

Sentimentalism and Metaphysical Beliefs

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ABSTRACT: This essay first introduces the moral sense theories of Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith, and clarifies important differences between them. It then examines whether moral judgment based on the moral sense or moral sentiments varies according to one's metaphysical beliefs. For this, the essay mainly applies those theories to such issues as stem cell research, abortion, and active euthanasia. In all three theories, false religious beliefs can distort moral judgment. In Hutcheson's theory, answers to stem cell research, abortion, and active euthanasia do not change according to the spectator's metaphysical beliefs. Yet answers to those issues can change according to the agent's metaphysical beliefs. Hume's theory cannot provide answers to stem cell research and abortion where the embryo or fetus is the receiver (the one affected by the agent's action) and to active euthanasia where the patient is unconscious. It may provide answers to abortion where the pregnant woman is the receiver and to active euthanasia where the patient is conscious. Yet the answers can vary depending on the woman's or the patient's metaphysical beliefs. Smith's theory can provide answers to stem cell research, abortion, and active euthanasia. But the answers can vary depending on the agent's metaphysical beliefs. These show that the moral sense or moral sentiments in those theories alone cannot identify appropriate morals.

KEY WORDS: Abortion, active euthanasia, Hume, Hutcheson, moral judgment, moral sense, moral sentiment, religious belief, Smith, stem cell.

1. Introduction

In this essay, I first introduce the moral sense theories of Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith, and clarify important differences between them. I then examine whether moral judgment based on the moral sense or moral sentiments varies according to one's metaphysical beliefs, that is, religious, spiritual, or philosophical beliefs. For this, I mainly apply those theories to such issues as stem cell research, abortion, and active

euthanasia.¹ The findings show that the moral sense or moral sentiments in those theories alone cannot identify appropriate morals.

2. Hutcheson's Moral Theory

In *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections*, Hutcheson defines sense as “every Determination of our Minds to receive Ideas independently on our Will, and to have Perceptions of Pleasure and Pain.” According to this definition, man has “many other Senses beside those commonly explained.” Hutcheson specifies the following senses: First, “the *External Senses*, universally known.” Second, “the *Pleasant Perceptions* arising from *regular, harmonious, uniform* Objects; as also from *Grandeur* and *Novelty*.” Third, “a *Publick Sense*, viz. ‘our Determination to be pleased with the *Happiness* of others, and to be uneasy at their *Misery*.’” Fourth, “the *Moral Sense*, by which ‘we perceive *Virtue*, or *Vice* in our selves, or others.’”² Fifth, “a *Sense of Honour*, ‘which makes the *Approbation*, or *Gratitude* of others, for any good Actions we have done, the necessary occasion of Pleasure; and their *Dislike*, *Condemnation*, or *Resentment* of Injuries done by us, the occasion of that uneasy Sensation called *Shame*, even when we fear no further evil from them.’” “There are perhaps other *Perceptions* distinct from all these Classes, such as some Ideas ‘of *Decency*, *Dignity*, *Suitableness to human Nature* in certain Actions and Circumstances; and of an *Indecency*, *Meanness*, and *Unworthiness*, in the contrary Actions or Circumstances, even without any conception of *Moral Good*, or *Evil*.’”³

Opposing moral rationalism, Hutcheson holds that moral distinctions rest on the moral sense, by which we perceive moral good (virtue) or moral evil (vice) in actions. According to *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, moral good “procures Approbation, and Love toward the Actor, from those who receive no Advantage by the Action.” On the other hand, moral evil “excites Aversion, and Dislike toward the Actor, even from Persons unconcern'd in its natural Tendency.”⁴ Moral approval or disapproval arises spontaneously. In *Illustrations upon the Moral Sense*, Hutcheson says, “*Approbation* is not what we can *voluntarily* bring upon our selves. When we are contemplating Actions, we

¹ In this essay, stem cell research refers to human embryonic stem cell research.

² Hutcheson (2002: 17). Previous to Hutcheson, the third Earl of Shaftesbury used the term ‘moral sense’ in writing. Hutcheson borrows the term from him. See Shaftesbury (2001: II, 27). This essay does not discuss Shaftesbury’s moral sense theory because he does not much talk about the moral sense in his theory.

³ Hutcheson (2002: 18).

⁴ Hutcheson (2008: 85).

do not *chuse* to approve, because *Approbation* is pleasant...*Approbation* is plainly a *Perception* arising without previous *Volition*, or Choice of it, because of any *concomitant Pleasure*.”⁵

Hutcheson distinguishes moral good and evil from natural ones.

How differently are they affected toward those they suppose possess'd of Honesty, Faith, Generosity, Kindness, even when they expect no Benefit from these admir'd Qualities; and those who are possess'd of the natural Goods, such as Houses, Lands, Gardens, Vineyards, Health, Strength, Sagacity? We shall find that we necessarily love and approve the Possessors of the former; but the Possession of the latter procures no Love at all toward the Possessor, but often contrary Affections of Envy and Hatred. In the same manner, whatever Quality we apprehend to be morally Evil, raises our Hatred toward the Person in whom we observe it, such as Treachery, Cruelty, Ingratitude, even when they are no way hurtful to our selves; whereas we heartily love, esteem and pity many who are expos'd to natural Evils, such as Pain, Poverty, Hunger, Sickness, Death, even when we our selves suffer Inconveniencies, by these natural Evils of others.⁶

Hutcheson argues against such philosophers as Thomas Hobbes and Bernard Mandeville who hold that morality is reducible to self-love or self-interest. Hutcheson remarks, “Suppose we reap the same Advantage from two Men, one of whom serves us from Delight in our Happiness, and Love toward us; the other from Views of Self-Interest, or by Constraint: both are in this Case equally beneficial or advantageous to us, and yet we shall have quite different Sentiments of them.”⁷

Hutcheson thinks that we originally have “*benevolent Affections*... toward others, in various Degrees, making us desire their Happiness as an *ultimate End*, without any view to private Happiness.”⁸ He says, “*Desire* of the Happiness of others which we account virtuous, is not *directly* excited by prospects of any *secular Advantage, Wealth, Power, Pleasure of the external Senses, Reward from the Deity, or future Pleasures of Self-Approbation*.”⁹ Hutcheson regards “disinterested Affection” as an “Instinct, antecedent to all Reason from Interest.”¹⁰

Hutcheson regards “the universal Foundation of our Sense of moral Good, or Evil” as “Benevolence toward others on one hand, and Malice, or even Indolence, and Unconcernedness about the apparent publick Evil on the other.”¹¹ In *A System of Moral Philosophy*, he writes,

⁵ Hutcheson (2002: 155).

⁶ Hutcheson (2008: 85–86).

⁷ Hutcheson (2008: 90).

⁸ Hutcheson (2002: 136).

⁹ Hutcheson (2002: 24–25).

¹⁰ Hutcheson (2008: 112).

¹¹ Hutcheson (2008: 120).

The affections which excite this moral approbation are all either directly benevolent, or naturally connected with such dispositions; those which are disapproved and condemned, are either ill-natured, by which one is inclined to occasion misery to others; or such selfish dispositions as argue some unkind affection, or the want of that degree of the benevolent affections which is requisite for the publick good, and commonly expected in our species (SMP I.2.V).¹²

Hutcheson also says, “the most useful Action imaginable, loses all appearance of Benevolence, as soon as we discern that it only flowed from Self-Love or Interest.”¹³ In his view, “[t]he Actions which flow solely from Self-Love, and yet evidence no Want of Benevolence, having no hurtful Effects upon others, seem perfectly indifferent in a moral Sense.”¹⁴ Thus, what is important in morality is not an action itself but a disposition behind the action.

In reality, the moral quality of actions is not always the same. To compare the quality, Hutcheson introduces the following principle:

In comparing the moral Qualitys of Actions, in order to regulate our Election among various Actions propos'd, or to find which of them has the greatest moral Excellency, we are led by our moral Sense of Virtue to judge thus; that in equal Degrees of Happiness, expected to proceed from the Action, the Virtue is in proportion to the Number of Persons to whom the Happiness shall extend; (and here the Dignity, or moral Importance of Persons, may compensate Numbers) and in equal Numbers, the Virtue is as the Quantity of the Happiness, or natural Good; or that the Virtue is in a compound Ratio of the Quantity of Good, and Number of Enjoyers. In the same manner, the moral Evil, or Vice, is as the Degree of Misery, and Number of Sufferers; so that, that Action is best, which procures the greatest Happiness for the greatest Numbers; and that, worst, which, in like manner, occasions Misery.

The phrase “the greatest Happiness for the greatest Numbers” precedes Jeremy Bentham’s similar and famous utilitarian phrase. Hutcheson’s utilitarianism is not just a mechanical calculation of effects. Hutcheson would disapprove of putting minority in grave misery for the benefit of the society as a whole. This is why he says, “the Dignity, or moral Importance of Persons, may compensate Numbers.”¹⁵

Hutcheson holds that “the Author of Nature [God]...has given us a Moral Sense, to direct our Actions, and to give us still nobler Pleasures.”¹⁶ This implies that the moral sense is universal. In fact, Hutcheson remarks,

¹² Hutcheson (1755). The “I.2.V” refers to book 1, chapter 2, section 5.

¹³ Hutcheson (2008: 103).

¹⁴ Hutcheson (2008: 122).

¹⁵ Hutcheson (2008: 125).

¹⁶ Hutcheson (2008: 99).

“’tis highly probable that the *Senses* of all Men are pretty *uniform*: That the Deity also approves *kind Affections*, otherwise he would not have implanted them in us, nor determined us by a *moral Sense* to approve them.”¹⁷

3. Hume’s Moral Theory

According to Hume, passions motivate actions, and “reason alone can never produce any action, or give rise to volition.” Reason is also “incapable of preventing volition, or of disputing the preference with any passion or emotion...Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them” (T 2.3.3.4).¹⁸ In Hume’s view, reason can influence our action only in the following cases: “[e]ither when it excites a passion by informing us of the existence of something which is a proper object of it; or when it discovers the connexion of causes and effects, so as to afford us means of exerting any passion” (T 3.1.1.12).

Hume holds that passions cannot “be oppos’d by, or be contradictory to truth and reason.” The condition for something to be true or false is that it has “representative quality.” Something is true when it accurately represents an object; something is false when it fails to represent an object accurately. According to Hume, “[a] passion is an original existence, or, if you will, modification of existence, and contains not any representative quality, which renders it a copy of any other existence or modification” (T 2.3.3.5). Thus, Hume thinks that passions cannot be true or false. He also writes,

Reason is the discovery of truth or falshood. Truth or falshood consists in an agreement or disagreement either to the *real* relations of ideas, or to *real* existence and matter of fact. Whatever, therefore, is not susceptible of this agreement or disagreement, is incapable of being true or false, and can never be an object of our reason. Now ’tis evident our passions, volitions, and actions, are not susceptible of any such agreement or disagreement; being original facts and realities, compleat in themselves, and implying no reference to other passions, volitions, and actions. ’Tis impossible, therefore, they can be pronounc’d either true or false, and be either contrary or conformable to reason (T 3.1.1.9).

Hume says, “as nothing can be contrary to truth or reason, except what has a reference to it, and as the judgments of our understanding only have this reference, it must follow, that passions can be contrary to reason only

¹⁷ Hutcheson (2002: 176).

¹⁸ Hume (2000). The “2.3.3.4” refers to book 2, part 3, section 3, paragraph 4.

so far as they are *accompany'd* with some judgment or opinion.” According to Hume, passions can be unreasonable only in two senses. “*First*, When a passion, such as hope or fear, grief or joy, despair or security, is founded on the supposition or the existence of objects, which really do not exist. *Secondly*, When in exerting any passion in action, we choose means insufficient for the design'd end, and deceive ourselves in our judgment of causes and effects.” To sum up, “a passion must be accompany'd with some false judgment, in order to its being unreasonable; and even then 'tis not the passion, properly speaking, which is unreasonable, but the judgment” (T 2.3.3.6).

Hume develops his moral theory mainly in book 3 of *A Treatise of Human Nature* and in *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*. He claims that moral distinctions are not derived from reason but from a moral sense. Hume thinks “that moral distinctions depend entirely on certain peculiar sentiments of pain and pleasure, and that whatever mental quality in ourselves or others gives us a satisfaction, by the survey or reflection, is of course virtuous; as every thing of this nature, that gives uneasiness, is vicious” (T 3.3.1.3). According to Hume, such a sentiment arises “only when a character is consider'd in general, without reference to our particular interest” (T 3.1.2.4).

Hume's theory rests on a sequence of events involving an agent, receiver (the one affected by the agent's action), and spectator.¹⁹ The agent's mental quality – either virtuous or vicious one – motivates his action. Suppose that the agent provides food for a starving person. In this case, the agent's virtuous mental quality motivates the action. The action affects the receiver positively. The receiver feels pleasure by the action itself, and by the usefulness of the action such as health improvement. When the spectator sees, hears, or imagines the receiver's pleasure, the spectator also feels pleasure sympathetically. This sympathetic pleasure constitutes the spectator's moral approval of the action or the agent's mental quality which motivated the action. The spectator thus regards it as virtuous. According to Hume, the spectator's sympathetic pleasure arises from four types of the agent's mental qualities. They are (1) mental qualities *useful* to *others*, (2) mental qualities *useful* to the *agent himself*, (3) mental qualities *agreeable* to *others*, and (4) mental qualities *agreeable* to the *agent himself* (T 3.3.1.30; EPM 9.12²⁰).

In the *Treatise*, Hume distinguishes between artificial and natural virtues. Artificial virtues “produce pleasure and approbation by means of an

¹⁹ I use the word ‘receiver’ to explain Hume's and Smith's theories. But they never use the word in this sense.

²⁰ Hume (1998a). The “9.12” refers to section 9, paragraph 12.

artifice or contrivance, which arises from the circumstances and necessities of mankind” (T 3.2.1.1). Examples of artificial virtues are justice, promise-keeping, allegiance, treaty-keeping, and chastity. On the other hand, natural virtues “have no dependance on the artifice and contrivance of men” (T 3.3.1.1). Examples of natural virtues are “[m]eekness, beneficence, charity, generosity, clemency, moderation, equity” (T 3.3.1.11).²¹

Finally, let us see moral disapproval of a vicious mental quality. Suppose that the agent steals property from someone. This time, the agent’s vicious mental quality motivates the action. The action affects the receiver negatively. The receiver feels pain by the action itself, and by the inconvenience the action produced. When the spectator sees, hears, or imagines the receiver’s pain, the spectator also feels pain sympathetically. This sympathetic pain constitutes the spectator’s moral disapproval of the action or the agent’s mental quality which motivated the action. The spectator thus regards it as vicious.

4. Smith’s Moral Theory

As in Hume’s theory, sympathy plays an important role in Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. How does it work in Smith’s theory? He says, “As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation” (TMS I.i.1.2).²²

Smith distinguishes between two types of moral judgments: judgments of propriety and impropriety, and judgments of merit and demerit. The former consider an agent’s motives, while the latter consider a receiver’s gratitude or resentment. “As our sense...of the propriety of conduct arises from...a direct sympathy with the affections and motives of the person who acts, so our sense of its merit arises from...an indirect sympathy with the gratitude of the person who is...acted upon” (TMS II.i.5.1). “In the same manner as our sense of the impropriety of conduct arises from a want of sympathy, or from a direct antipathy to the affections and motives of the agent, so our sense of its demerit arises from...an indirect sympathy with the resentment of the sufferer” (TMS II.i.5.4).

On the conduct of another, we make a moral judgment by putting ourselves in his position. “We either approve or disapprove of the conduct of another man according as we feel that, when we bring his case home to

²¹ The distinction between artificial and natural virtues in the *Treatise* almost disappears from the *Enquiry*. The word ‘artificial’ relevant to virtues appears only once in the *Enquiry* (EPM App. 3.9n).

²² Smith (1982). The “I.i.1.2” refers to part 1, section 1, chapter 1, paragraph 2.

ourselves, we either can or cannot entirely sympathize with the sentiments and motives which directed it” (TMS III.1.2).

On our own conduct, we make a moral judgment in the following way: “We endeavour to examine our own conduct as we imagine any other fair and impartial spectator would examine it. If, upon placing ourselves in his situation, we thoroughly enter into all the passions and motives which influenced it, we approve of it, by sympathy with the approbation of this supposed equitable judge. If otherwise, we enter into his disapprobation, and condemn it” (TMS III.1.2). Smith identifies “the supposed impartial and well-informed spectator” with conscience (TMS III.2.32).

5. Important Differences between the Theories

Although those three theories agree in that moral distinctions are not derived from reason but from feelings, there are important differences between them. First, Hutcheson holds that we perceive moral good (virtue) or moral evil (vice) in actions by the moral sense, which is an extra sense beyond the five senses. Smith rejects the idea of the moral sense. He introduces the idea of moral sentiments, which arise from sympathy with, want of sympathy with, or antipathy to the agent’s motives, sympathy with the receiver’s gratitude or resentment, and so on. Hume uses both the terms ‘moral sense’ and ‘moral sentiment.’ In his theory, they are almost synonymous. They arise from sympathy with the receiver’s feelings toward an action itself and its effects.

Second, there are two objects of focus in sentimentalism: an agent’s motives and the effects of his action. In Hutcheson’s theory, what is important in morality is not an action itself but a disposition behind the action. Thus, the agent’s motives matter. To compare the moral quality of actions, Hutcheson also introduces the utilitarian principle, which considers the effects of actions. Yet the agent’s motives have priority over the effects of his action in moral judgment. According to Hume, moral approval or disapproval arises from the spectator’s sympathizing with the receiver’s feelings toward an action itself and its effects. The action itself, in Hume’s view, embodies the agent’s mental quality. Thus, Hume’s theory considers both the agent’s motives and the effects of his action. Smith holds that moral approval or disapproval arises from our or the impartial spectator’s sympathizing or not sympathizing with the agent’s passions and motives behind his action. As we saw, Smith’s theory features not only judgments of propriety and impropriety, but judgments of merit and demerit. While the former rest on “a *direct* sympathy with,” “a want of sympathy, or...a *direct* antipathy to the affections and motives of the agent,” the latter rest on “an *indirect* sympathy with the gratitude” or resentment of the receiver

(TMS II.i.5.1, 4; italics mine). According to Smith, “we cannot indeed enter thoroughly into the gratitude” or resentment of the receiver, “unless we beforehand approve” or disapprove “the motives of the agent” (TMS II.i.5.2, 5). This is because the agent’s motives may not be approvable while the receiver feels gratitude, or may not be disapprovable while the receiver feels resentment. Considering these, in Smith’s view, the agent’s motives have priority over the effects of his action. In reality, one cannot always clearly distinguish between the agent’s motives and the effects of his action. D. D. Raphael says, “A person’s intention in doing an action goes well beyond the purely physical movement initiated: it has an aim, to bring about some effect or effects of the physical movement.”²³ Achieving some effect can be a motive for an action. While Raphael only talks about physical actions, the same applies to mental actions like praying for others’ happiness. Not every motive for an action has an aim because it is possible to do an action without purpose or without considering its effects.²⁴ But the possible effects of an action at least sometimes shape or influence one’s passions and motives for the action.²⁵

6. Metaphysical Beliefs and Moral Judgment

This section examines whether moral judgment based on the moral sense or moral sentiments varies according to one’s metaphysical beliefs, that is, religious, spiritual, or philosophical beliefs. For this, I mainly apply the three theories to such issues as stem cell research, abortion, and active euthanasia. I choose these issues for the following reasons: First, there has been little effort to apply the theories to those issues. Second, one’s metaphysical beliefs seem decisive for his moral judgments in those issues. There are different kinds of metaphysical beliefs. Some of them are against stem cell research, abortion, or active euthanasia, while others, including atheistic ones, are not. Unless otherwise specified, metaphysical beliefs mentioned in this essay include both kinds.

Hutcheson holds that “the Author of Nature [God]...has given us a Moral Sense, to direct our Actions, and to give us still nobler Pleasures.”²⁶ Hutcheson’s following statements express similar ideas: “[O]ur *Senses or Desires*...are fixed for us by the Author of our Nature, subservient to the Interest of the *System*.”²⁷ “[W]e entirely depend on God;...all the goods

²³ Raphael (2007: 25).

²⁴ This excludes cases where the purpose of an action is the action itself.

²⁵ For other differences between the theories, see, for example, Harman (2000: 181–95).

²⁶ Hutcheson (2008: 99).

²⁷ Hutcheson (2002: 82).

either of mind or body, all our virtues, have been derived from him, and must be preserved or increased by his gracious Providence” (SI I.II.XII).²⁸ “[I]t was God our Creator <and ruler> who implanted this sense of right and wrong in our souls” (SI II.I.III). “For the very kindest purposes, God has indeed planted a very high standard of virtue in our hearts” (SMP I.9.X). “*God* declares by the constitution of nature, by the *moral faculty* he has given us, that he espouses the cause of virtue and of the universal happiness” (SMP I.9.XV). “[O]ur *moral sense*, by the wise constitution of *God*, more approves such affections as are most useful and efficacious for the publick interest” (SMP II.2.II). “*God*...is the author of all our natural powers and dispositions, our reason, our *moral faculty*, and our affections” (SMP II.3.VII). Hutcheson also says, “Virtue it self, or good Dispositions of Mind, are not directly taught, or produc’d by Instruction; they must be originally implanted in our Nature, by its great Author; and afterwards strengthen’d and confirm’d by our own Cultivation.”²⁹ Thus, Hutcheson denies that virtue originates in something other than the divine, such as tradition, society, or culture. Considering those statements, some might think as follows: since the moral sense for Hutcheson already has a divine source, the presence of religious beliefs makes no difference in moral judgment in Hutcheson’s theory.

Yet, on the other hand, Hutcheson holds that we can have ideas of virtue and vice independently of the divine law. He says, “many have high Notions of Honour, Faith, Generosity, Justice, who have scarce any Opinions about the Deity, or any Thoughts of future Rewards; and abhor any thing which is Treacherous, Cruel, or Unjust, without any regard to future Punishments.”³⁰ Thus, Hutcheson is against the idea that God’s rewards and punishments are the ground for our moral sense. I do not judge whether the moral sense in his theory has a divine source.

Most of the above passages by Hutcheson suggest that the Deity brings about positive effects on us. But elsewhere Hutcheson claims that “the false Opinions of the Will or Laws of the Deity” have distorted our moral sense, producing “Follies, Superstitions, Murders, Devastations of Kingdoms, from a Sense of Virtue and Duty.”³¹ This is how religious beliefs make a difference in moral judgment. In Hutcheson’s theory, false religious beliefs distort moral judgment.

Hume and Smith have similar views to Hutcheson’s on this point. Hume holds that “superstition or enthusiasm...must have the most pernicious

²⁸ Hutcheson (2007). The “I.II.XII” refers to book 1, chapter 2, section 12.

²⁹ Hutcheson (2008: 179).

³⁰ Hutcheson (2008: 96). See also Hutcheson (2008: 177, 181–82).

³¹ Hutcheson (2008: 144–45).

cious consequences [on morality], and weaken extremely men's attachment to the natural motives of justice and humanity."³² Smith says, "False notions of religion are almost the only causes which can occasion any very gross perversion of our natural sentiments" (TMS III.6.12). Thus, in all three theories, false religious beliefs can distort moral judgment.

Then some standard is necessary to identify the distortion. This standard must be different from the moral sense and moral sentiments in the three theories because the moral sense or moral sentiments alone cannot recognize the distortion. If the moral sense or moral sentiments alone could recognize it, there would not be the distortion from the beginning. Thus, some external standard is necessary to identify the distortion. It follows that the moral sense or moral sentiments in those theories alone cannot identify appropriate morals even if the undistorted moral sense or undistorted moral sentiments can identify appropriate morals.

Let us think about stem cell research, abortion, and active euthanasia from a spectator's perspective in Hutcheson's theory. As we saw, in Hutcheson's view, what is important for morality is not an action itself but benevolence in the action. Thus, as long as the spectator perceives benevolence in stem cell research, abortion, and active euthanasia, they are moral. The spectator's metaphysical beliefs do not affect his perceiving benevolence in those actions.

In Hutcheson's theory, our benevolence can extend to human embryos being destroyed for their stem cells and to human embryos and fetuses being aborted. Hutcheson thinks it necessary "to extend our views to the *whole Species*, or to all *sensitive Natures*, as far as they can be affected by our Conduct."³³ He also says as follows: "the Perfection of Virtue consists in 'having the *universal calm Benevolence*, the prevalent Affection of the Mind."³⁴ "That disposition... which is most excellent, and naturally gains the highest moral approbation, is the calm, stable, universal good will to all, or the most extensive benevolence" (SMP I.4.X). Hutcheson points out the possibility that our benevolence extends even to "rational Agents, capable of moral Affections, in the most distant Planets."³⁵ Hutcheson upholds "universal Benevolence"³⁶ as opposed to partial benevolence. He remarks, "All Benevolence, even toward a Part, is amiable, when not inconsistent with the Good of the Whole: But this is a smaller Degree of Virtue, unless our Beneficence be restrain'd by want of Power, and not want

³² Hume (1998b: 124).

³³ Hutcheson (2002: 125).

³⁴ Hutcheson (2002: 8).

³⁵ Hutcheson (2008: 114).

³⁶ Hutcheson (2008: 127).

of Love to the Whole.”³⁷ It is possible to interpret the idea of the universal benevolence so that it extends to human embryos being destroyed for their stem cells and to human embryos and fetuses being aborted.

Let us think about stem cell research from the agent’s perspective in Hutcheson’s theory. The agent cannot conduct it with benevolence if he has a metaphysical belief, for example, that an embryo being destroyed for its stem cells is a person and therefore an object of our benevolence. If the agent has no metaphysical beliefs against stem cell research, he may conduct it with benevolence, for example, when he thinks that it will offer cures for many diseases and injuries of others.

Let us think about abortion from the agent’s perspective in Hutcheson’s theory. The agent cannot conduct it with benevolence if he has metaphysical beliefs, for example, that karma is the fundamental cause of any pain and suffering, and that the embryo, fetus, or pregnant woman cannot fundamentally escape pain and suffering by abortion. If the agent has no metaphysical beliefs against abortion, he may conduct it with benevolence, for example, when he thinks that it will remove the future physical, relational, or economic pain and suffering of the embryo, fetus, or pregnant woman.

Hutcheson would not deny that the agent could conduct stem cell research or abortion with benevolence. In fact, Hutcheson holds that “strange Crueltys practis’d toward the Aged, or Children, in certain Countrys” in themselves do not show the lack of benevolence. He says, “if they really be universally allow’d, look’d upon as innocent, and vindicated; it is certainly under some Appearance of Benevolence; such as to secure them from Insults of Enemys, to avoid the Infirmitys of Age, which perhaps appear greater Evils than Death, or to free the vigorous and useful Citizens from the Charge of maintaining them, or the Troubles of Attendance upon them.”³⁸

Let us think about active euthanasia from the agent’s perspective in Hutcheson’s theory. The agent cannot conduct it with benevolence if he has a metaphysical belief, for example, that active euthanasia is against God’s will and brings a serious negative outcome to the patient after his death. If the agent has no metaphysical beliefs against active euthanasia, he may conduct it with benevolence, for example, when the patient seriously requests it.

To sum up, in Hutcheson’s theory, answers to stem cell research, abortion, and active euthanasia do not change according to the spectator’s

³⁷ Hutcheson (2008: 126).

³⁸ Hutcheson (2008: 139–40).

metaphysical beliefs. Yet answers to those issues can change according to the agent's metaphysical beliefs.

Hume's theory does not work in stem cell research and abortion where the embryo or fetus is the receiver. According to Hume, moral approval or disapproval arises from the spectator's sympathizing with the receiver's feelings toward an action itself and its effects. Yet it is difficult to imagine the embryo's or fetus's feelings toward stem cell research or abortion itself and its effects. Thus, Hume's theory does not work.

Hume's theory may provide an answer to abortion where the pregnant woman is the receiver. Yet the answer can vary depending on her metaphysical beliefs. The woman's feelings toward abortion itself and toward its possible effects can be mixed. On one hand, she has a desire to abort the embryo or fetus unless she is forced to do so. On the other hand, depending on her metaphysical beliefs, she may feel guilty about abortion. Suppose the woman has a metaphysical belief, for example, that abortion is against God's will and she incurs punishment or compensation for it in this life, in the afterlife, or in the next life. Then she would feel guilty about abortion. However, if the woman has no metaphysical beliefs against abortion, she would not feel guilty about it. In each case, the spectator may sympathize with the woman's feelings toward abortion itself and its possible effects.

Let us think about active euthanasia from Hume's perspective. If the patient is unconscious, he has no feelings. Thus, Hume's theory does not work. If the patient is conscious and has a metaphysical belief, for example, that active euthanasia is against God's will and brings a serious negative outcome to the patient after his death, he would be averse to active euthanasia. If the patient is conscious and has no metaphysical beliefs against active euthanasia, he may sincerely want active euthanasia to escape his physical or emotional pain. In each case, the spectator may sympathize with the patient's feelings toward active euthanasia itself and its possible effects. Thus, Hume's theory may provide an answer to active euthanasia where the patient is conscious. Yet the answer can vary depending on the patient's metaphysical beliefs.³⁹

Let me note that Hume's theory aims at producing moral judgments common to all people. According to him, for stable moral judgment, "we

³⁹ In the essay "Of Suicide," Hume discusses suicide, which is equivalent to active euthanasia. There Hume regards our traditional attitude of condemning suicide as superstition, and argues that suicide "may be free from every imputation of guilt or blame." Hume (1987: 580). Yet his argument does not affect the conclusion in this paragraph because as long as some have metaphysical beliefs against active euthanasia, it leads to the conclusion.

fix on some *steady* and *general* points of view” (T 3.3.1.15). The spectator must “depart from his private and particular situation, and must choose a point of view, common to him with others” (EPM 9.6). “’Tis only when a character is consider’d in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil” (T 3.1.2.4). In Hume’s view, “constant and universal” pleasures and interests “are alone admitted in speculation as the standard of virtue and morality. They alone produce that particular feeling or sentiment, on which moral distinctions depend” (T 3.3.1.30). Hume thinks that a moral theory is wrong if “it leads to paradoxes, repugnant to the common sentiments of mankind, and to the practice and opinion of all nations and all ages.”⁴⁰ If we adopt those ideas, in abortion and active euthanasia, the spectator sympathizes with the pregnant woman’s or the patient’s feelings only when those feelings are common to all people. In other words, the spectator cannot make a moral judgment on abortion or active euthanasia when there is no common feeling toward it and its possible effects.

To sum up, Hume’s theory cannot provide answers to stem cell research and abortion where the embryo or fetus is the receiver and to active euthanasia where the patient is unconscious. It may provide answers to abortion where the pregnant woman is the receiver and to active euthanasia where the patient is conscious. Yet the answers can vary depending on the woman’s or the patient’s metaphysical beliefs. These show that the moral sense or moral sentiments in Hume’s theory alone cannot identify appropriate morals.

In Smith’s theory, moral judgment can vary depending on the agent’s metaphysical beliefs. According to Smith, moral approval or disapproval arises from our or the impartial spectator’s sympathizing or not sympathizing with the agent’s passions and motives behind his action. This means that, even on a same action, moral judgment can vary depending on the contents of the passions and motives. As we saw, the possible effects of an action at least sometimes shape or influence one’s passions and motives for the action. Thus, to find out the passions and motives, it is necessary to consider all the possible effects of the action from the agent’s viewpoint shaped by his metaphysical beliefs. Also, the agent’s metaphysical beliefs may directly shape his passions and motives for an action without considering the effects of the action. For example, a belief that killing human embryos is morally wrong may directly be a motive for the agent’s opposition to stem cell research without considering the possible effects of the research. Thus, the agent’s passions and motives can vary depending

⁴⁰ Hume (1987: 486).

on his metaphysical beliefs. Therefore, even on a same action, moral judgment can vary depending on the agent's metaphysical beliefs.

Let me show this by concrete examples. First, let us think about stem cell research. Suppose the agent has a metaphysical belief, for example, that stem cell research is against God's will and the agent incurs punishment or compensation for it in this life, in the afterlife, or in the next life. Then we or the impartial spectator would disapprove of the research. However, if the agent has no metaphysical beliefs against stem cell research and thinks that stem cell research holds great medical promise, we or the impartial spectator would approve of the research. Next, let us think about abortion. Suppose the agent has a metaphysical belief, for example, that abortion is against God's will and the agent or the pregnant woman incurs punishment or compensation for it in this life, in the afterlife, or in the next life. Then we or the impartial spectator would disapprove of abortion. However, if the agent has no metaphysical beliefs against abortion, we or the impartial spectator may approve of abortion, for example, when the pregnant woman seriously requests it. Lastly, let us think about active euthanasia. Suppose the agent has a metaphysical belief, for example, that active euthanasia is against God's will and the agent or the patient incurs punishment or compensation for it in this life, in the afterlife, or in the next life. Then we or the impartial spectator would disapprove of active euthanasia. However, if the agent has no metaphysical beliefs against active euthanasia, we or the impartial spectator may approve of active euthanasia, for example, when the patient seriously requests it. As we see in those examples, depending on the agent's metaphysical beliefs, we or the impartial spectator could make even opposite moral judgments.

Smith's theory can provide answers to stem cell research, abortion, and active euthanasia. But the answers can vary depending on the agent's metaphysical beliefs. Thus, the moral sentiments in Smith's theory alone cannot identify appropriate morals.

7. Conclusion

In all three theories, false religious beliefs can distort moral judgment. In Hutcheson's theory, answers to stem cell research, abortion, and active euthanasia do not change according to the spectator's metaphysical beliefs. Yet answers to those issues can change according to the agent's metaphysical beliefs. Hume's theory cannot provide answers to stem cell research and abortion where the embryo or fetus is the receiver and to active euthanasia where the patient is unconscious. It may provide answers to abortion where the pregnant woman is the receiver and to active euthanasia where the patient is conscious. Yet the answers can vary depending

on the woman's or the patient's metaphysical beliefs. Smith's theory can provide answers to stem cell research, abortion, and active euthanasia. But the answers can vary depending on the agent's metaphysical beliefs. These show that the moral sense or moral sentiments in those theories alone cannot identify appropriate morals.⁴¹

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⁴¹ I am grateful to two anonymous reviewers of *Prolegomena* for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this essay.