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Emotion Education without Ontological Commitment?

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Abstract   Emotion education is enjoying new-found popularity. This paper explores the 'cosy consensus' that seems to have developed in education circles, according to which approaches to emotion education are immune from metaethical considerations such as contrasting rationalist and sentimentalist views about the moral ontology of emotions. I spell out five common assumptions of recent approaches to emotion education and explore their potential compatibility with four paradigmatic moral ontologies. I argue that three of these ontologies fail to harmonise with the common assumptions. Either those three must therefore be rejected or, if we want to retain one or more of them (for instance, Jesse Prinz's recent rebranding of hard sentimentalism that I explore in detail), we need to revise our assumptions about the practice of emotion education in ways that are both radical and, I argue, ultimately unacceptable.

Keywords   Emotion education · Moral ontology · Rationalism · Sentimentalism · Jesse Prinz

The Cosy Consensus

The tenuous relationship between theory and practice continues to haunt practical disciplines. A psychotherapist uses cognitive behavioural therapy while questioning behaviourism as a psychological model. A school administrator abhors the subjectivist definition of quality underlying Total Quality Management but still decides to apply its practical tools and techniques. An educational practitioner sets out to develop a 'praxis' of teaching irrespective of any established theory. Are these better understood as cases of undue inconsistencies or of healthy pragmatism? There is much talk among academics of 'guilt by association', where reservations about underlying theories carry over into related practices or vice versa; there is less mention, for some reason, of 'pride by association', although that seems to be the other side of the same coin.

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It lies somehow in the nature of philosophy of education to try to mediate the relationship between educational theory and practice. That is, at any rate, what I try to do in the present paper for a specific sub-area of practice: *emotion education*. After languishing more or less in obscurity during the heyday of Kohlbergianism, emotion education is suddenly all the rage in educational circles. Approaches such as SEL ('social and emotional learning', based largely on the ideal of EI, 'emotional intelligence'), SEAL ('social and emotional aspects of learning': an application of SEL to general educational practice), care ethics (as developed, in particular, by Nel Noddings) and character education (in so far as it is inspired by Aristotle and aligned to contemporary virtue ethics) all champion the education of the emotions as an indispensable facet of education in general and moral education in particular. Despite their misgivings about educational grand narratives, even some postmodern educators have wanted to join this eclectic bandwagon.

The differences between all these approaches notwithstanding—for instance, concerning the role of pleasure and pleasant emotions in the good life between Aristotelian virtue ethics, on the one hand, and EI/SEL/SEAL, with its roots is first-generation positive psychology, on the other (see e.g. Kristjánsson 2007; Suissa 2008; Cigman 2008)—they appear to share at least five basic assumptions: moral, developmental, epistemological, methodological and educational (although these are rarely stated systematically and explicitly). Let me elaborate each of these assumptions in turn:

(1) Moral Assumption: Proper emotions form part of the good life and are implicated intrinsically in moral selfhood at all levels of engagement.

(2) Developmental Assumption: The development of emotions is essential to the development of humans as moral persons. Without emotions, the moral enterprise as we know it would never have gotten off the ground in the first place, as we would not have learned how to track the morally relevant features of situations.

(3) Epistemological Assumption: Emotions are essentially corrigible. They can be judged morally appropriate or inappropriate, and they are open to correction and coaching. Emotions are not infallible as a normative guide, therefore. What feels right here and now cannot simply be assumed to be truly right.

(4) Methodological Assumption: Psychological findings and other social scientific data provide invaluable evidence for gauging the nature and value of emotions. Issues of emotional adequacy cannot be settled exclusively from the philosophical armchair.

(5) Educational Assumption: Emotion education is not only valuable for moral education but can enhance the necessary affective conditions for successful learning in general, for instance through its fostering of students' self-respect and self-confidence.

Conspicuously absent from the emotion-education agenda has been any sustained engagement with the contrasting normative moral theories, with their disparate views on the nature and salience of the emotions, which dominate the theoretical landscape: Kantianism, utilitarianism, virtue theory, contractualism, liberalism, Marxism, poststructuralism and so on. Implicit in most educational writings on the subject seems to be the idea of a 'cosy consensus' among different normative theories about the five assumptions listed above: a consensus that would consider acting on those assumptions in educational practice a reasonable modus operandi for followers of otherwise contrary normative outlooks. In a useful contribution to the present journal, Maxwell and Reichenbach (2007) finally broke the silence on the normative 'theoretical affinities' of approaches to emotion education. Their main conclusion—that the normative theories explored in their paper provide compatible and complementary, rather than competing, avenues to cultivate the emotions—seems, if anything, to buttress the 'cosy consensus'. Yet they acknowledge the existence of underexplored complexities that might problematise the matter further, for

instance regarding the *metaethical commitments* of approaches to emotion education (2007, p. 161).

The aim of this paper is to take up Maxwell and Reichenbach's challenge by subjecting to further scrutiny the 'cosy consensus' on the aforementioned five assumptions, especially when they are viewed in the light of traditional metaethical views. In particular, I am concerned here with views on the moral ontology of emotions: whether emotions are to be understood as 'recorders' or as 'donors' of moral value. My strategy will be somewhat different from that of Maxwell and Reichenbach. I start by accepting, for the sake of argument, the validity of the five assumptions, and ask what that tells us about the adequacy of the metaethical views that I am considering. What emerges is nothing like a painless 'cosy consensus' on the immunity of emotion education from theoretical differences; rather, a number of standard metaethical views seem to fall short if they are judged solely from the perspective of the five assumptions. I use this strategy because I happen to believe—as most emotion educators do—in the validity of the five assumptions and expect any good theory to be able to accommodate them. Towards the end of the paper, however, I probe the alternative strategy of asking if we should perhaps revive some 'fallen' theory and relinquish instead one or more of the five assumptions. What would that mean for emotion education as we know it?

More specifically, I consider, in section "Four Competing Ontologies", 'hard' and 'soft' rationalist, as well as 'hard' and 'soft' sentimentalist, views on the ontology of the emotions, and show how only the two soft variants pass the first hurdle. In section "Complexities and Shortcomings", I argue that the most fully worked out latter-day version of 'soft' sentimentalism fails to account adequately for the Epistemological Assumption about the essential corrigibility of emotional judgements. 'Soft rationalism' seems then, tentatively, to be the only remaining option. In section "Hard Sentimentalism Revived", I explore a recent attempt by Jesse Prinz to resurrect a form of hard sentimentalism; and in section "Implications for Emotion Education", I demonstrate how radical (and ultimately unacceptable) the educational implications of accepting his proposal would be.

Four Competing Ontologies

What does it mean to say, as stated in the Moral Assumption, that emotions are intrinsically implicated in moral selfhood ? Consider the *Euthypro*-type question posed by Ronald de Sousa: 'Do emotions apprehend antecedently existing facts about value, or are facts about value mere projections of emotions?' (2001, p. 116). In other words, are emotions value-recorders or value-donors? The dichotomy in question may seem, at first sight, to be the familiar one between moral *realism* and moral *anti-realism* concerning the existence or non-existence of truth-evaluable moral facts. But that is a mistake, for while all moral realists will understand emotions essentially as value-recorders, not all those who understand them as value-donors will reject moral realism. They may, for instance—as we will see later—be internal moral realists, holding the view that although emotions do not track externally existing (mind-independent) moral facts, they reveal truth-evaluable moral facts *about us*. The debate about the moral ontology of emotions is waged, rather, between moral *rationalism* and moral *sentimentalism*. Rationalists believe that moral facts exist independently of our emotions, and that those facts can be tracked by human reason. Sentimentalists believe either that no moral facts exist at all, moral value residing in the non-cognitive, non-truth-evaluable expression of emotional preferences, or, alternatively, that moral facts are created by our emotions and exist in our minds. In either case, they

believe that moral properties and concepts are essentially, and exclusively, related to emotions.

It is helpful to distinguish between 'hard' and 'soft' forms of both moral rationalism and sentimentalism. According to *hard rationalism*, not only do all moral facts—not just some—exist independently of our emotions, but also, emotions hinder rather than help reason's quest for those facts and may even detract from their moral value. This does not mean that hard rationalists need to reject the Developmental Assumption about the role, albeit temporary, emotions serve in the development and acquisition of a moral sense by the young. They may also envisage some place for emotion education in the necessary trajectory towards maturity (see the Educational Assumption). Obviously, hard rationalists will also gladly embrace the Epistemological Assumption. But for them, emotions do not form part of the morally good life of a mature person, and reason alone, when fully honed, is capable of grasping moral value. Hard rationalists are thus bound to forswear both the Moral and the Methodological Assumptions behind contemporary emotion education, which means, simply put, that if one accepts those assumptions, one cannot be a hard rationalist. Moreover, if the 'cosy consensus' identified in section "The Cosy Consensus" rests on the belief that one's ontological commitment is irrelevant to one's endorsement of emotion education programmes, then that consensus is clearly wrong.

Plato is perhaps the prototypical hard rationalist, with his theory of moral value residing in eternal, mind-independent 'forms', and his insistence that the content of those forms is to be approached and ultimately grasped through acts of contemplative reason. Kant is another hard rationalist who even claimed (notoriously) that the moral value of a reason-discovered moral rule is compromised rather than enhanced by the existence of a co-operating emotional inclination to follow it. Nevertheless, recent years have seen the proliferation of more pliant interpretations of Kant's moral theory, which make it amenable at least to the Developmental and Educational Assumptions, in addition to the Epistemological one (see e.g. Maxwell and Reichenbach's take on Kantianism, 2007). Yet I reiterate my earlier observation that one cannot really believe in all five assumptions and, at the same time, subscribe to the moral ontology underlying Kantianism. Since Kohlberg was heavily influenced by not only Platonic, but more especially Kantian ethics, it is easy to understand why emotion education is not well accommodated in the Kohlbergian cognitive-developmental model.

'Soft' rationalists—who could also be called 'sentimentalist rationalists'—distinguish themselves from their 'hard' counterparts in believing that not only proper actions but also proper reactions are conducive to moral wellbeing. A distinctive feature of the canonical *soft rationalist* model, namely Aristotle's virtue theory, is thus the assumption that emotional reactions may constitute virtues. Emotions are central to who we are, and they can, no less than actions, have an ideal 'best condition' when they are felt 'at the right times, about the right things, towards the right people, for the right end and in the right way' (Aristotle 1985, p. 44 [1106b17–35]). Emotions are felt in this proper way when they have been *infused with reason*, not in the sense of *being policed by* reason (a characteristic of people who are merely continent or self-controlled but not virtuous), but in the sense of *being united with* reason. Yet emotions may easily get things wrong, in virtue of their typical focus on specific aspects of a situation, and may thus diverge from a person's overall considered judgement. So while the hard rationalist idea of emotions as intrinsically irrational or arational is rejected, soft rationalists warn against any joyous retreat into the idea of emotions as unproblematically ordered and reliably aligned with reason in the average person (see e.g. Goldie 2008).

What I have said so far may indicate that soft rationalists differ from hard rationalists only in so far as the former consider emotions to be an indispensable handmaid of reason rather than an intruder into the realm of reason. But things are a bit more complicated than that. Just as anthropologists' theories about the cultures in which they live are part of those very cultures and may influence them in various ways, so the fact that we have emotions (some of which are virtue-grounding in and of themselves, witness compassion which remains a virtue even if the compassionate person is barred from acting on it) becomes partly constitutive, for beings like us, of our moral wellbeing. As the soft rationalist David Pugmire clearly explains, not every kind of moral value we rightly attribute to states of affairs can be separated from the powers that those states have to affect us emotionally: 'Sometimes the significance we give things lies precisely in how they move us, in what they can evoke in us.' Emotions thus have not only an exploratory but also a constructivist role to play in moral evaluation (Pugmire 2005, pp. 17–18). For example, the moral breach of a young child, which under normal circumstances and from a purely rationalist perspective would be deemed minor, might have to be judged differently if it is invested with enough significance by the child to create moral anguish. While hard rationalists could write such a case off as one of disproportionate and ultimately irrational evaluation, soft rationalists—sensitive as they are to the capacity of emotions to confer as well as to register value—could not. Indeed, for soft rationalists, no neat distinction can be drawn between our rational and our sensuous natures (cf. Svavarsdóttir 1999, p. 216).

Human beings are emotional beings, and it is only natural that this is reflected to some degree in a morality that fits them. Morality for a society of Mr. Spocks (of *Star Trek* fame) would look considerably different. Yet that difference must not be exaggerated: after all no one has, to the best of my knowledge, seriously considered constructing a special morality for people with Asperger-syndrome, although it is well known that their emotional make-up is saliently different from that of the average person. Moreover, although soft rationalists acknowledge the capacity of emotions to imbue things with value, they refuse to draw the standard sentimentalist conclusion that after the value-conferring process, the value continues to lie in the emotional attitude rather than the thing itself. As Pugmire puts it: 'The worth things have for us via feelings still resides in them, not just in the feeling we have for them' (2005, p. 113). So, after things have been imbued with value, the imbued value becomes an objective, reason-responsive fact about them. It is obviously incumbent on soft rationalists to explain how emotionally conferred value can in the end happily coexist and harmonise with non-emotional value in the value-system of a virtuous person. Possible explanations could assume the form either of biosocial evolutionary accounts of morality, as an adaptive mechanism, or more intellectualist accounts, along Aristotelian lines, of how reason (first the reason of our primary caregivers, later our own *phronesis*) moulds our emotions and oversees that, in the virtuous person, a workable unity is maintained.

The moral ontology of soft rationalism painlessly accommodates all of the five common assumptions of contemporary approaches to emotion education listed in section "The Cosy Consensus". That is perhaps unsurprising, given that one of those approaches (character education) is explicitly Aristotelian in origin, and the others, arguably, also implicitly or obliquely so. Although Noddings does not acknowledge the Aristotelian heritage of her care-ethics, Aristotle has been considered the founder of an ethics of care (Curzer 2007); and the proponents of EI/SEL/SEAL typically (albeit controversially) claim that they are doing nothing more than repackaging Aristotle's ideal of an intelligently regulated emotional life for modern consumption (see e.g. Goleman 1995, p. xv). Whether or not those

practical approaches *require* the moral ontology of soft rationalism is a further question that cannot be answered until we have looked at the remaining alternatives.

Let us now turn from rationalism to sentimentalism. The latter is perhaps not such a felicitous term since in ordinary language it means something like mawkishness or the indulging of emotions out of season (see e.g. Pugmire's scathing critique of such sentimentalism, 2005, Chap. 5). In philosophy, the term has a more respectable genealogy which can be tracked back to David Hume. Philosophical or *moral sentimentalism* is the thesis that all evaluation is to be understood by way of human emotional responses and that it cannot in any significant sense be analysed, elucidated or critiqued without appeal to such responses (see e.g. D'Arms and Jacobson 2006). As Hume put it, the nature of virtue or vice completely escapes us as long as we look for it in external objects. It is not until we turn our reflections into our own breasts, and find sentiments of approbation or disapprobation, that we understand what virtue and vice are all about. Morality is thus 'more properly felt than judged of' in a rational way (Hume 1978, pp. 468–470). Contemporary Humeans typically adduce various empirical findings against rationalism, findings indicating that rational amoralists exist—people who think 'normally' but fail to register the same impacts on their moral radars as the rest of us do because of their lack of the relevant emotions—and that what actually steers the moral judgements of ordinary people are emotional responses that more often than not have little to do with a purely rational assessment of circumstances. The conclusion drawn is, then, that rational creatures who lack 'our' emotional repertoire have no good reason to pass the moral judgements that 'we' do, and that there is no principled basis for holding that all rational creatures should possess similar emotions, which could be called the 'morally right' emotions (see e.g. Nichols 2004, esp. p. 185).

A reasonably clear distinction obtains between what I call 'hard' and 'soft' varieties of sentimentalism. According to *hard sentimentalism*, we do not perceive or grasp moral properties but simply project them onto the world. Hard sentimentalists are moral antirealists who define themselves as expressivists, projectivists or emotivists. Characterising them is their common rejection of the Epistemological Assumption from section "The Cosy Consensus" about the essential corrigibility of emotional judgements. What is there to correct when I say that fish smells bad or compassion is morally good? Those are simply my feelings about what I approve or disapprove of—and feelings are incorrigible. Hard sentimentalists thus typically espouse both moral relativism and moral subjectivism. To complicate matters, however, Hume himself espoused neither. That is not because his moral ontology stopped short of hard sentimentalism, but rather because he added various auxiliary empirical theses to his ontology, such as an objectivist thesis about all human beings, in fact, possessing more or less the same sentiments, and another about the practical need for a species with the same basic characteristics to superimpose a common structure of 'artificial' utilitarian moral virtues upon the sentimentalist foundation of morality (Hume 1978, Book III).

Emotion educators who endorse the five assumptions from section "The Cosy Consensus" cannot be hard sentimentalists since that would deprive their enterprise of its very rationale: of helping students rectify and regulate their emotions in a moral manner. That it not saying much, however, as there are preciously few hard sentimentalists left in philosophical circles (with the recent exception of Jesse Prinz to whom I turn in section "Hard Sentimentalism Revived"). To find a group of true hardcore sentimentalists, we have to go back almost a century to the logical positivists, such as A. J. Ayer. The problem with hard sentimentalism—and here most contemporary sentimentalists agree—is its inability to account for the fact that moral discourse, including emotional discourse, is responsive to

rational debate (see e.g. de Sousa 2001, p. 117). Thus, today's sentimentalists have typically softened their stance in order to embrace the Epistemological Assumption. Surprisingly, moral psychologists and educationalists, both rationalist Kohlbergians and post-Kohlbergians, seem typically to be unaware of the subtle changes that have been taking place within sentimentalism and continue to equate it with its hard variety, which they dismissively call 'emotivism' (see e.g. Blasi 1999).

What is *soft sentimentalism* (also known as 'neo-sentimentalism' or, following D'Arms and Jacobson, 'rational sentimentalism') then all about? There are actually two different versions of it. One—adopted by sophisticated expressivists such as Simon Blackburn and Allan Gibbard—makes a distinction between mere sentiment and evaluative judgement: that is, between having an emotional response and endorsing it as appropriate, where the latter is understood as being a complex higher-order attitude. Whereas traditional expressivism identifies thinking that a child has done wrong with being angry with the child, this sophisticated version identifies it with the acceptance of a norm calling for such anger. There may be various reasons, upon reflection, why we would deem it wrong to endorse such a norm although a child's temper tantrum might be making our blood boil with anger here and now (see D'Arms and Jacobson 2006, p. 198). Soft sentimentalism of this sort pushes true moral evaluation one step upwards, from spontaneous, unreflective and possibly incoherent (with respect to our preferences) emotional judgement to a sombre, reflective and coherent one. But it does not really set any external rational limits on the content of the eventual moral evaluation.

The second version of soft sentimentalism, on which I shall focus hereafter, is called 'sensibility theory'. Its most vocal proponents are Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson (2000a, b, 2006). Sensibility theorists agree with the above-described norm-expressivists that an action is morally right (or wrong) if it *merits* an emotional response: if reflective observers deem it appropriate to have feelings of approbation (or disapprobation) towards it. They go much further than norm-expressivists, however, in placing rational limits on the appropriateness of emotions, limits that have to do with more than simple coherence or enlightened self-reflection. D'Arms and Jacobson (2006) think of sensibility theory as a 'middle-ground' ontology between rationalism and hard sentimentalism, something akin to a perceptivist view of colours as secondary qualities in an ontology of 'material' properties. To be sure, colours are not 'out there' unless someone sees them as such, but nevertheless there are various ways in which eccentric and anomalous perceptive elicitations of colour judgements can be second-guessed. The same applies, then, *mutatis mutandis*, to our perceptions of moral properties and judgements about them. Aware of the fact that to 'merit' a moral judgement is not the same as to 'elicit' a colour judgement, D'Arms and Jacobson nevertheless see in both a similar kind of sensitivity to features of the world. Rejecting the moral-realism versus moral-anti-realism dichotomy, sensibility theorists describe themselves either as internal realists about value or, at the very least, as '*anti*-anti-realists'.

The central challenge for soft sentimentalists is to preserve the Humean idea that moral values are grounded in sentiments while at the same time making sense of the rational aspects of evaluation (D'Arms and Jacobson, 2000a, p. 722). In order to do so, they need to give us a plausible story of what it means to normatively assess the appropriateness (or merit or rationality) of emotional responses. Provided that we take what they say on trust, they do endorse a moral ontology that harmonises with all five common assumptions of emotion education. In the following section, I explore further, however, if they really succeed in elucidating the Epistemological Assumption. At the end of the present section we may conclude—albeit tentatively—that for emotion educators who believe in the five

assumptions, soft rationalism and soft sentimentalism seem to hold their own as adequate moral ontologies whereas hard rationalism and hard sentimentalism do not.

Complexities and Shortcomings

The differences between the four ontologies canvassed in the previous section may seem relatively clear cut. Before proceeding further, however, we need to pay attention to internal divisions and disagreements that cut across traditional 'party lines' and complicate the picture somewhat.

What motivates moral behaviour? And what is the relationship between moral judgement and moral motivation? In response to the first question, theorists are typically divided into *Humeans* and *non-Humeans*. Humeans maintain that belief is insufficient for motivation, which always requires (in addition to belief) a desire or a conative state, for instance one provided by an emotion. Non-Humeans insist that moral belief can itself give rise to motivation (see further in Rosati 2006). The responses given to the second question divide theorists into motivational *internalists* and *externalists*. The internalists believe that moral judgement is intrinsically motivating. That is: if one sincerely passes a moral judgement and is not suffering from some general motivational disorder, then one is (by way of conceptual necessity) motivated to act on the judgement. The motivation may be overridden by other stronger motivations, but at least it is there. Motivational externalists claim, in contrast, that while some moral judgements may be intrinsically motivating (for instance those involving emotional judgements), a fully rational person who is, say, a moral cynic or amoralist can sincerely pass a moral judgement about a state of affairs without being moved to act on the judgement. As the connection between moral judgement and motivation is purely contingent, what is needed to convert such a judgement into motivation is a desire external to the judgement, for example the desire to be a moral person. Internalists consider the non-motivated amoralist to be a conceptual impossibility. Although such persons seem to be passing sincere moral judgements, what they are really doing is using moral language in an 'inverted comma' sense about what other people think is moral. Externalists blame this internalist intuition, in turn, on the naivety of overzealous moralists (read: people like Socrates or Kohlberg) who think that moral motivation is somehow guaranteed if only we can get people to see moral matters aright (see further in Svavarsdóttir 1999; Rosati 2006).

If we try to connect these two dichotomies—Humeanism versus non-Humeanism and internalism versus externalism—to the four moral ontologies, the first thing to note is that *hard sentimentalists* tend to be Humean internalists. That is unsurprising, given that this was Hume's own position, at least as far as we can tell (after all, the terms 'internalist' and 'externalist' did not exist in his day). *Soft sentimentalists* normally occupy the same position on these two issues as their hard counterparts. Indeed, belief in motivational internalism provides theorists with a strong incentive to be sentimentalists (see e.g. D'Arms and Jacobson 2006, p. 191), as sentimentalism explains why internalism is true. It is true, according to sentimentalism, because all moral judgements are emotional judgements, and emotional judgements—even externalists will agree—are by necessity at least weakly motivating. As the saying goes, however, 'one man's modus ponens is another man's modus tollens', and if one does not believe in motivational internalism, that disbelief will count as a reason against being a sentimentalist. Notice that not all soft sentimentalists adhere to an identical model of Humean internalism. John McDowell (1996) stands as a notable exception. He is a leading advocate of soft sentimentalist sensibility theory

(a precursor of D'Arms and Jacobson), and therefore an internalist, but he is also a non-Humean and a 'neo-Aristotelian'. This eclectic position is forged via adherence to a strict traditionalist reading of Aristotelian moral-habituation theory, according to which one is trained as a child into seeing moral situations in a special light—the light of a specific moral tradition—and into passing judgements about them that are based neither on isolated beliefs (as non-Humeans would claim) nor on isolated desires (à la Humeanism), but rather on an inseparable, integrated mixture of the two: 'besires'. McDowell still thinks that his sensibility theory can accommodate the Epistemological Assumption, although all critiques of one's moral reactions will admittedly be critiques internal to—and vindicated within—one's own moral tradition.

Hard rationalists, such as Plato, Kant, and Kohlberg, make common cause with sentimentalists in their allegiance to motivational internalism. They are non-Humeans, however: they hold that moral judgements are based on beliefs only, and that such beliefs have the power to motivate us intrinsically. What about the *soft rationalists*? Well, it is clear (*pace* McDowell) that Aristotle, the prototypical soft rationalist, was—to put it anachronistically—a 'Humean' with regard to motivation, holding that only desires, and not mere beliefs (or even 'besires'), move us to action: 'Thought by itself [...] moves nothing', he says; rather 'the origin of an action [...] is decision, and the origin of decision is desire together with reason that aims at some goal' (Aristotle 1985, p. 150 [1139a30–35]). As already noted, being a 'Humean' about the role of desires in motivation does not necessarily make one an internalist—that is, holding moral judgement to be intrinsically motivating—for the action-moving desire may be thought to be external to the specific judgement. Aristotle is generally, however, considered to be both a 'Humean' and a motivational internalist. There is no denying the fact that if one sticks to the letter of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle appears to be speaking as an internalist. That work has a specific target audience, however, namely people already 'brought up in fine habits' (1985, p. 6 [1095b4–5]). It is unsurprising that among those lurk no amoralists—passing sincere moral judgements about the right things to feel and to do without being moved by them—but this does not mean that Aristotle took the existence of such persons to be a conceptual impossibility as internalists do. Indeed, the most natural position for a soft rationalist to assume—one who is also, like Aristotle, an ethical naturalist and moral realist—is to be a Humean externalist about motivation (for a classic example of such a position, see Railton 2003; cf. Svavarsdóttir 1999). All these classifications are necessary to make full sense of the variety of moral positions that adherence to each of the four ontologies do and do not entail.

To take stock, then, what stood out at the end of section "Four Competing Ontologies" was that soft rationalism was compatible with the five common assumptions of contemporary emotion-education practice, but also that soft sentimentalism in its most sophisticated form (*qua* sensibility theory) could be, providing it can deliver on its promise to do justice to the essential corrigibility of emotional judgements (recall the Epistemological Assumption). It is now time to see whether or not that promissory note can be paid off.

The danger for soft sentimentalism to avoid here is that of circularity. We are told that moral judgements are exclusively emotional judgements. We are also told that emotional judgements may at times get things wrong. Obviously it will not help to say that emotional judgements get things wrong when they are immoral, for that explanation is either empty (they are immoral when they are immoral) or circular (emotional judgements are wrong when they are immoral and immoral when they are wrong). What is needed is an account of inappropriate emotions that does not rely on their being immoral. In default of such an account, soft sentimentalism is, as D'Arms and Jacobson readily acknowledge, 'fatally

flawed' (2000a, p. 747). And it is precisely such an account that the two authors have ventured to give. They begin by accusing the contemporary literature on emotional appropriateness of a systematic error: the error of conflating moral and non-moral reasons for inappropriateness. They call the second kind of reasons, in which they are chiefly interested, reasons of representational 'fittingness'. The conflation error has allegedly led previous theorists, rationalists and sentimentalists alike, into the *moralistic fallacy* of inferring 'from the claim that it would be wrong or vicious to feel an emotion, that it is therefore unfitting' (2000b, p. 68).

What is representational fittingness—or lack thereof—then all about? If something is funny, disgusting, fearful, shameful, enviable and so forth, then anyone—D'Arms and Jacobson tell us—in the right context has a *reason* to feel the relevant emotion, irrespective of his or her moral values. The reasons for fit are reasons that speak to the emotion's characteristic concerns: whether or not the emotion is genuinely applicable to its object. For fear to be fitting, for instance, the feared object must really be fearful; for envy to be fitting, the object must really be enviable, and so forth. Emotional regulation is then primarily about the rational regulation of emotions according to objective judgements of fittingness. Notably, the criterion of fittingness does not make demands only upon the proper 'shape' of an emotion but also on its proper 'size', that is, if it is an over-reaction or under-reaction. Now, everyone will agree that there are constraints on how much you should grieve over the loss of your spouse if giving into unbridled grief makes you unfit to take care of the children that are left behind (and you are able somehow to control the extent of your grief), but are those not moral constraints, rather than restraints of representational 'fittingness'? Interestingly, D'Arms and Jacobson cite such a case of modified grief precisely as an example of considerations that have to do with one's general moral outlook (involving, presumably, a host of interrelated emotions) rather than with 'fittingness', and rely instead on a case of excessive envy—when one, in fact, has it 'almost as good' as one's envied rival—as a case of an 'unfitting' emotional over-reaction (2000b, pp. 72–77).

The first misgiving about D'Arms and Jacobson's elucidation of the Epistemological Assumption, as being about fittingness rather than about moral appropriateness, has to do with their distinction between the two types of over-reactions. This distinction seems murky, to say the least, and I am not sure I understand how my envy of a rival can be of the right 'shape' but still of the wrong 'size' for non-moral reasons. Another way to approach the issue is to consider envy over things which most people do not find enviable, say, the envy felt by a paedophile when another paedophile boasts about his superior success in sexually abusing children. It may be difficult to claim outright that no envy felt under such circumstances can, in principle, be representationally fitting, but at the same time it is terribly hard to tell what should count there as an over-reaction or under-reaction without invoking moral criteria. At least we can reasonably say that the kind of evaluation of appropriateness of an emotion that most people (including prospective emotion educators) would focus on in this scenario would be moral evaluation: it is, simply, never morally right to feel envy with regard to an immoral practice of this kind.

D'Arms and Jacobson try to establish an intermediate level of objective assessment of emotions between mere subjective feeling and full-blown moral evaluation. To be sure, few theorists would deny that emotions can be dismissed as being *irrationally formed* independently of their moral content. Emotions can, for example, be based on disregard for facts, negligent and hasty judgements, and even purposeful self-deceptions (see e.g. Kristjánsson 2002, pp. 41–44). But D'Arms and Jacobson go much further than that in critiquing the irrationality (*qua* unfittingness) of emotions, for example when they claim

that it is unfitting to find recent Woody Allen movies funny because they are not—in contrast to his earlier films—'genuinely funny' (2006, p. 203). Now, one could perhaps expect such a claim from a rationalist (cf. Pugmire p. 20), but for a sentimentalist, something must surely be deemed funny or not according to how well or poorly it evokes a certain type of resonant experience. This example strains D'Arms and Jacobson's unfittingness criterion towards the breaking point.

A more general objection to their whole enterprise has been developed recently by Michael Brady (2008). He points out that D'Arms and Jacobson themselves do not in the end succeed in avoiding the 'conflation problem'. The judgement that something is enviable turns out to be, on sentimentalist lines, the judgement that it is correct or fitting to evaluate the object as enviable. The property of the moral justifiability of the envy, in the given context, must supervene on the property of its emotional fittingness (for there is no royal non-emotional road to moral evaluation according to sentimentalism). But then it becomes mysterious why a fully fitting emotion is not also a morally appropriate emotion. Consequently, the circularity that D'Arms and Jacobson tried to avoid returns to haunt them. Hard sentimentalists will agree with this negative conclusion, albeit for a different reason. What they will complain about is the unnecessary complication of our ontology by adding a level of ready-to-fit facts that are 'fundamentally different from rivers, rhinos, and railroads' (Prinz 2007, p. 107).

I conclude, then, that D'Arms and Jacobson—the advocates of the most fully worked out soft sentimentalist programme to date—have failed to make good on their promise to elucidate the Epistemological Assumption in a non-trivial, non-circular fashion. The only remaining ontology for those who believe in all the five common assumptions of contemporary emotion education seems to be *soft rationalism*. A possible objector might reply, however, that this conclusion is in itself trivial as it turns the reasonable order of justification on its head. Surely assumptions about educational practice should be judged on the merits of the best theoretically grounded moral ontology rather than vice versa. If such assumptions fail to pass muster, then they must simply be revised or abandoned. In response, I am not sure that I agree that theory always needs to ground practice rather than the other way round. Even if I did, space would not permit me here to consider all of the already 'discarded' ontologies in order to gauge their practical implications. To do some justice to the objection in question, however, let me give consideration to a sophisticated rebranding of hard sentimentalism that has recently come into vogue: Jesse Prinz's account of the 'emotional construction of morals' (2007).

Hard Sentimentalism Revived

Jesse Prinz's neo-Humeanism has hit the world of emotion theory like a tornado, ruffling quite a few feathers along the way. As already noted, Hume himself modified the radical reverberations of his hard sentimentalism with various auxiliary theses about the general moral point of view, based on shared sentiments and the shared conditions of human life and discourse. Indeed, Books II–III of Hume's *Treatise* retreat systematically from the radical empiricist epistemology introduced in Book I (1978; cf. Kristjánsson 2009b). Having little taste for compromises of this sort, Prinz is unafraid to stick out his neck in ways that invite disputes.

The latest in a trilogy of books 'replicating' the three parts of Hume's *Treatise*, Prinz's book starts with a firm statement in favour of empirically enlightened ethics (and, by implication, also of our Methodological Assumption from section "The Cosy Consensus"):

morality is 'a descriptive task *par excellence*' (2007, p. 1). Prinz argues that an empirically informed approach to ethics quickly does away with standard normative theories such as utilitarianism, Kantianism and virtue ethics, as well as all rationalist moral ontologies. Empirical research thus shows that the concept of *good* has nothing to do with best consequences, universalisable rules or human *eudaimonia*; rather it 'is the concept of that which causes strong emotions of approbation' (p. 26). In fact, we classify responses as moral if and only if a person has emotional responses of that sort (p. 41). It is precisely the approbation that brings order to the apparent disunity of 'morally good' behaviours. Conversely, the actions of lying, stealing, hurting and killing have nothing in common except the fact that we frown upon all of them (pp. 47–48). Moral objectivism is mistaken because moral properties are not objective in any interesting sense—which also means, at a more general level, that moral realism can be dispensed with (p. 167).

Prinz uses the term 'sentiment' in a technical sense to refer to an *emotional disposition* and claims that our values are based exclusively on such sentiments rather than on occurrent emotions, which may not reflect our long-term values (2007, pp. 84, 104). In short, moral rightness and wrongness can be defined in terms of sentiments that are the constituents of moral judgements (p. 175). For instance, 'a form of conduct is truly wrong for someone if that person has a sentiment of disapprobation toward it' (p. 138). Soft sensibility-theory sentimentalists complicate this picture with their insistence that a conduct is wrong if reflective observers *deem it appropriate* to have emotions of disapprobation towards it; and they also introduce a prior level of fittingness to screen emotional adequacy. As well as faulting his soft counterparts for failing to distinguish between occurrent emotions and dispositional sentiments, Prinz unflinchingly rejects their objectivity-rescuing manoeuvres. For an action to have the property of being morally wrong, we simply need an observer who has a sentiment of disapprobation towards it (pp. 92, 104, 112–113). As Prinz himself notes, emotional warrant 'is cheap' if his hard sentimentalism is true (p. 236).

It should be noted that, in Prinz's account, something is always wrong *for someone*. Prinz has no compunction about acknowledging that he embraces both moral subjectivism and moral relativism—as well as arationalism (2007, p. 2). All moral judgements are relative to the sentiments of the appraiser and, indirectly, to the culture of moral appraisers who share his or her sentiments (p. 179). If two people disagree on moral issues, there is no fact of the matter to decide who is right: that is, unless they share the same 'grounding norms' and one of them manages to persuade the other that he or she has misapplied those values in the particular case through some oversight (pp. 120, 125). There is an unbounded number of possible moralities (p. 288), and there is no objective moral criterion—not even a universal Humean sentiment—which can adjudicate whether or not practices such as cannibalism, incest, bestiality, infanticide or gladiator sports are morally right or wrong. Nevertheless, this understanding of morality allows us to draw certain general moral implications from our own relativistic stand, such as that it is wrong to try to impose our morality on others, and that while tolerance is an intellectual as well as a moral virtue, it does not demand of us that we change our own values to cohere with somebody else's (pp. 210–211).

It is not difficult to locate the sources of the antipathy that Prinz's uncompromising sentimentalism has evoked. For one thing, in his fiery mission, fairness to adversial positions is often compromised. Consider for instance his attacks on utilitarianism, where he claims that the statement 'X is morally required' does not mean the same as 'X maximises utility', and where he presents empirical findings showing that only 8.3% of people consider it permissible to push a person in the path of a trolley that is speeding

towards five people (2007, pp. 38, 159). The problem is that utilitarianism is not a thesis about meaning; it is an empirical thesis about what is in fact desired by experienced judges. Moreover, the fact that people are not willing to push an innocent bystander into the path of a trolley heading towards a group of railway workers should come as no surprise. All sophisticated utilitarians will accept that sacrificing the life of a person in a low-risk zone (here an innocent train traveller) in order to save people in a high-risk zone (here railway workers who know about the attendant risks of their job) will create a precedent that is strongly inimical to overall utility in the long run. Prinz seems to be confusing this case with the traditional trolley-case where the driver of a runaway tram can steer it onto a track where one railway employee is working rather than another track where it would kill five of his colleagues. In such a case, the potential victims are in similar risk-zones, and utilitarians would deem it morally right to save the five instead of the one. In a similar vein, Prinz rides roughshod over the arguments for and against virtue ethics. He blames virtue ethicists for insisting on human flourishing being a natural construct, which flies in the face of overwhelming empirical evidence for cross-cultural variations in what counts as the good life (p. 157). What he fails to take account of here is both the fact that there is an equally large mountain of empirical literature attesting to cross-cultural similarities (or at least the possibility of bringing apparent token-differences under common moral type-denominators, see e.g. Kristjánsson 2009a) *and* the possibility that some cultural beliefs (such as the belief of the Ilongot headhunters that recreational killing is fine; Prinz 2007, p. 109) may actually be wrong.

For another thing, Prinz pays no attention to the uniqueness of morality as a specific human practice. He talks about moral rightness and wrongness in the same breath as he talks about funny jokes and disgusting food. This is no novelty: sentimentalists, hard and soft, understand all our evaluations—moral or otherwise—to be rooted in emotion (see e.g. the examples given by D'Arms and Jacobson of the evaluative concepts in which they happen to be interested, namely 'funny', 'shameful', 'disgusting' and 'fearsome': 2006, p. 194). The underlying idea is the Humean one that 'the [moral] case is the same as in our judgments concerning all kinds of beauty, and tastes, and sensations' (Hume 1978, p. 471). As Prinz put it earlier, to be good is simply to be approbated. What sentimentalists fail to heed is the great variety that exists in our use of the word 'good'. In his classic treatment, Georg von Wright (1963) demonstrated that 'good' admits of no primary form; goodness is not even a family concept. There are, so to speak, many kinds of 'goodnesses' that have little, if anything, in common. One of them is the *moral good*, of what is beneficial for human wellbeing. The moral good is a kind of instrumental goodness. To attribute instrumental goodness to a thing is primarily to say of this thing that it serves some purpose well—for example to say that a certain kind of morality is good at harmonising the conflicting interests of people in a world of scarce resources—and 'genuine judgements of instrumental goodness are always objectively true or false judgements' ((1963), p. 29). Hedonic goodness is quite another thing. It attributes value to pleasant sensations of taste, for instance, as well as to other subjective pleasures.

To think that all the different meanings of goodness can be subsumed under a single heading and explained in the same way via emotional responses seems naïve, on von Wright's nuanced account. One can coherently, at any rate, be a sentimentalist and a motivational internalist about the taste of food and the fun of jokes while being a rationalist and even an externalist about moral goodness (cf. Svavarsdóttir, p. 165 [footnote 6]). For Prinz, if subjects are hypnotically induced to find X disgusting, and the disgust becomes part of their long-term sentimental system, X is simply disgusting to them and there is nothing more to say about it. Following von Wright, we see how this example may work in

the area of hedonic goodness. If I am hypnotised into finding shellfish disgusting, then shellfish simply is disgusting to me, full stop. That this example does *not* work in the field of moral goodness can be shown by the fact that if I am hypnotised (or brainwashed) into finding compassion morally disgusting, then there is surely something more to be said about it than just that compassion is morally disgusting to me, full stop. What must be added is that *I should not* consider compassion morally disgusting. The upshot here is that moral evaluations are *answerable to reasons* in a way that judgements of mere liking or disliking are not (see Jones 2006). Perhaps Prinz's emotional warrant, 'cheap' as he says it comes, is really much too cheap after all.

Implications for Emotion Education

Prinz argues that our sentiments are established through biocultural interactions—nurture rather than nature—or more precisely through a process of 'punishment, love withdrawal, and induction during moral development' (2007, p. 143). Children are not born with any innate moral sense (p. 269). Our moral educators are our primary caregivers, role models and peers (p. 185). They induce us into their world of sentimental values, their own grounding norms, which we make our own. Moral judgements are self-justifying: if I make a judgement that X is wrong, which expresses my true sentiment, then my belief is warranted because 'wrong' refers to that towards which I have such a sentiment (p. 236).

   Where does all this leave the Epistemological Assumption of current emotion-education practice, which states that emotions are essentially corrigible: that they can be judged morally appropriate or inappropriate and are open to correction and coaching? Well, an occurrent emotion can be deemed inappropriate by me, in Prinz's account, if it does not cohere with my corresponding long-term sentiment. Apart from that, there are no grounds for impugning my sentiments. They are, as already stated, 'self-justifying'. This theory does not seem to leave much room for emotional corrections. Interestingly, however, Prinz thinks that it actually does. He claims that hard sentimentalism allows for emotional reform and progress. Sentiments, and hence moral judgements, can be assessed with respect to consistency, coherence with facts, stability, ease of implementation, welfare, wellbeing, universality and so forth—and such assessments may lead us to the conclusion that one sentimental grounding norm is 'better' than another (2007, Chap. 8). Importantly, however, these standards are, in Prinz's view, not moral standards but *extra-moral* ones, which go beyond the categories of moral good and evil (p. 292). They are, more precisely, standards of pragmatic convenience—'pale shadows' of standard moral theories, as Prinz readily admits (p. 303), but still useful as the only standards we have for adjudicating between differing sentiments.

   We now see how radically we would need to revise the Epistemological Assumption of current emotion-education practice for it to cohere with Prinz's hard sentimentalism. There would be no way any more to judge or correct student's emotional dispositions from a moral perspective. We would only end up with suggestions about how their emotions could be made more useful for themselves and others in an extra-moral sense. In that case, however, all that is distinct about the recently burgeoning practice of emotion education would, I submit, be lost, as that practice has essentially developed as a sub-branch of moral education. Prinz's hard sentimentalism would thus rob current emotion education of its very point, and I, for one, find that an unacceptable implication.

   But am I being too quick here? Are the implications of Prinz's stance really all that different from the Epistemological Assumption as understood by advocates of EI, SEL and

SEAL—approaches that are, after all, at the forefront of current emotion-education practice, and all of them rooted in the soil of early (pre-Seligman) 'positive psychology'? Recently, philosophers of education have thrown down the gauntlet at the positive-psychology understanding of moral and emotional wellbeing as implicated in educational practice. They complain, for instance, that 'Goleman's conception of *EI* fails to make any *substantive moral demands* on the content of intelligent emotions' (Kristjánsson 2007, p. 94)—with the ensuing danger of *phronesis* collapsing into mere Machiavellian calculation—and that the language of positive psychology rules the 'broad normative dimension' out of educational discourse (Suissa 2008, p. 579). The agenda under discussion 'plucks the idea of regulating children's emotions' from the realm of individual moral encounters and sets it down, mistakenly, in the 'realm of public policy' (Cigman 2008, p. 7).

Apt as all these complaints may be in principle, we must take care not to engage in rhetorical shadowboxing. The debate in question is most charitably framed as a debate about what comprises the morally good life. Positive psychologists understand (or at least understood, prior to their recent retrieval of the virtues) the morally good life in terms of biocultural adaptability, self-esteem, freedom from internal and external conflict, and pleasant emotions. Philosophers of education—at least those of an Aristotelian persuasion—understand it differently, in terms of *eudaimonia*, self-respect, truth-seeking and pleasure-pain-mixed emotional maturity. But the two contingents are still engaged in the same debate, in the same enterprise: advancing *competing* claims about the morally good life. Positive psychologists would never dream of describing their project as that of the abandonment of morality in favour of mere extra-moral concerns: of deliberately replacing *phronesis* with mere *techné*. So even if all the objections urged against the early positive-psychology-inspired approaches to emotion education were correct, this would not impugn my earlier diagnosis of Prinz's hard sentimentalism as making much more fundamental mischief in the idea of emotion education, as we know it, than the view of any of the leading current emotion educators.

The title of this paper contains a question: whether emotion education can do without ontological commitment. The answer to that question is no. Approaches to emotion education sit atop more fundamental theories about moral ontology. The 'cosy consensus' on the immunity of educational practice from those theories is mistaken. Only one of the theories in question, that of soft rationalism, is fully compatible with current educational practice. Furthermore, at least one of the incompatible theories, namely that of hard sentimentalism explored in the final sections of this paper, would, if adopted, have not only radical but devastating ramifications for such educational practice.

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