

A Contextualization of the Classic Moral Sentimentalism

Rarita MIHAIL¹

¹ Associate Professor, „Dunărea de Jos”
University of Galati, Romania,
rarita.mihail@ugal.ro

Abstract: Moral sentimentalism can be defined as the philosophical theory according to which emotions are the source of our value judgements, in general, and of our moral judgements, in particular. It follows that, from a historical and conceptual point of view, moral sentimentalism has emerged and developed in opposition to moral rationalism, according to which reason allows us to formulate and understand value judgments from a psychological point of view and is also the source of our axiological knowledge from an epistemic point of view. In this article we present the theoretical issues related to the sentimentalist approach to morality and evaluative judgments, starting from the diverse theories of the classical representatives of sentimentalism, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume and Smith, and especially the three theses they defended: psychological perspective, the theory of moral sense and the theory of moral feelings. I also argue that the first moral sentimentalism emerged from the confrontation of three distinct aporia: the first aporia refers to the conceptualization of emotions and emotional states; the second deals with the possibility of axiological knowledge; and the third refers to the nature and existence of values. Finally, we are interested in the birth of sentimentalism in order to highlight a series of difficulties inherent in this theoretical approach and which we find today in contemporary moral sentimentalism. The aim is to highlight the conceptual and argumentative tensions that were at the heart of sentimentalism at its emergence.

Keywords: *Sentimentalism; rationalism; emotions; motivations; morality.*

How to cite: Mihail, R. (2021). A Contextualization of the Classic Moral Sentimentalism. *Postmodern Openings*, 12(1Sup1), 238-256.
<https://doi.org/10.18662/po/12.1Sup1/282>

1. Introduction

Moral and ethical sentimentalism advocates that emotions play an essential role at a given time within the proper moral theory. This role might be epistemic, semantic, metaphysical, axiological, or normative. For moral sentimentalists, our emotions and desires play a lead role in the anatomy of morality. Some believe that moral thoughts are fundamentally sentimental, others that moral deeds refer mostly to our sentimental answers or that emotions are the main source of moral knowledge.

Moral sentimentalism can be defined as the philosophical theory according to which emotions, make up the source of our value judgements, as a whole, and, our moral judgements, in particular. On one hand this philosophical approach is often equated to *the theory of moral sense* as proposed by the first sentimentalists, i.e. Shaftesbury (1999) and Francis Hutcheson (2002). Such an understanding of moral sentimentalism would, nonetheless, be too restrictive, because the sceptical authors of the notion of moral sense, like David Hume (1978) or Adam Smith (1976), are also among the founders of this current. They, in turn, stressed the role of emotional interactions in the development of our moral judgements, based, especially, on the concept of *affinity*. On the other hand, today there are numerous philosophers who are also part of this current, and who do not emphasize moral sense, or affinity, but rather certain types of emotions such as disgust, anger, or sadness, for example. This is the case for Shaun Nichols (2004) and Jesse Prinz (2007), two of the main representatives of today's sentimentalism.

From a historical and conceptual point of view, sentimentalism opposes rationalism. According to this philosophic current, reason allows us to formulate and understand value judgements from a psychological point of view, and it is also the source of our axiological knowledge from an epistemic point of view. Rationalism often also claims that values are independent from our affective constitution from a metaphysical point of view. This is, of course, a simplified image of this current and it would be caricatural to say that all rationalists accept these three theses. It is entirely possible for one of these three claims to be approved. Another important rupture point between sentimentalism and rationalism depends on "naturalistic" claims of the former. Indeed, most of the classic sentimentalists insisted on the empiricist character of their approach, as opposed to the "emaciated" proposals of the rationalists, who would simply be "disconnected" from our affective nature (Nichols, 2008). In this perspective, sentimentalists generally look for confirmations through

experience for the theses defended by them, but also for empirically argued rejections, for the theses they reject.

Sentimentalism is worthy of special interest, firstly for reasons inherent to this particular current, but also for ones that take into consideration recent research in the field of psychology. A first argument refers to the fact that our affective states and, especially our emotions, lie at the core of our value judgments. In this respect, it is here asserted that the evaluative language has a rather obvious connection to affective language. On the one side, evaluative judgment holds a major place in the life of people: one leads their life in a polarized world, with zones of attraction, and of rejection, ones of interest, having either positive or negative value, and the emotions of joy and sadness seem to play a lead role in this particular case. On the other side, emotions are at the center of human life, which is why it is absolutely necessary for people to gain an interest in the different roles which might be played according to evaluative judgment, a direction in which all sentimentalists have been moving toward.

A second type of argument in favor of the interest in the area of sentimentalism is related to contemporary psychology research. Be it Social Psychology, Cognitive Sciences, Neurosciences, or Moral Psychology, emotions are of actuality. Just as a “cognitive revolution” was often brought in discussion in order to refer to the birth of the cognitive sciences, an “affective revolution” can also be pinpointed so as to name the ever-increasing interest for the different psychological functions that human emotions are prone to play (Haidt, 2008, 68).

Therefore, sentimentalism cannot be reduced to a philosophical approach, which would only take into consideration moral philosophy and moral problems, that can be found in the three theses defended by the first sentimentalists. One of the directions of modern sentimentalism is the explanation of the way in which an agent can formulate and understand value judgment and to elaborate evaluative knowledge on this basis.

This article first tackles the theoretical problems connected to the sentimentalist approach to morality and evaluative judgment. More specifically, the birth of sentimentalism will be looked into in order to highlight a series of inherent difficulties to this theoretical endeavour, which can be found nowadays in contemporary sentimentalism. The goal is to accentuate the conceptual and argumentative tensions which have lain at the centre of sentimentalism even from its conception. Next, an argument in favor of a specific sentimentalist theory is brought forward, a theory which will be here called “motivational theory”. The latter is an interpretation of

the three fundamental theses previously mentioned, which seeks to bring conceptual clarifications for a possible version of present sentimentalism.

2. The birth of sentimentalism: history, issues

Before being literally a theory, sentimentalism is first and foremost the name of a thinking current that came about within the Scottish Illuminism and whose main representatives – Shaftesbury (the only non-Scottish philosopher of the group), Hutcheson, Hume and Smith – shared certain fundamental aspects or, at least, “a theoretical program” which comprised of on the one hand in defending an inherent favourable aspect specific to human nature and, on the other hand, in an oblique opposition towards moral rationalism (Biziou, 2000, 22). From a more general perspective, all these authors seem to consider that emotions, feelings or desires are situated at the centre of the majority of evaluations, that these are not only moral, but also aesthetical or instrumental. Finally, they share a certain type of analysis which can be described as both empirical, and naturalistic. Indeed, the main method of conceptual analysis is based upon the empirical analysis of examples which anyone can experiment. And, in doing this, they affirm that they are not doing anything else other than to describe as accurately as possible the human nature and the spontaneous tendency towards morality, without the necessity to refer to transcendent principles or to facts that do not come from experience.

When he theorizes about his own method, in the introduction of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, considering it “an experimental philosophy” (Hume, 1978), straining to analyse his philosophical debates, starting with their psychological causes, Hume does nothing more than to characterise a demarche which he believes to have been already developed by his predecessors. In any case, sentimentalists seem to consider that the hypotheses on moral are those empirically assessable and they manifest true distrust towards the theories which are so abstract that no observation can either confirm or deny them. As such, it is legitimate, in their eyes, to search for what Bacon named “crucial experiences” (Hume, 1983), a fact which will allow a decision to be made about philosophical hypotheses, confirming, or denying them.

These first common points, be them too general, allow for a first regrouping of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith under the common name of “sentimentalism”. Despite some common intuitions on the different approaches defended by these authors (especially the three theses – psychological, epistemic, and metaphysical), which ensure the unity

of sentimentalism, it must be emphasized that they do not agree on many points, remaining open to divergent interpretations. But, before discussing the internal disputes that accompanied the birth of sentimentalism it is useful to first present the three founding theses, which show interest, from a psychological point of view, in the passing from the theory of moral sense to the theory of moral sentiments.

First and foremost, sentimentalists support the *psychological thesis* according which our emotions, passions, feelings, or desires are the best method to explain our moral judgements. Also, it has to be noted from the beginning that they do not make a clear distinction between these different concepts and dispositions. Most of the times, sentimentalists use the notions of passion, affection, emotion or feeling in a relatively interchangeable manner (Jaffro, 2009, 135-136). These different concepts serve to designate, in their perspective, what we call today an emotion, in other words a punctual, episodic disposition related to an object and which involves certain characteristic sensations. On one hand, only Smith seems to clearly distinguish emotion from feeling, as far as, in his view, the feeling serves to characterise a lasting affective disposition, maintained by our rational reflection. On another hand, Hutcheson distinguishes the passion and affection concepts according to their intensity: the first one would be violent, while the second one would be calm (Hutcheson (2002), Biziou (2000, 303-304). However, in broad lines, sentimentalists do not seem to make a clear distinction between these punctual emotions and feelings, such as hatred and love, which are more lasting, and which allow us to experiment many other emotions in regard to their objects (I can be sad, feel happy, be worried for those whom I love or I hate). The distinction from desire is, however, generally clearer, especially that the latter has a motivational strength which the other affective states do not possess, or not with the same intensity.

Nonetheless, these semantic fluctuations should not make us lose sight of the sentimentalists' primary ambition, which is descriptive in nature: they try to respect our moral dispositions based on our sensibilities, or, more specifically, starting from our states of mind. This approach makes sentimentalism a special and novel current within the field of the history of thought, despite its obvious affiliation with certain aspects of stoicism. It truly seems that no author has clearly supported, before Shaftesbury (1999) and Hutcheson (2002), a moral psychology that takes note of our capacity to formulate moral judgements on our emotions and feelings. Or, as Jaffro (2009, 137) pinpoints, sentimentalists support that which today is called the thesis of "motivational internationalism", in other words the thesis

according to which our moral judgements are inherently motivational. To judge that x is morally wrong or reprehensible means to be willing and motivated not to do x in “normal” conditions (in other words, when we are not under the influence of a drug or when we are not intemperate). And, if sentimentalists estimate that moral judgements are inherently motivational, this aspect is mostly due to the fact that judgements are informed, in their view, of our dispositions, which play both a motivational and a judicial role.

In this sense, three types of relations between emotion and judgement can be distinguished (Jaffro, 2009, 139-140):

a) According to the “entirely cognitive view of judgement”, moral judgement is moulded by emotions, which, in turn, are identical with rational judgements, or anticipations of rational judgements, such as with the stoics. In this case, there is not a significant difference between emotion and judgement, so that moral judgement is entirely cognitive, seeing as there is no specificity to dispositions per se.

b) According to the “mixt” concept, moral judgement has a cognitive component and an affective component. In this case, moral judgement is influenced by emotion and desire, as such it would not be an authentic moral judgement without this influence. In this regard, the idea shared by the majority of sentimentalists, and that allows the extension of this approach to the ensemble of value judgements (and not only to the moral ones), is that the assignment of a value to a thing is specific to affective dispositions and that no purely rational judgement can solely fulfil this task.

c) Finally, according to the “reductionist” or “integral affective” conception of the moral judgement, it does not hold any truly cognitive component, but it is integrally shaped by affective dispositions, to which it can be reduced. As a result, in the best-case scenario, moral judgement expresses only affective dispositions. This conception mostly coincides with what we would call today a “non-cognitivist” approach of moral judgements, which sustain that these do not express properly cognitive states (as propositions and representations) and this is why they are improper to be true or false

While Shaftesbury (1999) supports the first approach, namely the “entirely cognitive view of judgement”, it is more difficult to clearly place those of Hutcheson (2002), Hume (1978) and Smith (1976). From Jaffro’s perspective (2009), the first two seem to oscillate between a mixt and a reductionist approach.

Secondly, the fathers of sentimentalism defend an *epistemic thesis*. Seeking to follow the conformity with the psychological thesis, they consider

that emotions and feelings are our primary manner of accessing the axiological properties or values. This epistemic thesis takes into account two aspects, according to sentimentalists. Firstly, the respective thesis supports the rejection of rationalism, which makes reason our primary source of axiological knowledge. Secondly, it supports the precise specification of the conditions in which our emotions constitute a reliable source when they access axiological properties, thus being susceptible to justify our value judgements. Indeed, sentimentalists do not support the glorification of the passionate nature of humans and thus ignoring some of the well-known negative effects of human emotions. Especially the fact that, sometimes, the emotions we experience try to go around our own judgement, and that it makes us be biased towards our close relations, is an aspect that sentimentalists will always regard, and which they will try to keep count of in their theories. This is the reasons why they look for the specification of the conditions in which our emotions ensure our safe access to values.

In any case, this epistemic thesis had an extremely controversial character, since it promoted the liberation of our moral evaluations not only from moral rationalism, but also from the religious dogmatism, showing that they can be reliable enough for us to not need any of the other two alternatives (Frankena, 1955). It must be reminded that Shaftesbury main study (1999), *Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit*, starts with an opposition between the inherently moral character of individuals and their religious opinions. When we want to know the morality of a human being, Shaftesbury (1999) said, we should evaluate his character, not his religious opinions, because zealous Christians have already been noticed doing all kind of atrocities and atheists that have a moral behaviour (Shaftesbury, 1999). The same kind of reasoning is also adopted by David Hume in *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (Hume, 2006), and also in *The Natural History of Religion* (Hume, 1957).

In this way, not only would our affective dispositions explain our capacity to elaborate moral judgements, but it is possible that they justify these and play a role in the cognition of values that no other mental state could. The characterisation of this epistemic thesis will herald many interpretations, especially depending on the psychological theses defended by various authors. If an entirely cognitive conception of moral judgement obstructs emotions to play a specific role in our access to values, in return, a reductionist conception risks the considerable limitation of the possibilities that our emotions offer us a certain axiological knowledge, because it denies the existence of any cognitive element in our value judgement. As far as it is possible, sentimentalist theories should lie between these two.

Thirdly, *the metaphysical thesis*, defended by the classic sentimentalism representatives, sustains that moral deeds are the ones related to our feelings. Generally, sentimentalists seem to agree that the axiological properties depend to some extent on our affective structure, not being independent from the spirit. From this perspective, they are in opposition with rationalists and intuitionists, such as Samuel Clarke (1991) or Richard Price (1948). Indeed, the latter ones affirm that there are rational truths, outside of us, which can diminish our actions when they become known to us. Contrarily, sentimentalists will try to show that such a conception is at the best least mysterious. According to them, there is no constrictive bond of this sort in nature, and the study of human nature reveals, per contra, the fact that the existence of values is closely tied to our affective dispositions. This means that, for example, good is a property that depends on certain feelings that we have, or we should have, and that could not exist independently from these.

Sentimentalists sometimes significantly differ in the way they interpret this thesis. While some, such as Hutcheson (2002), at times seem closer to the rationalist and intuitionist theses, which understand values as independent from us, others, like Hume (1978), tend to strongly insist on the dependence of values on our sensibilities. The major problem is that none of these authors exposes the clear ontology that his theory presupposes. Only Hume (1978) makes a major effort in this respect, but his formulas are often contradictory, and they need plenty of interpretative precaution. Although sometimes he seems to argue that values do not exist and they are mere projections of our emotions, he, at times, contrarily claims that there is no difficulty in the recognition of the existence of values.

3. Opposing views of the first sentimentalists

Although we can generally estimate that the first sentimentalists share the three theses, some disclaimers must be added. First, it is mandatory to remember that these theses are logically independent one from the others. It is entirely possible to assert from a psychological point of view that one's own emotions explain their moral judgement, but does not justify them, and that moral deeds are independent from one's emotional reactions. Secondly, we could declare that emotions offer a privileged access to values, but that they do not explain most of our regular moral judgements and that axiological acts are independent from our emotional reactions. Finally, and more controversially, we could imagine that moral acts refer to the emotions we experience, but that our emotions do not prepare us to pass moral

judgements, and that we could imagine such deeds independent from our emotions.

This aspect leads to the next disclaimer. Although it is true that the fathers of sentimentalism support the three preliminary theses, it is not less true that there is major disagreement among them regarding the exact manner in which these must be understood, but also regarding the relevance of the arguments used by some. As such, as far as the psychological thesis is concerned, Shaftesbury (1999) and Hutcheson (2002) declare that it is necessary to postulate the existence of a “moral sense” in order refer to our own moral evaluations. Nevertheless, Hume (1978) and Smith (1976) suggest that such a postulate is futile and that our evaluations can be explained by our inclination to “sympathise” with someone else’s moral feelings. Thus, while moral sense is conceived as an organ of moral perception individualised the same as the other senses, Hume (1978) and Smith (1976) claim that our moral evaluations are essentially generated by our social and affective interactions. In this way, sentimentalism is divided between a perspective of innéiste inspiration and one that insists more on constructing “our moral feelings” starting with our socialisation.

Indeed, Hutcheson’s (2002) intention to demonstrate the existence of this moral sense determined him to primarily support a descriptive approach of our evaluative practices, in detriment of all normative approaches. In this manner, he neglects a major part of the issues related to the epistemic thesis. Nonetheless, Hume (1978) and Smith (1976) try, from the perspective of the impartial spectator, to go around this difficulty, and to propose a correction criterion able to define the evaluative justification norms. We can add to these two divisive lines, the lack of clarity and the divergencies that sentimentalists had regarding their metaphysical theses. So, it becomes clearer and clearer that there are important content debates and theoretical differences which would be imprudent to dismiss. For example, it would not make much sense to consider Hume and Smith as theoreticians of the moral sense, equal to Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. Biziou (2000, 423) declares that the difference between Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, on one hand, and Hume and Smith, on the other, reflects a deeper contrast between a “philosophy of evidence” for the former, and a “philosophy of imagination” for the latter. This statement is true from an epistemological point of view, but, from a psychological perspective, the role of social interactions in the forming of moral judgements seems to be more on Hume and Smith’s sides, and not on Shaftesbury and Hutcheson’s. To ignore these differences is to neglect a range of possible positions which the sentimentalists offer, while maintaining only a simplified view.

4. Aporia of sentimentalism

Although sentimentalists support a few elementary theses, it is obvious that they are in opposition regarding the exact interpretation of these. The most debated aspect refers to the psychological thesis. In effect, everyone agrees that our desires and emotions are the ones conceives the values of things. And they all admit that reason can influence indirectly this judgement. Still, it is important to observe a major difficulty. Indeed, all sentimentalists tend to highlight the nature of affective concepts, which they use to analyse our relation to values. As such, the concepts of “emotion”, “feeling”, or even “desire” are taken into account as raw psychological data, and sentimentalists try too little to distinguish among them or to analyse their psychological contributions to our knowledge of values. Hume seems to be the one who made the greatest effort in this direction, but his conception of passions as “reflexive impressions” contains ambiguities impossible to dismiss, especially in the relation these have towards reason and representation.

It is clear enough that this lack of clarification of the nature of affective phenomena will make a substantial contribution to the decline of sentimentalism, and, this is definitely a first aporia for sentimentalists. Indeed, they wanted to explain our moral judgements and, in general, our inclination towards morality, starting from our emotions and desires. But affective concepts appear to a large extent as undetermined, in most of their analyses. In this sense, going from a theory of moral sense, Shaftesbury (1999) and Hutcheson (2002), to a theory of moral feelings based on affinities, Hume (1978) and Smith (1976), meant a great deal of effort made to clarify the affective basis of our moral judgements. From this perspective, these are no longer considered by Hume (1978) and Smith (1976) as an unanalysable fact, but on the contrary as a product of our social interactions and our tendency to share emotions with others. Thus, while Shaftesbury (1999) and Hutcheson (2002) consider moral sense an innate disposition, Hume (1978) and Smith (1976) reject, this innéisme. Hume claims, indeed, that there is no “origin disposition” of morality, that would contain the infinite range of our duties. (Hume, 1978). In fact, moral judgements are largely socially conditioned by sharing emotions through affinity and by the judgements we internalise in this manner.

This does not stop us from trying, due to the same tendency of sharing through affinity, to establish a norm independent from our social environment, which becomes real especially in the figure of the impartial bystander. But this would mean that certain emotions are adequate, and,

from this point of view, we believe that Hume and Smith's theories would deserve to be clarified in at least two ways. On one hand, from the standpoint of the nature of emotions, and, on the other, from the one of the normative criterion, which allows the mention of the conditions under which an emotion is adequate to its object, allow thus the justification of our evaluative judgements. Rejecting the possibility that emotions have a representational character, Hutcheson and Hume somehow kept away from minding the adequate character of emotions.

This confusion and this lack of precision of affective concepts would determine Bentham to disqualify both the theory of moral sense and the theory of affinity, reproaching that these do not relate to a moral norm with the help of which it could be determined under what conditions our emotions are adequate (Bentham, 1999).

As such, the psychological thesis has epistemic implications that also need clarification, especially from the standpoint of moral rationalism criticism, which constitutes one of the pillars of sentimentalism. Both Hutcheson (2002) and Hume (1978) admit that reason can have a relation of causality to the emotions that it is assumed we have in certain situations. Here, the theories prior analysed, tend to depend on a separation, which has nowadays mostly disappeared, between emotions and reason, that would consist of claiming that the former are states lacking in any cognitive qualities, while the latter, contrarily, is the only one capable of offering knowledge. Taking under consideration this first distinction, it is very difficult to give a determining epistemic role to emotions, and this difficulty is at the heart of sentimentalism. One of the characteristics of contemporary sentimentalism is based on the rejection more or less clear of this distinction, so as to clarify the concept of "adequate emotion" or "correct emotion".

Furthermore, this opposition between reason and emotions makes difficult the lecture of sentimentalists in order to establish if they are cognitivists or non-cognitivists. As such, Hutcheson (2002), as well as Hume (1978), intends to deny that emotions can constitute a certain form of knowledge. On one hand, for the former these are simple, unanalysable ideas, while for the latter they are impressions lacking in representational qualities. On the other hand, they both seem to admit, just as Smith (1976), that there are many moral truths and that our value judgements can be true or false, so that these latter ones should transmit a form of axiological knowledge, a thing which would be impossible if they were non-cognitivist. From this perspective, sentimentalists wanted to defend the idea that affection is a source of knowledge, without it being knowledge per se. But

without additional clarifications, conceiving these two ideas seems to regularly lead them towards an epistemic aporia.

Finally, from a metaphysical standpoint, sentimentalists claim that values are related to our affective nature. But this approach is accompanied by certain hesitations in Hutcheson (2002), who sometimes admits that values could exist independent of us. Moreover, such a conception about values can be conceived as problematic, in the extent to which it has troubling implications from a moral point of view (Deonna & Teroni, 2008, 93).

Hume does not seem to see an issue here either. It is not only unlikely that we can alter our dispositions in this manner, but morality in itself does not have any other vocation than the one to solve practical problems appearing before us as affective creatures, having passions and desires. And if our passions and desires should change radically, then certainly the rules of morality should change as well. But the different emotional answers of some show a sufficient uniformity, inside human nature, for any certainty to exist that our common dispositions can ever change. In this sense, the dependence of axiological properties in relation to our affective constitution is not necessarily problematic. Nonetheless, a big part of the efforts made by sentimentalists consisted in demonstrating that it is difficult, if not impossible, to keep count of the existence of axiological properties which would be independent from us. As such, sentimentalist metaphysics of values is, considering everything, the most plausible.

Beyond this difficulty of principle, it is clear that sentimentalists clearly hesitate between a theory that is anti-realist, and mostly relativist¹ and one of a more realist inspiration, even if they never admit a strong form of rationalist realism, in which values would be bearers of obligations. But the metaphysic of values is an aspect about which sentimentalists are generally evasive. Hume's (1978) theory is by far the most confusing in this respect. But it is difficult to propose a consensual interpretation of the metaphysics of values in Hume, in the extent to which his texts are quite contradictory about this topic. On one hand it can be easily claimed that values do not truly exist, in his view, in the extent to which these are merely the result of our affective projections. As consequence, no value judgement can be true because there is nothing that can confirm it. On the other hand, it is equally as plausible that Hume supports a form of non-normative realism, in which

¹ According to Iwasa (2013), relativism constitutes an insurmountable problem for sentimentalism, as much as it would not be capable to identify a norm independent from the habits in which we evolve.

there are values that relate to human nature, which is in our interest to know.

The three elementary theses of sentimentalism have thus led their founders towards three different kinds of aporia. A psychological aporia, according to which affective dispositions should decisively contribute to the explanation of capacity to create moral judgements. But the lack of precise determination of these concepts makes sentimental psychological explanations obscure from this perspective. To this first aporia it is then added an epistemic one: while it is assumed that emotions transmit a form of moral knowledge, they are mostly bare of cognitive value for the first sentimentalists. For this reason, they oscillate on a regularly basis between two types of epistemic posts: sometimes they give affective dispositions a decisive role in the development of axiological knowledge, in the detriment of reason; and at other times they try to rehabilitate the role of reason, but, in doing this, they risk to lose the essence of the sentimentalism.

These two first aporia finally find an echo in the metaphysic aporia. According to this, sentimentalists try to prove that values are properties which depend on our affective dispositions, in but doing this, they systematically hesitate between an antirealistic approach, and a more rather relativist one, and a realistic approach. As far as values depend on our affective reactions, and being possible that these reactions get changed, it looks difficult to obtain a definition of an axiological norm that can be safe from our affective changes. Certainly, it would be exaggerated to claim that these problems are real aporia. Hutcheson, Hume and Smith do not seem to have ever imagined for one moment that they are facing problems that cannot be solved.

5. Motivational theory: a possible version of present sentimentalism

So as to attempt to surpass the difficulties generated by the aporia encountered by the first sentimentalists, a sentimentalist theory will be brought to discussion, that will be here called “motivational theory”, based on the result offered by psychology research and on philosophy theses, which are of great interest in the sentimentalist field today. The defense of this theory brings to light multiple debates associated with sentimentalism, but which are not always mentioned explicitly as such. The sentimentalist approach, by means of motivational theory, has as starting point the revision of the aporia met by the fathers of sentimentalism.

As it has been previously shown, the first aporia of sentimentalism referred especially to the nature of affective states and emotions. If the

majority of Scottish sentimentalists agree that emotion plays a decisive role in the capacity to produce value judgment, the nature of emotions still remains obscure in their analyses. So as to overcome these limits, contemporary sentimentalists approached the problem of the relation between emotion and knowledge, which is both a central issue in the determination over the place of emotions in the cognitive architecture of the mind, and a zone of constant conflict between the different theories of emotions, particularly after the controversy which transformed Williams James (1957) and Walter Cannon (1927) into opponents at the beginning of the 20th century. While the first develops a noncognitive conception of emotion according to which emotions are deprived of any reference to our mental cognitive states, the latter supports a cognitive conception according to which emotions are modelled by our cognitive states and belong, deservedly so, to this type of mental state.

A more recent approach takes into consideration the apparent lack of unity between the different phenomena associated with the concept of emotion. This problem is directly linked to the debate between the cognitive and noncognitive conceptions about emotions. As such, some philosophers like Amelie Rorty (1980) or Paul Griffiths (1997), claimed that the reason for this debate is connected to a conceptual confusion. According to these philosophers the multitude of theories about emotions is due to the fact that the concept of emotion is, in reality, a confusing notion inherited from vernacular language. The main issue is that the concept would have more referents, who are incompatible, sometimes making reference to states which we can control, for example, and other times to uncontrollable states; to calm and rational states, or too irrational ones, or ones which would be biologically programmed and that are natural, and at times to states which are socially conditioned.

Rorty (1980) and Griffiths (1997) are thus partisans to the “theory of disunity”, according to which the concept of emotion is a pseudo-concept, lacking in unity. In their vision, this notion might become relevant again, if it is fragmented and it gives birth to other concepts more refined, each of which names a specific referent. This debate has a more significant importance for a sentimentalist theory which tries to clarify the role emotions play in our capacity to form value judgment. If the supporters of the disunity theory are right, then it means that any theory which has as object emotions risks formulating theses which lack epistemic value. This dispute became refreshed once affective neurosciences appeared, sciences which lay accent one on the cerebral structures involved in the creation of emotions.

The second aporia encountered by early sentimentalists, especially Hume (1978) and Hutcheson (2002), is based on the one side on the assumption according to which emotions are at the core of moral and aesthetic evaluations, and on the other side on the idea that emotions do not have any representative qualities or any cognitive significations. The characterization of emotions as cognitive states which consist of the evaluation of the axiological signification of the things present in the environment of an individual, opens new possibilities of approaching this aporia. The question that is asked now is whether emotions can offer the adequate access to values so that evaluative judgment can be justified. The main versions of contemporary sentimentalism bring forth a common problem and that is to mention under which conditions emotions can be sources of axiological knowledge.

This represents, in essence, the main problem of classic moral sentimentalism, and it continues to be the object of most of the contemporary analyses, often under much more complex forms. As Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson (2006, 190) pointed out, sentimentalism can be defined as the theory according to which evaluative concepts cannot be understood or analyzed without referring to the subjective answers of individuals, and especially to their emotions and motivations. To be more precise, the idea is that a concept tied to emotions allows an analysis of a hypothesis linked to value only under the condition that this emotion be considered "correct" or "adequate".

In the present debate concerning the conditions under which it can be said that an emotion is correct, or otherwise the "conditions of correctitude" of an emotion are met, two stances became prominent (Deonna & Teroni, 2009). The first stance is "independence", in the sense that the conditions of correctitude are independent of our motivations, and the subjective perspective about the world; the second one is "motivational" to the extent that it supports, on the contrary, that these conditions are based on subjective motivations. This motivational theory of human inspiration favors the idea that the correctitude of an emotion is dependent on the correctitude of both the motivation from which it derives and the properties of its object. Someone's pity for George is correct only if it can be reported to a correct motivation (for example the fact that the person feels friendship for George or the fact that the person is sensitive to the situation in which unhappy men generally are) and if George has features which allow the perception of being pathetic.

From the perspective of motivational theory, a correct emotion is one that attributes value to an object in a way which is congruent with at

least one of the deep motivations, which needs to be in itself correct, so that it is justified to say that non-evaluative properties of the object of this emotion exemplify a property that can be logically connected to this deep motivation. Sadness that Mary feels when she loses her friend is justified because it can be followed by a feeling which she had towards him and this feeling might in itself be considered correct: this friend was always sympathetic, caring, willing to help, etc.

Motivational theory tries to find balance between independence theories that consist only of epistemic considerations and theories defended by Kauppinen (2014) or Lemaire (2014) who claim that these conditions of correctitude for emotions can only be understood in practical terms. Some philosophers seem to acknowledge such a motivational approach (Roberts, 2003, Prinz, 2004 and 2007), but Helm (2001) is perhaps the only philosopher who defended very explicitly the motivational concept of the correctitude of emotions.

The third aporia of sentimentalism refers to the metaphysical statute of values, and classical sentimentalists seemed to oscillate between a realist approach to values and an anti-realist one. Starting from this aporia, the metaphysical implications of the motivational approach which is here sustained are followed. The motivational view of emotions and their conditions of correctitude involve a form of moderate or skeptical realism of naturalist type. According to this approach, values depend on both the objects in one's environment as well as on motivations. A sentimentalist approach can be on one side projective and on the other side realist in respect to both non-moral and moral values.

It is tempting to believe that motivational theory would allow the analysis of moral and non-moral values in the same manner, starting with one's motivations. Some philosophers like Jesse Prinz (2007) defended this type of analysis. As far as Prinz (2007, 92) is concerned, values in general (especially good and evil) are made from one's feelings of approval and disapproval towards certain actions. Feelings as motivational states, prepare one in order to be disgusted by some actions and to admire of others, to be appalled, embarrassed or even guilty. An action would be therefore good if it is tied to a feeling of approval and bad if it is tied to a feeling of disapproval. Moral emotions, which are connected to these feelings of approval and disapproval, would then be meant to detect these moral properties of good and evil. Daniel's outrage towards the way foreigners in his country are treated would be connected to a feeling of disapproval towards social injustice; and his concern understood as formal object of his outrage would be partially formed from this feeling of disapproval. In accordance with the

motivational thesis, Victor might not feel appalled by the same situation as Daniel. In the extent to which he has a completely different opinion regarding social justice his emotions will regard finding inequalities in different situations.

Taking under advisement Prinz's point of view (2007), motivational theory should be as relativist in the case of moral values as in the case of non-moral values. The problem is that this aspect seems more difficult to admit in the case of moral values. To be more precise, the relativity of moral values seems to be difficult to be considered compatible with their reality. In fact, moral values are designed in general as independent of one's motivations. People are inclined to believe that one of the characteristics of moral values is that they are applied even when it is undesirable, that they impose a certain rigor to a person's actions independent of one's motivation and they can even oppose these latter ones. From this perspective, it seems that moral discourse necessarily contains categorical imperatives, or otherwise non-negotiable rigors, which are imposed regardless of one's own desires. It must be highlighted that this reference to the notion of categorical imperative does not necessarily imply moral kantian law. It must, nevertheless, be admitted that Immanuel Kant (2010) knew how to emphasize an apparently specific feature of moral discourse distinguishing categorical and hypothetical imperatives which are tied to one's motivations, being in this respect conditioned. Nevertheless, it can be admitted that morality is constructed from hypothetical imperatives without being relativist. Thus, it can be imagined, such as Hume (1978) did, that any moral system tends to favor public interest so that there is always a concern to act morally, and people's own interest might perfectly converge toward a unique moral system.

6. Conclusions

Our intention was to show on one side the unity of these different thinkers in their common affiliation to the sentimentalist current, and on the other side, to highlight the internal lines of fracture of this current. In this sense, we intend to offer an accurate image of what Anti Kauppinen (2014) called "paleo sentimentalism", in other words of this first Anglo-Scottish sentimentalism who was born under Shaftesbury's impulse and that vanished very quickly after Smith, due to several reasons.

Sentimentalism is not the moral sense theory and much less a particular moral theory, but a tradition of thinking capable of opening more types of logically distinct and exclusive one towards the other philosophical positions. From this perspective, Biziou (2000, 11) claims that

sentimentalism would rather be a tradition instead of a school of thought. In fact, a tradition is happy with the distribution of questions or problems, while a school of thought distributes theses. As such, while theoretical conflicts cause the death of schools of thought, contrariwise, they supply and maintain traditions. On one side, sentimentalists approach some philosophical and moral problems, but in opposition with the rationalists, and, on the other side they defend a certain number of common elementary theses. Despite those common aspects, sentimentalists do not support a unified theory that stands on a reduced number of incontestable dogmas and in fact the conflicts between them supply and develop their thought.

To conclude, from all these aspects, it can be considered that sentimentalism is a tradition very much alive which contains at present valuable resources so as to try to comprehend one's affective state, as well as one's relationship with values.

References

- Bentham, J. (1999). Introduction aux principes de la morale et de la législation. In C. Audard. *Anthologie historique et critique de l'utilitarisme, tome 1 : Bentham et ses précurseurs* (pp. 201-231). PUF.
- Biziou, M. (2000). *Le Concept de système dans la tradition anglo-écossaise des sentiments moraux, 1699-1795. De la métaphysique à l'économie politique – Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume, Smith*. ANRT-diffusion.
- Cannon, W. (1927). The James-Lange theory of emotions: A critical examination and an alternative theory. *The American Journal of Psychology*, 39, 106–124.
- Clarke, S. (1991). A Discourse concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion. In D.D. Raphael (Ed.). *British Moralists*, Vol. 1. Hackett.
- D'Arms, J. & Jacobson, D. (2006). Sensibility Theory and Projectivism. In D. Copp (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* (pp. 186-218). Oxford University Press.
- Deonna, J., & Teroni, F. (2008). *Qu'est-ce qu'une émotion ?* Vrin.
- Deonna, J. A., & Teroni, F. (2009). Taking affective explanations to heart. *Social Science Information*, 48(3), 359- 377.
- Frankena, W. (1955). Hutcheson's Moral Sense Theory. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 16(3), 356-375.
- Griffiths, P. E. (1997). *What emotions really are : the problem of psychological categories*. University of Chicago Press.
- Haidt, J. (2008). Morality. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3(1), 65-72.
- Helm, B. (2001). *Emotional reason : deliberation, motivation, and the nature of value*. Cambridge University Press.

- Hume, D. (1978). *A Treatise of Human Nature*. P. Nidditch et L. Selby-Bigge (Éds.). Clarendon Press edition.
- Hume, D. (1983). *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Hackett.
- Hume, D. (1957). *The Natural History of Religion*. Adam and Charles Black.
- Hume, D. (2006). *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*. Dover Publications.
- Hutcheson, F. (2002). *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*. K. Haakonssen et A. Garrett (Éds.). Liberty Fund.
- Iwasa, N. (2013). On Three Defenses of Sentimentalism. *Prolegomena*, 12(1), 61–82.
- Jaffro, L. (2009). Emotions et jugement moral chez Shaftesbury, Hutcheson et Hume. In S. Roux (Éd.), *Les émotions* (pp. 135-159). Vrin.
- James, W. (1957). *Principles of Psychology*. Vol. II. Dover
- Kant, I. (2010). *Critica ratiunū practice*. Ed. Univers Enciclopedic Gold.
- Kauppinen, A. (2014). Fittingness and Idealization. *Ethics*, 124(3), 572-588.
- Lemaire, S. (2014). Norms for Emotions : Intrinsic or Extrinsic ?. In Dutant, J., Fassio D. & Meylan A. (Eds.) *Liber Amicorum Pascal Engel* (pp. 828-843). University of Geneva.
- Nichols, S. (2004). *Sentimental rules : on the natural foundations of moral judgment*. Oxford University Press.
- Nichols, S. (2008). Sentimentalism Naturalized. In W. Sinnott-Armstrong (Éd.), *Moral and Diversity* (pp. 255–274). MIT Press.
- Price, R. (1948). *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*, D. D. Raphael (ed.), Oxford University Press.
- Prinz, J. (2004). *Gut reactions. A perceptual theory of emotion*. Oxford University Press.
- Prinz, J. (2007). *The Emotional construction of morals*. Oxford University Press.
- Raphael, D.D. (1991). *British Moralists*, Vol. 1. Hackett.
- Roberts, R.C. (2003). *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rorty, A. (1980). Explaining emotions. In A. Rorty (Ed.), *Explaining emotions* (pp. 103-126). University of California Press.
- Shaftesbury, A. A. C., Third Earl of. (1999). *Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit*. In *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, éd. L. E. Klein. Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, A. (1976). *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. D.D. Raphael et A.L. Macfie (Éds.). Oxford University Press.