we cannot learn how to navigate the world.

Conclusion

Damasio's research into human reasoning and decision-making serves to clarify the differences between Korsgaard and Railton. Korsgaard's Kantian position can use the example of Elliot to show that the human interest that morality should be concerned with is the capacity to recognize what our identity requires of us. In a closed laboratory system Elliot has the intellectual ability to determine what his identity requires of him and what practical reasons should motivate him.

On the other hand, Railton can use the example of Elliot to show that our ability to generate and use somatic markers through experience and the resultant environmental feedback is necessary to connect the normative to the explanatory conception of instrumental rationality. Railton is concerned with human experience and Elliot shows that we require emotions to have the ability to make good decisions in real life settings in order to have a good life and to be a source of good for others. That is, somatic markers, generated by our emotional experiences are required for us to learn from our environment how to further and better achieve our objective interests.

Chapter 4

The Role of Emotion in Information Processing

In the previous chapter I argued that Damasio's work provides important insights about how Korsgaard and Railton's positions differ. Now I am going to turn to research that explores how emotions affect how we process information. In their article "Judgment Under Emotional Certainty: The Effects of Specific Emotions on Information Processing" psychologists Larissa Z. Tiedens and Susan Linton found that we have two primary reasoning strategies and our emotional state determines which strategy we use. When we are in an emotional state associated with certainty, we process information using heuristics. Heuristic processing is the ability to make quick decisions based on incomplete information through reliance on cues that we receive from our environment. For example, believing the content of person's argument because they are in a position of authority is a heuristic. When we rely on stereotypes and/or make quick decisions without considering all the information, we are using heuristics. Conversely, when we are in an emotional state associated with uncertainty, we process information systematically. That is, we carefully look at all the relevant facts, consider the importance of each fact, and run various scenarios through our minds.

Like Damasio's research, Tiedens's and Linton's findings serve to clarify the differences between Korsgaard and Railton. Tiedens's and Linton's research is consistent with Korsgaard's view that morality requires that humans remain committed to their agency through the development of identities and corresponding obligations. Furthermore, they show that we need to be in an uncertain mood in order to make a decision from a moral point of view. A decision is made from a moral point of view,

only if it is made when the individual reflects whether an action is consistent with her identity and this can only be done when one is feeling uncertain. A decision made without such reflection is not one that is made from a moral point of view.

Tiedens's and Linton's research is also consistent with Railton's view that humans have a variety of information processing techniques which help us successfully navigate the world and have a good life. This research shows that Railton is correct to argue that we have developed a variety of information processing strategies and that these strategies generally map onto our needs. So, we think using heuristics when the situation does not appear to warrant further investigation. On the other hand, when we are uncertain, it is likely that the situation is a difficult one and requires us to think through the situation rationally.

Korsgaard could use Tiedens's and Linton's research to clarify when a decision is made from a moral point of view and when it is not. The findings show that in many cases, especially when we rely on heuristics, humans do not make decisions from the moral point of view. It is not a problem for Korsgaard if our emotions interfere with our decision-making ability as it merely renders the decision one that is not a moral one. For example, if a woman instinctually makes a decision to run into a burning building to save her children, it is not a decision made from the moral point of view as she has not reflected on whether that decision is consistent with her identity as a mother and whether her identity as a mother is consistent with her obligations as human being. Many would argue that it is consistent with her identity as a mother, but that is not the point. The point is that she did not consider whether such an action is consistent with her identity; instead, she saw that her children were in trouble and immediately ran in to save them.

It is important on Korsgaard's view that humans have the ability to go back and reevaluate their decisions in order to make them moral decisions. So, after saving her children from the fire (assuming she survives and does indeed save them), the mother may question her decision to run into the burning building and ask herself if part of being a mother is the ability to put her life in danger to save her children, and the answer is yes. She must also ask herself if her identity as a mother is consistent with her identity as a human being, and again, the answer is yes. Therefore, the decision to go into the burning building is now a decision that is made from the moral point of view.

Tiedens's and Linton's research shows that, only when we are in uncertain mood, we have the capacity to make decisions from the moral point of view. When we are in an uncertain mood, we use systematic thought processing and so we are capable of determining whether a certain action is consistent with our identity. Furthermore, Tiedens's and Linton's findings clarify that we are incapable of making decisions from the moral point of view when we are in a certain mood because we rely on heuristics. Decisions made using heuristics may be morally correct; however, because they are not reflective decisions, they lack moral value. When we rely on heuristics, we are not reflecting on whether a particular action is consistent with our identity as human beings and so, even if the decision is correct, it is not a decision made from the moral point of view.

On the other hand, Railton could argue that this research reinforces his view that the interest that informs the content of morality is the desire to have a good life. Railton argues that, throughout our lives, we have a variety of experiences and those experiences inform our future decisions by providing us with feedback. We adapt our future actions

based on the feedback we receive from past decisions and actions. The development of the use of heuristics is one way that we are able to better enjoy our lives, as we are able to make quick, easy, and reliable decisions.[102] Without heuristics we would be stuck systematically processing all of our decisions and this would be very time consuming. However, some decisions require more thought and in such instances we would use systematic thought processing. Railton could argue that Tiedens's and Linton's research is evidence that we use different strategies to process information and that the use of a particular strategy depends on how advantageous it is to a particular situation. As a result, we are better able to enjoy our lives while at the same time making good decisions, moral or otherwise.

Review of the Disagreement Between Korsgaard and Railton

The primary difference between Korsgaard and Railton is that each thinks that different human interests determine the content of morality. Korsgaard thinks that the human interest that informs morality is our agency. As an agent I am required to conceive of an identity for myself. Out of my identity stem my obligations, as once I have an identity I am obligated not to commit acts, which would violate my identity. When approaching a moral dilemma, an individual must ask herself if she could act in such a way and retain her identity as a human being. If she cannot she is obligated to refrain from such an act. In developing an identity she must act within the confines of the categorical imperative and the moral law. Therefore, when it comes to determining

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[102] Decisions made using heuristics have been shown to be very accurate and useful. For the relevant discussion see the following:
Gigerenzer, Gerd, Peter M. Todd, and the ABC Research Group *Simple Heuristics that Make Us Smart* New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

whether an act is congruent with her identity, Korsgaard is only concerned that she has the intellectual ability to perform the reflective endorsement test and that she is capable of recognizing reasons which meet the internalism requirement.

On the other hand, Railton is concerned with individuals having a good life. It does not matter how we approach decision-making, as what is important is that our decisions are in our objective interests. Furthermore they must also cohere with the impersonal (or common) point of view. For example, suppose I decide to continue using my gym pass after it has expired. I might get away with it because I know the people at the front desk and they mistakenly assume that I have renewed my membership. I am certainly acting within my objective interests, the particular interest here to maintain my health. But I am violating the impersonal point of view because I am freeloading. I am violating the rule "do not freeload" and this is a rule that I am obligated to uphold. We could not agree to live in a society which allows freeloading whenever possible because the costs have to be offset by all other members of society and it is simply unfair that certain members get to coast through life at the expense of others. Therefore, I would be condemned as a cheater.

As Railton is concerned with humans having a good life, one could argue that my freeloading is enabling me to have a good life. This is true in the short term as I am getting free access to the gym; however, on the bigger picture, if I am concerned about fairness and about honesty, I will not be happy. I will be nervous every time I go to the gym that I may be required to show a valid pass and therefore get caught. I will feel guilt about the fact that all of my fellow gym goers are paying while I may be contributing to a rate hike in order for the gym to remain profitable or even open. Most importantly, if I

consider my actions from the impersonal point of view, I will feel the condemnation of my act. It may be that I am a cheat and I feel no compunction about my freeloading. Then I will have failed to recognize my obligations to society and I will be a poor example of a moral person. However, if I am able to recognize that I am a cheat, I will feel guilt about my actions and this will be a detriment to my having a good life. Whether I come to this conclusion by using heuristics or systematic thought processing is irrelevant. All that matters is that I recognize what norms I am obligated to uphold.

Railton could use Tiedens and Linton's research to show that we have adopted specific strategies about when to use these two decision-making procedures and this depends on our environment. Our ability to use a variety of efficient strategies allows us to enjoy a good life. Railton argues that we have developed shortcuts and other strategies such as the use of heuristics as in some situations they help us navigate the world more efficiently than if we were to use systematic thought processing.[103] When we are in a certain mood we have no reason to systematically think through every single decision, whereas such a process is advantageous when we are uncertain, as we are able to step back and think through the problem.

Certainty, Uncertainty and the Decision-Making Processes

Tiedens's and Linton's research into the effect of certainty - associated emotions and uncertainty - associated emotions on information processing found that we use two primary decision-making systems, heuristics and systematic thought processing. What strategy we use is dependent on the mood we are in when faced with a problem. Confidence, definitiveness, being sure, etc characterize certain moods. For example, disgust is an emotion associated with certainty because when we are disgusted we know

what is disgusting and why we are disgusted. Uncertain moods are characterized by a lack of confidence, being unsure, etc. For example, fear is an emotion associated with uncertainty because even though we are certain that we are frightened we do not know what is going to happen next and we are sure that, whatever it is, it will be bad. The results of their research indicate that, contrary to what had been previously held, whether the emotion is positive or negative is not relevant to our use of a particular information processing technique. Instead, it is whether a particular emotion is associated with certainty or uncertainty.[104] Tiedens's and Linton's research is valuable because it illustrates the pervasive effect that our emotional state has on how we process information.

Tiedens's and Linton conducted four experiments related to judgment under conditions of certainty and uncertainty. All the participants were college students with no known psychological or neurological disorders. In the first experiment participants were induced to feel emotions associated with either certainty or uncertainty by writing about autobiographical, emotional memories.[105] The participants were induced to feel one of four emotions; fear (negative, uncertain); disgust (negative, certain); happy (positive, certain); or hopeful (positive, uncertain). A different examiner was brought in to conduct what was billed as a "second study" (the different examiner was brought in so as to ensure that no correlation could be made between the emotion induction portion of the

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[103] Railton, "Moral Realism" p. 187

[104] Tiedens, Larissa Z. and Susan Linton "Judgment Under Emotional Certainty and Uncertainty: The effects of Specific Emotions on Information Processing" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 81, No. 6, (Dec., 2001) pp. 973-988 p. 2

[105] In all but the final experiment no neutral conditions were used because they are not particularly useful as a control condition when studying appraisal theories of emotions. They are not useful because the

test and the question portion). The participants were asked to make a series of predictions about the year 2000 (which at the time was two years in the future so they would not be able to make reliable predictions). They were asked to make eight predictions in total, including how much tuition would have increased at their school by the year 2000 and whether same-sex marriages would be legal in California in the year 2000. They were also asked to rate on a 9-point scale from 1 (not at all certain) to 9 (extremely certain) how certain they were that their predictions would be correct. These ratings were averaged to provide the measure of overall certainty about the millennium.[106] It was hypothesized that those induced to a certainty- associated emotion would be more certain about their predictions than those induced to feel an uncertainty- associated emotion.[107] The results showed that the emotion valence (positive or negative) did not affect Year 2000 certainty. However, there was a statistically significant correlation between being induced to a certainty-associated emotion and feeling certain about Year 2000 predictions and being induced to uncertainty-associated emotion and feeling uncertain about Year 2000 predictions.[108] At this point there was no consideration about how information was processed. Tiedens and Linton merely wanted to establish a correlation between being in a (n) (un) certain mood and that (un) certainty affecting subsequent and unrelated judgments.[109]

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induction of neutrality may be accompanied by increased or diminished emotions. Tiedens and Linton p. 14

[106] Tiedens and Linton, "Judgment" p. 6

[107] Tiedens and Linton, "Judgment" p. 4

[108] Tiedens and Linton, "Judgment" p. 6

[109] Tiedens and Linton, "Judgment" p. 6

Tiedens and Linton then investigated the correlation between certainty and heuristic processing and uncertainty and systematic processing. They explored this correlation in order to build on previous research that indicated that a correlation exists between being in a positive mood and heuristic use and between being in a negative mood and systematic thought processing.[110] Tiedens and Linton hypothesized that the connection lies not in the positive/negative mood bifurcation but in the certainty/uncertainty bifurcation.[111]

In the second experiment participants were induced to feel one of four target emotions. Then a different examiner came in and had all the participants read an essay advocating the end of grade inflation. The goal was to determine whether it was the certainty/uncertainty bifurcation that was important in determining how we reason or whether it was the positive/negative emotional bifurcation that was significant. Tiedens and Linton designed the experiment so that one group was induced to feel a certain negative emotion; another group was induced to feel an uncertain negative emotion and the same was done for the positive emotions. Two of the emotions were anger and contentment that are associated with certainty. The other two were worry and surprise that are associated with uncertainty. The essay was presented in two forms. One essay was presented as having been written by a distinguished professor and presented in newspaper article format. The other was presented as having been written by a student from a nearby community college and was presented in a format consistent with college essays.[112] The respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed with

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[110] Tiedens and Linton, "Judgment" p. 6
[111] Tiedens and Linton, "Judgment" p. 7

the essays.[113] The results showed that emotion valence did not play a role but certainty or uncertainty did. Across conditions, people were more persuaded when the article was attributed to the professor than the student. That is, regardless of certainty-state, the professor's argument garnered more agreement. But those induced to certainty were even more likely to be persuaded by the professor than the student. They were paying more attention to that was making the argument rather than the content of the argument. In contrast, those induced to feel uncertainty were still more likely to be persuaded by the professor but the student also persuaded them as they were paying attention to the quality of the argument.[114]

In the third experiment Tiedens and Linton examined how two negative emotions, fear and disgust, which differed in their certainty content, affected the use of stereotypes. The purpose was to remove the positive/negative bifurcation so as to place the focus solely on the certainty/uncertainty bifurcation. They used film clips to induce the desired emotions. For fear they used a clip from *The Shining* and for disgust they used *Maria's Lovers*. These clips have been shown to reliably induce fear and disgust respectively. Each participant watched one of the two clips alone and then an experimenter told them about a recent dispute in regard to how colleges and universities respond to students' infringements of the law. They were told that the purpose of the study was to see if their opinions about the situation matched the actions of the university. The participants were told that they would read about one such instance and make judgments about the guilt or innocence of the student. The crime involved cheating on an exam; specifically the

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[112] Tiedens and Linton, "Judgment" p. 7

[113] Tiedens and Linton, "Judgment" p.7

student was accused of adding a section to his essay response after the graded exam had been returned. For half the participants the student was described as a 'well-known athlete on the basketball team,' and for the other half this phrase was not included. After reading the case they were asked to rate on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 11 (extremely) how likely it was that the student cheated, how likely it was the student was lying about the situation, and how dishonest the student was. These three figures were combined into a single scale. The participants also indicated what action they thought the school should take.[115]

The results showed that heuristics were used by those induced to feel certain, while systematic thought processing was used by those induced to feel uncertain. Those induced to feel a certainty- associated emotion (disgust) tended to think that the athlete was more likely to have cheated. Those who were induced to feel an uncertainty-associated emotion (fear) did not rely on stereotypes about athletes and did not consider the athlete more likely to have cheated than the unidentified student.[116] There was no evidence that the athlete was more likely to have cheated and so the participants who labeled the athlete a cheater were relying solely on stereotypes about athletes to make their judgment. On the other hand, by recognizing that there was no evidence that being an athlete entails being a cheater, those induced to feel uncertain were no more likely to label the athlete a cheater than the unidentified student.

In the fourth experiment Tiedens and Linton explored the emotion of sadness because it is closer to the middle of the certainty/uncertainty bifurcation than the other

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[114] Tiedens and Linton, "Judgment" pp. 8-9

[115] Tiedens and Linton, "Judgment" pp. 10-11

emotions previously studied.[117] Sadness is typically associated with uncertainty but it is not as strongly associated with uncertainty as fear.[118] However, sadness can also be associated with certainty. As a result, Tiedens and Linton decided to conduct the final test involving only one emotion but with two valences so as to ensure that it was the certainty/uncertainty bifurcation that was the cause of the difference between heuristic and systematic information processing. They also used a neutral condition in order to compare this research to previous research on sadness.[119] Participants were induced to feel sad and uncertain, or sad and certain, or simply sad but with no instructions about whether to think about a time that they were certain or uncertain, or to feel neutral.[120] After the induction, another experimenter came in and gave the participants information about a new product, in this case a camcorder. The camcorder "sales pitch" has been used in other psychological studies to compare appraisals of strong and weak arguments.[121] The participants were given one of two information packages containing an argument in favour of this particular camcorder. One was the strong argument that provided information on important features such as colour accuracy, picture quality, and battery time. The other was the weak argument which focused on less important features such as colour selection for the tote bag, cloth lens wipe, and the length of the extension cord. After reading one of the two arguments, participants rated whether they would consider buying the camcorder on a scale from - 4 (definitely not consider purchasing) to

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[116] Tiedens and Linton, "Judgment" p. 12

[117] Tiedens and Linton, "Judgment" p. 14

[118] Tiedens and Linton, "Judgment" p. 14

[119] Tiedens and Linton, "Judgment" p. 14

[120] Tiedens and Linton, "Judgment" p. 14

4 (definitely consider purchasing). Furthermore, they were to write down any thoughts that they had while reading the description, indicating whether it was a positive, negative, or neutral thought. This was done to examine how participants were processing information.[122]

The results showed that the neutral condition varied from the other conditions on a variety of dimensions and so it was difficult to determine how being induced to feel neutral affected how the participants processed information. However, those induced to feel neutral differentiated only marginally between the strong and weak arguments.[123] Those induced to feel neutral tended to use heuristics, although not to the same degree as those induced to feel certain.[124] Most importantly those induced to feel sad and uncertain or sad with no directions, processed information systematically. They paid more attention to argument quality.[125] On the other hand, those induced to feel sad and certain did not distinguish as much between the strong and weak arguments as those induced to feel uncertain or simply sad. Overall, those induced to feel certain relied on heuristics to make their decision while those induced to feel uncertain used systematic thought processing.

Tiedens and Linton concluded on the basis of the four experiments that a correlation exists between feeling certain and using heuristics and feeling uncertain and using systematic thought processing. They progressively narrowed the field of emotions so as to determine that it was the certainty/uncertainty bifurcation that resulted in the use

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[121] Tiedens and Linton, "Judgment" p. 15

[122] Tiedens and Linton, "Judgment" pp. 15-16

[123] Tiedens and Linton, "Judgment" p. 19

[124] Tiedens and Linton, "Judgment" p. 19

of heuristics and systematic thought processing respectively. They began with experiments including both negative and positive emotions and moved to an experiment that involved only negative emotions and finally to an experiment involving only one emotion, sadness. As a result, they were able to separate the positive/negative emotion bifurcation from the certainty/uncertainty bifurcation. They also established a correlation between certainty and the use of heuristics. A corresponding correlation was established between uncertainty and the use of systematic thought processing.

Implications for Korsgaard

Korsgaard argues for a very narrow view of what it is for a decision to be made from a moral point of view. A decision made from a moral point of view is a decision that is made after an individual reflects upon her identity and determines whether or not a particular action is consistent with her chosen identity. She must also consider whether that identity is consistent with her obligations as a human being; if it is, then Korsgaard argues that the decision has been made from a moral point of view.[126] How the agent feels about the decision is not relevant from a moral point of view, although it is nice if she does in fact like her decision.[127] It is in this respect that emotions are not relevant for morality as how she feels about her obligations to her identity is not morally important. Korsgaard recognizes that in everyday life we make many decisions that are not made from a moral point of view and sometimes these decisions may coincide with what is morally acceptable and other times they may not. However, on Korsgaard's view,

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[125] Tiedens and Linton, "Judgment" pp. 18-19

[126] Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity* p. 104

[127] Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity* p.103

decisions that are not made after the individual has reflected on her identity have no moral content.[128]

Tiedens's and Linton's research serves to clarify Korsgaard's view of when a decision is made from a moral point of view and when it is amoral. Heuristic decisions may have many advantages as heuristics enable us to make quick decisions and move through the world quickly and competently. I am going to look at two instances of heuristics' use - the first being correct and helpful, the second being incorrect and therefore unhelpful. In order for conclusions derived from heuristics to become moral decisions, the individual must step back and consider the situation in terms of agency and identity. That is, like the mother who saved her children from the burning building, in order for a decision to be considered a moral decision, one must reflect upon one's decision and upon one's identity (as a mother, say and as a human being) and determine whether one's decision was consistent with one's identity.

Tiedens and Linton have shown that our emotional valence affects how we process information and this may affect our conclusions about that information. When we are in a certain mood such as being happy, angry, or disgusted, and we are required to make a decision, we will rely on heuristics. These judgments, like judgments made under emotional duress, are not made from a moral point of view as the actor reflecting on her identity and her corresponding obligations does not make them. As we quite often make the correct judgments when using heuristics, they are quite acceptable on Korsgaard's view; however, they are judgments without moral value.

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[128] According to Korsgaard, only decisions which have passed the test of reflective endorsement are considered reasons to act. See *Sources of Normativity* p. 89

If we think of Korsgaard's example of the two philosophy students who are required to take a math course, we can see how relying on heuristics allows us to make judgments; however, these judgments will be amoral as the students make them without reflecting on their identities as philosophy students.[129] I will be expanding upon Korsgaard's example by imagining differences in the student's moods and how that affects their decision-making. All references to mood and information processing are my own and not part of Korsgaard's example.

One of the philosophy students wakes up in a happy mood because it is a nice sunny day and he is going to the beach after he registers for classes. He is in a certain mood as he is happy and he knows why he is happy. Upon arriving at campus to register for his classes, he learns that he is required to take a math class. He will easily accept this as a requirement for his degree even though he hates math. As he is in a certain mood he will use heuristics and unconsciously recognize that the philosophy department is in a position of authority to determine what courses are required. While he has no choice about whether or not to take the course, when it comes time to register the student, if he questions the validity of the required course, will, using heuristics look to and rely upon the authority of the department. As the student will use the heuristic "rely on authorities", it is unlikely that he will question why the course is required. Therefore, he will sign up for the course solely on the basis of the authority of the philosophy department. He will not consider whether the department is correct to make a math course required. At this point this would not be a judgment from a moral point of view because he is relying on stereotypes about authority and not questioning whether his identity requires him to take the course. The student does not reflect on his freely chosen

[129] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* pp. 105-106

identity as a student and what that identity requires of him. As a result, even though he has made the correct decision, it is a decision that does not have moral value, as he did not reflect on his identity as a student. Even if he did make the decision on the basis of his identity as a student, in order for it to be a judgment that had moral value, he would need to consider whether his identity as a student is consistent with his identity and obligations as a human being.

A student in an uncertain mood, on the other hand, would be able to make the decision from a moral point of view. If she wakes up and is uneasy because she had an argument with her best friend and is no longer certain of the relationship, then she would be in a position to process information systematically. Imagine that later that morning she goes to school to register for class and is informed that she must take a math class to be a student in the philosophy program. She hates math and begins to question why it is that she must take a math class. She then begins to question her decision to become a philosophy student and she decides that she wants to remain a philosophy student and so chooses to retain that identity. She recognizes that her identity as a philosophy student requires her to take the math class. So she decides to register for the class. At this point, the decision has rational value as she has made it by considering her identity; however, it does not yet possess moral value. In order for it to have moral value, she must consider whether her chosen identity as a student is consistent with her obligations as a human being. The answer is yes and so it now becomes a decision that possesses moral value and is made from a moral point of view.

If we return to the first student who used heuristics to make his decision, it is possible to make the judgment one that has rational value.[130] He would have to think about the problem systematically and in terms of his identity. If he were to think of Korsgaard and ask himself if taking the math course was an obligation of his identity as a student and if that gives him reason to take the course, he would quickly answer yes, register, and go to the beach. He would be able to meet both the internalism requirement and the reflective endorsement test.

If we look at Tiedens's and Linton's third experiment, we have an example where individuals made an incorrect judgment because of their use of heuristics. In their third experiment, they found that participants induced to feel a certain emotion, in this case disgust, were more likely to rely on stereotypes than those induced to feel an uncertain emotion, fear. As a result, those induced to feel disgust thought that the athlete was more likely to have cheated than the unidentified student. This result emerged because of the stereotype that athletes are more likely to cheat than non-athletes.[131] However, no empirical evidence was given that the athlete was more likely to have cheated. The only difference between the two cases was that the student was identified as 'a well-known athlete on the basketball team'.

In order to correct this mistake, on Korsgaard's view, the participants would have to ask themselves questions about identity and about the moral law. If the participants were asked why they considered a student athlete more likely to have cheated than a student who was not an athlete, they might respond that student athletes are more likely

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[130] At this point the question that the student faces is not a moral question as nothing moral hinges on his decision to remain a student. As an adult he could decide to relinquish his identity as a student and still retain his identity as a human being.

to cheat. If the issue was pressed further and if the participants were asked if it was a fair generalization to brand all student athletes, then they would be compelled to reconsider. They would have the capacity to ask themselves if relying on stereotypes about groups was something they should agree that all rational individuals could do. That is, they would have to ask themselves if it was consistent with the moral law to live in a society that relied on stereotypes. They would have to respond 'no'. It would not be rational from the point of view of their identity as citizens of the Kingdom of Ends to live in such a society. So even though they made a false inference the first time about student athletes, they might demonstrate the ability to reevaluate that decision. That ability is all that Korsgaard requires maintaining her position.

Systematic thought processing is associated with being in an uncertain mood and is entirely consistent with Korsgaard's position. Let us return to Korsgaard's example of the two philosophy students and consider the student who understands the correlation between math and philosophy. This philosophy student wakes up and is having problems with his girlfriend; he is unsure about whether he should end the relationship or if she is going to end it. Suffice to say he is in an uncertain and unhappy mood. He realizes that he has to register for school that day. He goes to school and learns that he is required to take a math class and he hates math. He may question why it is that he is required to take a math class and he thinks back to some of his readings where he learned about the connection between philosophy and math. He thinks to himself, "Philosophers since the time of Plato have taken mathematics to be the model for knowledge: elegant, certain, perfect, beautiful, and utterly *a priori*. But you can't really understand either the power

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[131] Tiedens and Linton, "Judgment" p. 12

of the model or its limits if you have an outsider's view of mathematics".[132] In this roundabout way he comes to understand why it is that the philosophy department requires him to take a math class. Therefore, he is able to determine that his identity as a philosophy student requires him to take a math class. He comes to the same conclusion as his fellow philosophy student, although it takes him longer. But there is one important difference, as his decision is more autonomous than the other student's decision. Because he is able to reflect on his identity and endorse taking the math course as opposed to taking it simply because it is required, it is a decision that is made from freedom.

Tiedens's and Linton's findings show that, contrary to common belief, emotion does not interfere with rational decision-making as often as we think, and being made to feel uncertain may actually help us reflect on our identities and recognize what norms our identities require us to uphold. If we return to the example of the individuals who were induced to feel uncertain and who did not condemn the student athlete as a cheater, we can see that, because they had the capacity to reflect on their identities, they recognized that they could not agree to live in a world that relied on stereotypes. Those individuals were able to use systematic thought processing which enabled them to recognize the unfairness of stereotypes. Therefore, they could not agree that it was morally permissible to make judgments on the basis of such stereotypes.

Implications for Railton

Tiedens's and Linton's research is also helpful in understanding Railton's naturalistic position as it shows that we have different information-processing

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[132] Korsgaard. *Sources of Normativity* p. 105 This is how the student phrases his decision to take the course. I have added all the information about his mood and how he comes to make that decision.

mechanisms to help us get around the world. When we are in a certain mood, we use heuristics because they are quick and easy, and on the basis of past experiences, successful. However, when we are in an uncertain mood, we use systematic thought processing because we are unsure about how to proceed. Depending on our environment and on our situation we will unconsciously use different techniques to best adapt to the environment. Clearly, we are fallible and so we may fail to use the appropriate technique and therefore fail to exhibit perfect rationality. Railton recognizes this and argues that ideally, throughout our lifetime, we become better at reasoning. Furthermore, like Korsgaard, Railton thinks we have the capacity to reevaluate our decisions. However, when we reevaluate our decisions, we are to do so from the impersonal point of view by considering the interests of all concerned. The focus is not on agency but rather on what would lead to a good life.

Railton argues that we have developed certain shortcuts such as heuristics to make decisions when they present advantages over systematic thought processing.[133] This is certainly the case when we are presented with similar situations repeatedly. There is no purpose in rationally thinking through sufficiently similar situations over and over again. In fact, in some instances, thinking through the situation systematically will certainly waste time and may even be detrimental. Elliot is a perfect example of why thinking through a situation systematically can be detrimental. He lost his job because he was unable to prioritize his tasks. He would spend hours trying to determine which filing system was the most efficient while being unaware that this task itself was not the most reasonable focus of his efforts. Because he could not simply rely on environmental cues

[133] Railton, "Moral Realism" p. 187

such as noticing what filing system is currently in use at the office and making a quick decision to use that system, he wasted time and eventually lost his job.

While Tiedens and Linton did not discuss why the certainty/uncertainty bifurcation was so pervasive across emotions and their corresponding information processing strategies, it is consistent with Railton's view that the use of heuristics and systematic thought processing evolved because they were the most instrumentally rational strategies. Railton argues that, over time, humans learn to use a variety of strategies or develop certain habits that are fairly functional and accurate.[134] These strategies are imperfect as we might not have experienced the appropriate feedback from situations or we may miss certain cues. However, all that Railton requires is that the strategies we use are accurate to the degree that humans are able to navigate the world.[135] Therefore, for certain situations, we develop heuristics to be able to sort through information and make decisions because they are quick and easy and quite often more reliable than using systematic thought processing.[136] But, in other situations, it is best to use systematic thought processing.

I suspect that the correlation between certainty and heuristics use is that when we are certain, nothing has caused us to doubt our decision-making abilities, nor has a problem arisen that brings two or more of our interests into conflict. As a result, it is more efficient to use heuristics than it is to systematically process all information. However, when we are uncertain, it is because we are unsure of our environment or because two or more of our interests have come into conflict. So we cannot use

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[134] Railton, "Moral Realism" p. 187

[135] Railton, "Moral Realism" p. 181

heuristics to make a decision, as we need to sift through all the relevant information and consider which interest(s) are more important to us. This separation is not perfect, as Tiedens's and Linton's research shows. Some participants induced to feel certainty-associated emotions relied on stereotypes about athletes or made poor product choices. However, as Elliot shows, it is much better to make some mistakes and be able to function in the world than it is to always think systematically and be unable to function. It would have been interesting to see how those induced to feel certain would react to a moral dilemma where two or more of their fundamental interests came into conflict. I suspect they would feel uncertain about how to act and rely on systematic thought processing to come to a conclusion. Unfortunately, it was not in the purview of Tiedens and Linton's project to ask that question at the time.

When we are certain, it is usually because nothing in our environment has caused us to think that there is anything that warrants extensive scrutiny. Let's return to Korsgaard's example of the philosophy student who took the math class simply because it was required. He was in a certain mood before he went to register for classes and when informed he had to take a math class, he signed up without really thinking about it because there was no reason to warrant extensive scrutiny. He knew he wanted to be a philosophy student and taking a math class was required to be a philosophy student so there was no reason to question it. His certainty had nothing to do with philosophy, but nothing caused him to be uncertain so he continued to employ heuristics as his reasoning strategy. In another familiar situation, think about going to the doctor for a yearly physical. I doubt few look forward to this; however, we are certain it is necessary for our

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[136] Railton, "Moral Realism" p. 187

health and if we care about our health we will go. I know I do not sit back and ask myself 'is this really necessary?' and 'what is the statistical likelihood that I will have a health problem?' nor do I weigh all the pros and cons of visiting the doctor. Instead, once a year, I (reluctantly) call the doctor and make an appointment because I simply know that it is important for my health to do so.

It is reasonable that we would develop techniques such as the ability to process information systematically in order to deal with unfamiliar or complex situations. When we are uncertain, it is usually the result of not having full information or not being sure about how to apply that information appropriately. This is consistent with Railton's position as he thinks that we develop various techniques to deal with our environment so as to improve our chances of having a good life. Quite often moral problems arise because interests come into conflict and it is not surprising that such a situation would make us feel uncertain. Being uncertain helps us to stop and evaluate information better and pay better attention to arguments than when we are certain. This is beneficial for dealing with moral problems as it provides us with the opportunity to think through the problem.

Returning to the climbing example, Yates struggled with the decision to cut the rope for hours because he was in an uncertain mood - he was afraid, scared, and unsure of his partner's fate. When deliberating about whether to cut the rope Yates did just that, he deliberated. He thought about how likely it was that Simpson was still alive, about how likely it was that weather conditions were going to improve, about whether or not he could actually commit himself to cutting the rope, whether he could justify to himself leaving his friend to die. He might think about whether he would ever get a climbing

partner again as some may be unwilling to partner up with a person who cut a partner loose. He needed to consider whether such an act would be rational from an impersonal point of view. As a result, Yates thought about the decision to cut the rope for several hours before he actually did it because had two conflicting interests; one, to himself to survive, the other, his obligation to his friend. It makes sense that we would process information systematically when we are uncertain because we want to find some argument or some information that will make us certain about our decision. However, Tiedens's and Linton's research shows if we are already feeling certain for extraneous reasons, then we do not feel a background need to spend the time slogging through information.

This account faces some problems as we sometimes use heuristics when we should use systematic thought processing. Railton does not think it is possible for us to be perfectly rational all the time; however, we do need the ability to step back and reevaluate our decisions. Just as the participants in the fourth experiment who were induced to feel sad and certain may end up making poor camcorder choices, we need the ability to rethink our decisions. Railton argues that we receive negative feedback from poor choices. So, if the participants purchased the camcorder because they liked that it had a long extension cord but were disappointed with the colour quality, next time they went to make an electronics purchase they might be more likely to find out whether a particular product has all the features they want. According to Railton we do not need to exhibit perfect rationality; we merely need to be able to function in the world. That being said, the better we are able to know what our objective interests are, in conjunction with the impersonal point of view, the more likely it is that we will make better choices.

Conclusion

Tiedens's and Linton's research serves to elucidate the differences between Korsgaard and Railton in two ways. First, it shows how our emotional state affects our capacity to make moral decisions. Second, it further clarifies the different views that Korsgaard and Railton hold on the interests that inform the content of morality.

On Korsgaard's view, we need to process information systematically if we are going to make a moral decision. In order to be able to make a moral decision, we need to be in an uncertain mood as when we are uncertain, we are able to process information systematically and therefore consider whether or not a decision is consistent with our identities as human beings. When we are certain, we rely on heuristics and so we are not in a position to make a moral decision. This does not mean that our decisions are necessarily morally wrong; rather, they are amoral decisions. Therefore, while our emotions do not inform the content of morality, they play an important role in determining when we are able to make a moral decision.

Korsgaard argues that the interest that informs the content of morality is our ability as agents to freely choose our identities. When we choose an identity, we choose the obligations that correspond to that identity. How we feel about our obligations is not relevant and, in this sense, emotions do not play a role in determining what morality requires of us. Emotions have a mechanical role in the sense that Tiedens and Linton's research suggests that we need to be in an uncertain mood in order to be able to make a decision from a moral point of view. When we are in a certain mood we cannot, on Korsgaard's view, make a decision from a moral point of view, as we will use heuristics to make decisions.

Unlike Korsgaard, Railton does not think that is important for us to make moral decisions using systematic thought processing, as he is concerned with our ability to have a good life. If we are faced with a moral problem and we are in a certain mood and we make a decision using heuristics that is fine provided the decision contributes to our having a good life. If we are in an uncertain mood and use systematic thought processing, that is also fine provided the decision contributes to our having a good life. Railton is primarily concerned with our ability to get around in the world and to learn from our mistakes and if the use of heuristics is helpful in some situations that is fine. Emotions then, on Railton's view, serve to provide feedback about whether or not we have made a good decision. If we have made a poor choice, we will most likely receive negative feedback, as we will have a negative emotional response to that feedback. So, instead of emotions merely having a mechanical role in determining what information processing strategy we will use, emotions play that mechanical role and also contribute to our appraisal of a particular decision because the feedback we receive from a decision is both intellectual and emotional. This ability to receive and process feedback enables us to have a good life.

Railton argues that the interest that informs the content of morality is the interest in having a good life. Tiedens's and Linton's research shows that we adopt a variety of information processing strategies in order to get around the world. If we are able to use heuristics and generally get positive results from their use, then it facilitates the quick and easy navigation of the world. I argue that it is intuitive that we would use heuristics when we are in a certain mood because nothing in our environment warrants our processing information systematically when nothing appears to be amiss. On the other hand, if we

are uncertain, then it could be because something is wrong or because there are conflicting interests and therefore it would be better to process information systematically. Both of these strategies are helpful in having a good life and so Tiedens's and Linton's findings fit nicely with Railton's view.

Conclusion

In the previous four chapters I argued that emotions play two very different roles in Christine Korsgaard's Kantian moral theory and Peter Railton's neo-Humean moral theory. By exploring the different roles and value that each theory assigns to emotions, we can further understand each theory. Korsgaard assigns a secondary role to emotions as they serve to aid in executing decisions; however, when it comes to establishing what norms we are bound to adhere to, her primary concern is agency. As moral agents we conceive of our identities and determine what are our obligations are in respect to these identities. On the other hand, Railton assigns a primary role to emotions, in particular the ability of emotions to help us sympathize, as they serve to help us establish the common point of view that provides the norms that individuals are obligated to meet. Furthermore, emotions are involved in providing feedback so that we may become better at moral reasoning.

Korsgaard's View of the Role of Emotions

1. Normativity and Emotion

Korsgaard's normative theory is centered on the concept that as moral agents we choose our identities and those identities obligate us to act in accord with our chosen identities. In order to determine whether or not an action is in accord with our identity, we must apply the test of reflective endorsement whereby we ask ourselves if a particular action adheres to the categorical imperative and the moral law. Our emotions do not play a central role in this process. Instead, they play a mechanical role in helping us make decisions that are in accord with our identity. Elliot suffers from a mechanical failure, not a moral failure, which indicates why he cannot make good decisions in real life. It is

a mechanical failure because Elliot no longer has the brain structure to have normal emotional experiences and this prevents him from making good decisions about what actions to take outside the laboratory. It is not a moral failure because it is a medical problem outside of his control. As Elliot is able to recognize what his identity requires of him in the confines of the laboratory, it indicates that our emotions do not inform our grasp of the obligations that our identity requires of us.

2. Determining What Normativity Requires of Us

Elliot is a perfect example of moral agency in Korsgaard's view because, in the laboratory, he is capable of determining what his identity requires of him. If Elliot is asked what obligations are entailed by the identity of father, or of employee, or husband, etc. he is able to determine what each of those identities requires; however, because he lacks normal emotional responses, he is unable to put those responses into action as real-life situations are too open-ended. This illustrates the secondary role that emotions play by providing the platform from which to execute moral decisions. Elliot shows that emotions do not determine the content of morality; they merely help us execute decisions that either are or are not in accord with our identity.

Tiedens's and Linton's research indicates that our emotional state, specifically whether we are in a certain mood or an uncertain mood, affects how we process information. This may have the effect that some judgments did not result from consideration of identity and obligation but from the use of heuristics such as stereotypes and as a result are not morally valuable decisions. However, this is not a problem for Korsgaard as we retain the intellectual capacity to use the reflective endorsement test. Therefore, while our emotional state may in fact affect our capacity to use the reflective

endorsement test, we retain our capacity for agency and so the capacity to determine what our identity requires of us.

3. Conclusions About the Role of Emotions for Korsgaard

Our emotions are not relevant to our ability to determine whether a rule is normative, nor are they relevant to deciding whether a particular action is consistent with our identity. However, emotions may serve to facilitate the decision-making process. Through the development of somatic markers, the decision -making process is made easier through the unconscious elimination of certain options and the conscious endorsement of other options. Yet, the final decision is made on the basis of something other than emotions: on whether an act is permissible according to one's identity. How we feel about this basis for obligation is irrelevant from the point of view of morality.

Railton's View of the Role of Emotions

1. Normativity and Emotion

Railton's neo-Humean moral theory gives emotions an integral role in the development of morality. We use sympathy to determine what is required of us by the common point of view. In addition, it is not only the intellectual understanding of what is required of us but also the ability to feel disapproval which motivates us to meet our obligations. For example, if I find a wallet left on a park bench, I may want to keep it; however, when I consider how others would judge me I would be motivated to turn the wallet over to the police. Even though it would satisfy a personal interest to keep the wallet, I would recognize that others would disapprove of my profiting from the mistakes of others. Furthermore, even if that consideration failed to motivate me, I would be obligated to turn the wallet in on the grounds that I could not accept a society which

allowed individuals to break rules in secret because that would eventually lead to disorder.

Railton argues that through our ability to sympathize with others and enter into the common point of view, we are able to recognize when the common point of view is incorrect. The development and expansion of civil rights is an example of a change from an incorrect common point of view to a correct common point of view. Civil rights were expanded because of a gradual change in the understanding that the differences between races were superficial and that we share a common humanity. As a result, the common point of view changed from one that viewed racism as morally correct to one that viewed racism as morally wrong. However, this change was brought about not only by intellect, as whites through increased interaction, either personal or through mass media, began to recognize that blacks shared the same basic feelings, emotions, experiences and it was no longer rational to segregate society. Sympathy, along with intellect, is responsible for changes to the common point of view.

2. Determining What Normativity Requires of Us

Damasio's research supports Railton's views that we need to use environmental feedback to improve the quality of our decisions and in turn the quality of our life. Part of that feedback is emotional, how we feel about a certain situation. Elliot shows that if we are unable to develop somatic markers then we are unable to successfully navigate the world. Elliot's severely diminished emotional responses caused him to be unable to sift efficiently through information, determine what was relevant, and come to the appropriate conclusion. Without normal emotional responses, Elliot is unable to appropriately enter into the common point of view, as he cannot sympathize with others

in the appropriate manner. That is, he could not feel that his co-workers were frustrated with his inability to select a filing system because he cannot in any meaningful way feel at all. As a result, Elliot would never consistently be able to come to a conclusion about what is normatively required of him in *real* circumstances. In some basic situations he may make the correct choice but, without the ability to sympathize with others and to receive and learn from feedback, he can never determine his obligations or meet them.

Tiedens's and Linton's research further reinforces Railton's view about the importance of feedback and the ability to make appropriate decisions based on that feedback. The ability to use heuristics in some situations and systematic thought processing in others allows individuals to get around the world in a timely fashion as we are not forced to think through every single decision. However, when necessary, we are able to examine a situation more closely and think through the problem.

3. Conclusions about the Role of Emotion for Railton

Unlike Korsgaard, Railton thinks that emotions play an integral role in determining what morality requires of us and whether we conform to this requirement. Through the use of sympathy we are able to enter into the common point of view and actually *feel* how others would feel if we acted in a certain way. Emotions serve to motivate us to act in a socially rational manner. Furthermore, they serve to inform the content of morality through affecting the development of the common point of view. Finally, emotions facilitate the decision-making process through the development and use of somatic markers and determining the use of systematic thought processing or heuristics.

The Similarities and Differences Between Korsgaard and Railton

There is not much in common between Korsgaard and Railton other than the desire to explain why norms are binding on individuals. Both recognize that it will not be possible to motivate all people at all times. Some people will always be out of the reach of morality, moral monsters for example. However, both want to be able to motivate psychologically normal individuals to be good people. Also, both want to locate the interest that informs the content of morality in humanity. Korsgaard does so in the concept of identity, while Railton is concerned with humans having a good life.

Emotions play two very different roles in the moral decision-making process for Korsgaard and Railton. Korsgaard is concerned with correct intention and with being able to determine what our identity requires of us. On her view, emotions play a mechanical role facilitating what our obligations require of us. Our emotions do not inform the content of those obligations. On the other hand, Railton is concerned with having a good life and argues that our emotions help us determine what the common point of view requires of us and also help to provide a feedback mechanism so that, provided we are rational beings, we can make better decisions.

Concluding Remarks

In this thesis I explored the relationship between emotions and practical reasoning as they pertain to Kant and Hume. Each of these philosophers had a very different view about the role of emotion in moral decision-making. I looked at two proponents of these views, Korsgaard and Railton respectively, and examined their views about emotions and practical reasoning. In order to explore these views, I looked at recent neurobiological and psychological research into the role of emotion in practical reasoning. I explored the implications of the research in order to sharpen each view and, as a result, provide a

clearer picture of the role of emotion in each position. In doing so, I have been able to clarify each position so that we may have a better understanding of the practical reasoning in each of these views which in turn sharpens the distinctions between their normative views.

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