

## EXPERIENCES OF VALUE<sup>1</sup>

Hume, in the *Treatise of Human Nature* rejects the thesis that morality is the province of reason — that it is the job of reason to reveal the moral truth, and then, via the will, to direct action, moderating and overriding the unruly influence of the passions. Hume announces — famously and shockingly — that

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.<sup>2</sup>

He concedes that “this opinion may appear somewhat extraordinary”, so that “it may not be improper to confirm it by some other considerations.”<sup>3</sup> The considerations which Hume adduces in favor of his thesis are rich and suggestive. Indeed they have suggested to different interpreters various versions of non-cognitivism, expressivism, subjectivism, projectivism and the response-dependence of the moral — in short, a variety of extreme to moderate antirealisms about morality and value.

I am sympathetic to a Humean moral phenomenology and epistemology of value, but I also favor a robust value realism. Here, I want to sketch a compatibility argument — an account of our knowledge of value that sits happily with much of what Hume says, but which also sits happily with a realist account of the metaphysics of value. By a realist theory I mean one that claims, firstly, that, value judgements have genuine propositional content, and that endorsing a value judgement is affirming the truth of the associated proposition. (This is *cognitivism*.<sup>4</sup>) Secondly, that the existential presuppositions of value judgements are satisfied, that there really are value properties and relations. (That is to say, *nihilism*, or an error theory of value

judgements, is rejected.) And thirdly, that value truths do not reduce to any more basic non-evaluative truths. (In particular *idealism* about value in particular, and *naturalism* in general, are false.) I won't argue for these theses here<sup>5</sup> but show rather that they are in fact compatible with many of Hume's central insights about the phenomenology of value, and that in fact Hume's insights can be put to service to help meet the epistemic challenge to value realism.

## 1 Reason and the passions

One powerful strand in Hume's thought is that pure reason alone could not discover truths about morality in particular or about value in general. Absent specific value *data* a pure ratiocinator would not alight on any truths about value— or at least no truths other than those that involve necessary relations between value concepts. (For example, if something is good it is not bad; that if *X* is better than *Y* and *Y* is at least as good as *Z*, then *X* is better than *Z* and so on.) With this line of the argument I am in broad agreement. The rational core of Hume's thesis, however hard it is to articulate it, is that you cannot derive an interesting evaluative judgement (e.g. an "ought") from a purely non-evaluative judgement (an "is), no matter how rich and interesting the latter may be. (The difficulty, of course, lies in characterizing the evaluative and non-evaluative judgements and dealing appropriately with mixed and hybrid judgements.<sup>6</sup>)

Hume argues, further, that the *direct* passions ("the impressions, which arise immediately from good or evil, from pain or pleasure"), like desires and aversions, cannot logically conflict with "truth or reason", because these passions are "original existences" which do not represent the world as being a certain way.

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. When I am angry, I am actually possest with the passion, and in that

emotion have no more a reference to any other object, than when I am thirsty, or sick, or more than five foot high. `Tis impossible, therefore, that this passion can be opposed by, or be contradictory to truth and reason; since this contradiction consists in the disagreement of ideas, consider'd as copies, with those objects, which they represent.<sup>7</sup>

The central premise of this argument (that the passions do not represent anything), as well as one of the conclusions Hume draws from this (that the passions cannot be “contradictory to truth”), I reject. However, the premise is not needed to secure Hume’s main thesis that unaided reason cannot secure interesting truths about value, and the conclusion that the passions cannot be “contradictory to truth” goes beyond what Hume is entitled to.

Hume himself concedes that it is not universally true of the passions that they don’t represent the world as being in a certain state. He recognizes that the indirect passions (those that “proceed from the same principles, but by the conjunction of other qualities”), like envy or pride, do indeed represent the world as being a certain way. If you are envious of your neighbour’s fancy new car then you must represent to yourself that your neighbour has a fancy new car. You cannot rationally combine your envy of your neighbour’s new car with the belief that he does not have a car. Thus your envy is misplaced if he has no car, and irrational if you don’t believe he has a car. So the idea of an indirect passion like envy is something like this: you first notice that your neighbor has a fancy new car, and you yourself would like just such a car, and you are averse to his having that kind of car while you lack such. The conjunction of this particular belief with these particular desires and aversions is what constitutes envy.

If we look at Hume’s examples the argument for the non-representative status of the passions seems even less persuasive:

When I am angry, I am actually possest with the passion, and in that emotion have no more a reference to any other object, than when I am thirsty, or sick, or more than five

foot high.

The state of being *five foot high* is an anomaly Hume's list — it quite obviously does not contain reference to anything else. But two of the others do contain, within themselves, not only a representation of some other state, but a representation of the value of a state.

If I am angry I am angry about *something* and part of the anger is that that thing presents itself to me as *unjust*. If I am thirsty, it *seems* to me that my body needs water, and that it would be good to drink some. My being sick, like my being five foot tall, may have no reference to any state other than being sick, but being sick does contain a reference to a standard of health, and *feeling* sick involves, at least, it's seeming to me that *my body is in a bad way*.

So, passions can be and are representative. Further, they can represent not just non-evaluative states, but evaluations of the states they represent. In this paper I develop the Humean idea that our knowledge of value is based on experience — specifically, on *value experiences* or *appearances of value* — and further, that these basic experiences of value are not just theoretical postulates required by a realist empiricist theory of value, but are states with which we are all intimately familiar: they are, in fact, Hume's direct passions, desire and aversion. Desires and aversions represent to us the values of the states that are their objects.

This idea is quite compatible with numerous Humean themes: that beliefs alone are incapable of motivating; that reason alone is not sufficient to reveal to us substantive value truths; that evaluative judgements are, in some sense, necessarily connected with motivation. All of this, however is also compatible with a realist account of value and of our epistemic access to the world of value.

## **2 The puzzling asymmetry**

One powerful argument that Hume levels against rationalism — an idea that has now enjoyed a

long a fruitful history — appeals to the idea that mere beliefs alone cannot motivate. Since evaluations, such as moral judgements, do motivate, evaluation cannot be a matter of mere belief, and hence cannot be a matter of pure reason.

“[T]is impossible that the distinction between moral good and evil can be made by reason; since the distinction has an influence upon our actions, of which reason alone is incapable.”<sup>8</sup>

I want to illustrate the apparent motivational force of value judgements by means of a puzzling asymmetry between first person and third person attributions of such. Consider the fact that millions of people suffer from debilitating conditions — like severe malnutrition — that would take only a few dollars to remedy. You know that. And as you cast your eye over my assets you might notice that I have a surplus which I am not sending to charities. In that case it wouldn't sound odd for you to endorse the following pair of judgements:

The best thing he could do with his surplus income would be to donate it to charity. But he has absolutely no desire to do that.

But I have to admit it sounds a bit odd for me to say:

The best thing I could do with my surplus income would be to donate it to charity. But I have absolutely no desire to do that.

Now a cognitivist about evaluation holds that value judgments have propositional content. And it is natural for the cognitivist to go on to hold that value judgments share standard features with

other judgments: that a typical affirmation or endorsement of a value judgment, for example, is just like the typical affirmation of any other judgement. Typically, to sincerely affirm a judgment with propositional content is to express one's belief in that proposition. Thus, typically, to sincerely affirm a value judgment is to express one's belief in a proposition about value. So, if cognitivism is right there is a perfectly good proposition which serves as the *common* propositional content of both your value judgement and mine, and both our affirmations are simply affirmations of the truth of that proposition. So why should *my* affirmation of that proposition sound odd, whereas *your* affirmation of the very same proposition sound not at all odd?

Call this the puzzling asymmetry

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### **3 Internalism**

Suppose that to endorse a value judgment necessarily involves being moved to behave or respond appropriately in the light of it — at least to some extent — and being moved to behave involves having appropriate desires. To summarize:

#### *Judgment Internalism*

Necessarily, one who endorses a value judgement possesses the corresponding desire to act or respond appropriately.

Hume, in the passage quoted in the previous section, along with many others, might plausibly be construed as a judgement internalist. Given judgement internalism, the oddness of *my* affirmation of the pair of judgements is immediately laid bare. That I endorse the value judgement necessitates my possessing an appropriate corresponding desire — a desire to donate my surplus income to charity. So by expressing my endorsement I thereby commit myself to the

existence of that desire. But straight away I go on to deny the existence of any such desire. So the oddness of my utterance consists in a kind of contradiction—between what I imply by affirming the value judgment (*viz.* that I have a certain desire) and what I imply by affirming the non-value judgment (*viz.* that I lack that very desire). However, *your* utterance does not commit you to any kind of contradiction. By endorsing the very same value judgement you affirm *your* desire that *I* donate my surplus income to charity. Your affirmation of that is quite compatible with your subsequent denial that *I* lack the right desires. Internalism thus provides an apparently neat explanation of the puzzling asymmetry.

Internalism flows rather naturally out of a non-cognitivist analysis of value judgements. It's a platitude that one can express attitudes other than belief by uttering a declarative sentence. If I say to someone —Cheney, say — “I hate you!” then I don't merely express my *belief* in the proposition that I hate Cheney (as someone else might do by saying “He hates Cheney.”). Rather what I express is my *hatred* for Cheney. So an apparently declarative affirmation can be used to express an attitude like hatred. When I exclaim “Pistachio ice-cream is the best!” maybe what I am expressing is not a belief about value at all, but rather a desire, a desire for pistachio ice-cream. Suppose that, quite generally, endorsing a value judgement, *that P is good*, is just a way of expressing *the desire that P*. Then internalism flows naturally out of that brand of non-cognitivism and the non-cognitivist can thus happily appropriate the internalist explanation of the puzzling asymmetry. Internalism and non-cognitivism dovetail nicely.

#### **4 Independence**

The cognitivist is also free to explain the puzzling asymmetry by embracing internalism. But internalism does not flow freely from cognitivism as it does from its rival. It is an extra commitment, and it may be an embarrassing commitment at that. True propositions about value would be queer. They would be queer, according to this line of reasoning, because grasping or

believing them would violate the Humean doctrine that beliefs alone cannot motivate us. The basic idea is that there are two broad classes of mental states, beliefs and desires, and these are logically independent states:

### **Independence**

For any belief, the possession of that belief is logically compatible with the possession of any given set of desire.

Belief and desire suffer from the standard state-content ambiguity which afflicts all our talk about the mental. By *belief* one might mean the propositional *content* of a belief — the proposition believed. (As in: *it was our belief that McCain would win the election easily.*) Alternatively, one might mean the mental *state* of believing that propositional content. (As in: *it was your belief that McCain would win the election easily that made you neglect your civic duty to vote.*) Similarly, by *desire* one might mean the content of a desire - *what* is desired - or else one might mean the mental state of *desiring* that thing. In the content-sense, beliefs are obviously logically dependent on other beliefs, because beliefs (in this sense) just are propositions, which, of course, stand in various relations of logical dependence. But in the state-sense, beliefs are just as obviously logically independent of each other: the having of one belief does not, by itself, entail the having of any other belief, even if the contents of those two beliefs are logically related. Now, given that belief-states are logically independent of one another, how unlikely that any given belief-state should entail a desire-state. In the state-sense, then, beliefs and desires are obviously logically independent. Being in some belief state does not entail that one is any particular desire state.

## **5 The queerness argument**

Here is a recent spelling-out of the queerness argument, offered by Michael Smith, and it is apposite here because it is clearly informed by neo-Humeanism.

[T]he idea of a [value] judgement thus looks like it may well be incoherent, for what is required to make sense of such a judgement is a queer sort of fact about the universe: a fact whose recognition necessarily impacts upon our desires. But the standard picture tells us that there are no such facts.<sup>9</sup>

So in a nutshell the argument is this: Internalism tells us that the endorsement of a particular value judgement is necessarily accompanied by the appropriate desire; Cognitivism tells us that the endorsement or affirmation of a value judgement just is the expression of a belief; and Independence tells us that the mere having of a belief does not entail the having of any desires at all. So the triad consisting of internalism, cognitivism and independence threatens a contradiction — something has to go. Consequently, if the realist wants to embrace internalism she will have to reject the independence of belief and desire — and that’s queer, or at least, deeply un-Humean.

## **6 Independence examined**

The cognitivist might begin with an examination of the independence thesis. Is there anything decisive to be said either in favor of it or against it?

Smith cites two arguments in favor of the thesis. First, there is notorious “direction-of-fit” argument. Beliefs purport to represent the world as it is, and a belief is faulty to the extent that its content fails to represent the world accurately. Briefly, beliefs are required to fit the world, and they can be justly criticized if they fail to fit the world — if they are false. Desires,

on the other hand, do not purport to represent the world, and are not usually said to be true or false. The content of a desire may be true or false, just as the content of a belief is either true or false. But it is clear that a desire cannot be criticized *merely* by pointing out that the content of the desire is not the case. In that sense, the content of a desire does not have to fit the world, or fit the world now, for it to be a perfectly defensible desire. Rather, the world is in some sense “defective” for not matching the content of one’s desires. Beliefs have to fit the world, but the world has to fit desires. There are thus two classes of mental states, characterized by different “directions of fit” and (perhaps because they are orthogonal dimensions) beliefs and desires are independent.<sup>10</sup>

The direction-of-fit metaphor may be unnecessary here. Smith spells out the essential contrast between beliefs and desires directly in terms of rational criticizability.

Since our beliefs purport to represent the world they are subject to rational criticism: specifically they are assessable in terms of truth and falsehood according to whether or not they succeed in representing the world to be the way it really is. Desires are unlike beliefs in that they do not even purport to represent the world as it is. They are therefore not assessable in terms of truth and falsehood. Indeed, according to the standard picture they are at bottom not subject to any rational criticism at all.<sup>11</sup>

Or, as Hume puts it:

‘Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger. `Tis not contrary to reason for me to chuse my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an Indian or person wholly

unknown to me.<sup>12</sup>

However, the claim that desires are not subject to any rational criticism is rather implausible, at least without hefty qualifications, and in fact Hume concedes most of these (at least with respect to the indirect passions). Firstly, a combination of desires may be logically inconsistent in the sense that they cannot all be jointly realized. (I want to be the richest man in the world, but I don't want everyone to be poorer than me.) Such combinations of desires are clearly rationally criticizable. Secondly, even if not *logically* incompatible, desires may not be jointly realizable given my beliefs. (I want to go to the concert and I also want to go to the lecture, but I believe they are being held at the same time.) Admittedly it is the total package of belief and desire that is here irrational and criticizable. But if the belief component is rationally impeccable, it is desires that must suffer reason's censure. Thirdly, desires may also be based on irrational belief. (I desire to leap out of a tenth floor window because I have a more basic desire to arrive safely on the ground-floor, and a belief that jumping out of tenth-floor windows is an efficient way of achieving my basic desire. The derived desire is rationally criticizable because the belief that mediates between the basic and the derived desire is crazy.) Smith (like Hume) acknowledges this: "desires are subject to rational criticism, but only insofar as they are based on beliefs that are subject to rational criticism."<sup>13</sup> And there are other objections to the claim that desires are not rationally criticizable.<sup>14</sup>

Here's a more promising argument for independence. Belief and desire suffer from the standard state-content ambiguity that afflicts all our talk of the mental. By *belief* one might mean the propositional *content* of a belief — the proposition believed. As in: *it was our belief that Bush would easily win the election*. The thing that characterizes both beliefs is one and the same propositional content. Alternatively, one might mean the mental *state* of believing that propositional content. As in: *Your belief that McCain would easily win the election made you*

*happy, but my belief that McCain would easily win the election made me depressed.* What has differential effects here is not the common propositional content of the belief — how could it? — but rather the numerically distinct belief states. Similarly, by *desire* one might mean the content of a desire — *what* is desired — or else one might mean the mental state of *desiring* that thing.

In the content-sense, beliefs are clearly logically dependent on other beliefs, because beliefs (in this sense) just *are* propositions that stand in relations of logical dependence. But in the state-sense, beliefs seem just as obviously to be logically independent of each other: the having of one belief does not, by itself, necessitate the having of any other belief, even when the content of the first belief necessitates the content of the second. (People can be illogical.) Now, if belief-states are logically independent of one another, how unlikely that any given belief-state should entail a desire-state. In the state-sense, then, beliefs and desires are obviously logically independent. Being in some belief state does not entail that one is any particular desire state.

This argument is, perhaps surprisingly, fallacious. There are, in fact, purely logical reasons why belief states cannot be totally logically independent of one another as demanded, and for the same reason belief states are not totally logically independent of desire states. The reason is that there are vastly more propositions than there are possible situations, and as such there too many propositional objects of belief and desire for there to be enough room in logical space to combine any old belief with any old desire set. There are just not enough possibilities to underwrite the logical possibility of all the different combinations of belief and desire required for the independence thesis to be true.<sup>15</sup>

This rather abstract refutation of independence is based on the Cantorian fact that a power-set is always of greater cardinality than the set itself. If propositions are classes of possible worlds then the set of propositions has a higher cardinality than the set of possible worlds. So there are more propositions than there are possible worlds, and hence more belief-desire pairs than there are possible worlds. If propositions are more fine-grained than sets of

possible worlds, then there are even more propositions, Concrete proposition-pairs that it is not logically possible to embrace as belief and desire can be directly constructed (see appendix 2 of Oddie [2005].).

Here is a direct and down-to-earth example against independence involving particular beliefs and desires. Suppose that to be in pain is to experience a very unpleasant sensation, and suppose the unpleasantness of a sensation consists (at least in part) in the strong desire to be rid of the sensation. So, to be in pain is *ipso facto* to desire that the painful sensation cease. Suppose further that one cannot be mistaken in one's pain-beliefs — that is to say, of necessity, if one believes one is in pain then one is in pain. It follows that a certain kind of belief (the belief that I am experiencing pain) necessitates a desire (the desire for the painful sensation I am experiencing to stop). So a typical pain-belief necessitates a desire — the desire for a certain sensation to cease.

The weakness in this refutation is, of course, the claim that pain beliefs are infallible. While it would certainly be an odd kind of cognitive defect to believe one is in pain without being in pain, it is not an unimaginable defect. People can certainly have false beliefs which are just as odd. Still, the Cantorian argument outlined above, as well as the argument in the appendix, are each sufficient to show that this quite general independence thesis fails.

## 7 **Desire-judgment gaps**

Still, even when one grants these or other limitations on the general independence thesis, a friend of the queerness argument could always retreat to a more local and plausible principle, one which would do the job. Isn't it just downright *implausible* that having the particular belief that P is good *necessitates* having the desire for P? Are we not familiar with lots of cases in which that claim is obviously false? Isn't denying judgment internalism a much more plausible response for the cognitivist?

Does judging something to be valuable entail that one is motivated to pursue it? Clearly judging that something is good does not always go hand in hand one with an *overriding* motivation to pursue that good. Something judged to be good may be just one such amongst many competing goods, and so may be traded off against other goods. Pursuing something judged to be good, even judged to be the best, may be rather risky, and unlikely to succeed. Pursuing what you judge to be best may run a high risk of landing you with something you judge not very good at all. (The best can be the enemy of the good.) Further, pursuing what is judged to be the best may conflict drastically with what you take to be in your own interests, which channel your desires in quite a different direction. Finally, one may suffer from *akrasia* — judging something to be the best, all things considered, but imply lacking the desire to pursue it. So, I am not so exceptional after all. I have plenty of company amongst the lazy, the self-interested, the risk-averse and the akratic. But the phenomenon is more widespread than this gallery of rogues might suggest. Quite generally, we do not think it particularly exceptional to find gaps, often small but sometimes very large, between our value judgements and our desires.

Cognitivism is well-equipped to give an account of these gaps — of the various ways in which one's value judgements can come apart from one's desires — by trading on the evident logical gap between belief-states and desire-states. By contrast, at least the simple versions of non-cognitivism, like expressivism, seem rather badly placed to save the phenomena. If endorsing a value judgement is *simply* the expression of a desire, rather than of a genuine belief, then it is a mystery how one can endorse such a judgement and fail to have the appropriate desire. In such cases the expressivist will have to deny that the judgement is sincere. If one lacks the desire and yet makes a show of the judgment, it must be an attempt to fool some audience into believing that one has certain desires that one in fact lacks, perhaps an audience consisting of oneself. But as a general rule, that seems far-fetched. The phenomenon at issue here, the gaps between one's desires and one's judgements of value, are rather familiar to all of

us.

Gaps come in different sizes. A gap may be small or it may be large. In the case of desire and value judgement, the gap will be large if the value attributed is large while the corresponding desire is small. The larger the gap, the more out of kilter one's desires are with one's value judgements. Suppose we grant the possibility of a gap here, and that it can vary in size. By continuity, there seems nothing to block the logical possibility that one have a maximal degree of belief that something is good and yet have the absolutely minimal corresponding desire. If this is right then the cognitivist should eschew any version of internalism which entails that a maximal belief-desire gap is not even possible.

Cognitivism is well-equipped to account for these gaps — of the various ways in which one's value judgements can come apart from one's desires — even without a generalized thesis of independence of belief and desire. By contrast, simple versions of non-cognitivism, like expressivism, seem badly placed to save the phenomena. If a value judgement is *simply* the expression of a desire, rather than of a genuine belief, then it is a mystery how one can sincerely make such a judgement and fail to have the appropriate desire. In such cases the expressivist will have to deny that the judgement is sincere, or heartfelt, or something like that. If one makes a show of endorsing the judgement, it may be an attempt to deceive some audience into believing that one has desires that one in fact lacks, perhaps an audience consisting of oneself. But as a general rule, that seems far-fetched. The phenomena at issue here, the gaps between one's desires and one's judgements of value, are just too familiar to all of us.

The upshot is that a strong Humean thesis of belief-desire independence seems to sit more happily with cognitivism about evaluative judgements and a rejection of judgement internalism than it does with non-cognitivism.

## **8 The merit connection**

If a cognitivist eschews judgement internalism, what can he then say about the puzzling asymmetry? What is the connection between value and desire that explains why it is odd for me to affirm the following judgement even when the propositions expressed are true?

*P is really very good, but I don't desire P at all.*

Here's a possibility. Many value theorists with a realist bent have suggested variants of a thesis about the relation between value and desire that I will dub the *merit connection*. Briefly, the thesis is that the good is what *merits* desire, or some other closely related motivating state. Given that something is good it is appropriate, or fitting, to desire it. Variations on this theme can be stated using closely related attitudes like approval and love. This thesis, broadly construed, can be found in Aristotle, Franz Brentano, Alexius Meinong, Max Scheler, C.D. Broad, and Roderick Chisholm, and more recently Kevin Mulligan.<sup>16</sup> C.D Broad stated the merit connection in this way:

I'm not sure that 'X is good' could not be defined as meaning that X is such that it would be a fitting object of desire to any mind which had an adequate idea of its non-ethical characteristics.<sup>17</sup>

The right-hand side might be necessary and sufficient for the left, and if so we can treat the right hand side as a definition of *good*. But even if we do treat it as a definition, it is clearly not a definition of *good* in non-evaluative terms. The term *fitting* — like the terms *merit*, *worthy of* and *appropriate* — is clearly evaluative. And as evaluative terms go, *fitting* seems a lot less basic than *good*. It would be much more natural to define what it takes for a desire to be fitting, or appropriate, in terms of the apparently more fundamental notion of goodness. But we can put

to one side the issue of definition and reduction, and simply note that the thesis posits a necessary connection between value and desire. We can state the thesis in a way that allows for degrees of goodness:

*The merit connection*

P is good just to the degree that P merits being desired (or: just to the degree that it is appropriate for P to be desired) by anyone with an adequate idea of P's non-value characteristics.

Given the merit connection, and given that it is a matter of necessity, the following also holds of necessity:

P is very good if and only if P is worthy of being strongly desired by anyone with an adequate idea of its non-value characteristics.

But then someone who utters

*P is very good, but I don't desire P at all*

is obliged to accept:

*P is worthy of being strongly desired by anyone with an adequate idea of its non-value characteristics, but I don't desire P at all.*

There is a tension here, but is the tension more obvious here than in the original? Perhaps it's a

*little* more obvious. Both clauses now make explicit claims about desire, but note that the first clause isn't a claim that the second clause repudiates. The first clause is about the *value* of a certain desire, and the second clause about the *non-existence* of that desire. The tension between acknowledging the value of desiring P while also acknowledging the actual lack of desire for P is rather *like* the tension between acknowledging the value of P while also acknowledging my actual lack of desire for P. In both cases, I acknowledge that I am not responding appropriately to value, but the *oddness* of that acknowledgement has not really been explained.

## 9 The value experience thesis

There is another thesis about the connection between value and desire which explains the asymmetry somewhat more naturally. Here I state the thesis with a brief defense, and show how it explains the asymmetry.

Hume is clearly right that we experience a rich array of values. We experience the world as replete with goods and evils: pleasure and pain, joy and misery, kindness and callousness, graciousness and greed, the beauty of Britten's *Billy Budd* and the banality of Britney's *Blackout*. The value of some of these — like intense bodily pleasures, or the unexpected kindness of a stranger — forces itself upon us. Their value lies on or near the very surface of appearance. The value of others — like the beauty of *Billy Budd* or of forgiving one's enemies — may be not so easily discerned. They may lie some distance from the surface, to be discovered only through repeated exposure and the refining of specific sensibilities. These experiences are surely connected with reasonable beliefs about value, just as our experiences of material objects are connected with reasonable beliefs about those.

Consider the normal relation between experience and belief. When I have a visual experience of a bright red rose, say, the rose presents itself to me as bright red. It *seems* or *appears* bright red to me in that sense of *seems* which is tied to perceptual presentation rather

than to belief. Normally, of course, the visual experience of a bright red rose — that is to say, the rose's appearing bright red to me — gives me a reason to believe that the rose really is bright red. But it is a defeasible reason in the sense that any number of conditions might crop up which indicate that, despite its appearance, the rose is not really red after all. Conditions may not be ideal for seeing, or my visual apparatus might be in an impaired condition, or I might be on drugs, whatever. If I discover any of these defeaters I might well believe that the rose is not bright red after all, or not nearly as red as it seems, despite the appearances and despite the fact that the rose persists in appearing bright red to me. If the rose can seem to me (is experienced by me as) bright red, even though I believe it not to be bright red, then there must be seemings which do not entail believing. I can also have the belief, of course, without the seeming. P's seeming to me to be the case (in this sense) and my believing P to be the case are thus logically independent. That is what I mean by the non-doxastic sense of *seems*.

Grant, then, that we do have *experiences* of value — value appearances, or value-seemings. If there are genuine experiences of value they could stand to values as ordinary perceptual experiences stand to the objects of perceptual experience. An experience of the goodness of P, say, would be the state of *P's seeming (appearing, presenting itself as) good* where this seeming is an experiential, non-doxastic take on the value of P. Given an appearance of the goodness of P then, by analogy with the perceptual case, it would give me a reason to believe that P is good. But, again by analogy, it would be a defeasible reason, in the sense that the totality of information available to me might indicate that P is not good, despite its seeming to me to be good. Either conditions may not be favorable for my experiencing P's value, or my ability to experience value might be impaired in some way. If I uncover any such defeaters, I might well come to the conclusion that P is not good after all, or not nearly as good as it seems — despite both the initial appearances, and despite the fact that P may persist in seeming good to me.

What exactly are these appearances of the good? We could of course leave things here, and be a bit mystified about the nature of these appearances. Alternatively we could rummage around in the collection of familiar mental states, and see whether any of them fit the characterization. There may be more than one — for example, approvals, emotions, feelings, or maybe combinations of these with other states — but consider desires. When I desire that P, P has a certain magnetic appeal for me. It presents itself to me as something needing to be pursued, or promoted, or embraced. Now the good *is* that which needs to be pursued, or promoted, or embraced. So my desire that P involves P's *seeming* good (seeming to be worth pursuing, promoting, embracing). So the desire that P looks as though it just is the experience of P as good.

The desire that P is clearly not the *belief* that P is good (just as the experience of the rose as red is not the belief that the rose is red). Nor does my desiring P — my experiencing P as good — entail that I have the belief that P is good, just as my experiencing the rose as bright red does not entail that I believe it to be bright red. The belief that the rose is bright red is something which one could have without experiencing the rose as bright red, and something which one might not have even if one were having the experience of the rose as bright red. Similarly, the belief that P is good is something which one could have without experiencing P as good, and something which one might not have even if one were experiencing P as good.

Let's gather these two theses (that there are experiences of value, which can serve as reasons for evaluative beliefs, and that desires are such experiences of value) into the following conjecture:

*The value experience thesis*

The desire that P is P's seeming or appearing good to me (P's being *experienced* as good by me).

If the value experience thesis is right, experiences of value are not exotic states which some otherwise mysterious faculty of “value intuition” delivers. They are mundane states with which we are totally familiar — desires and aversions, Hume’s direct passions.

I have said desires are experiences of value. It does not follow that experiences of value are all and one desires. Are they? I want to leave that open here. Maybe all experiences of value are either desires or contain a desiderative component. Alternatively, however, desire may be just one way of experiencing value, as visual experiences are just one way of experiencing shapes. (One might have a tactile experience of a shape or even an auditory one — witness the bats and the dolphins.) It is quite possible that *value-experience* is a determinate of which *desire* is a determinate. I myself think that desires stand to the goodness of *states of affairs* as visual experiences stand to colors. Visual experiences are the standard and paradigmatic way of experiencing colors of objects (although one might dream up other ways of doing so). Likewise, desires are the way we paradigmatically experience the value of states of affairs. The value of other categories of object (persons, or works of art for example) might demand a different determinate realization of value-experience. It may be that the way one experiences the value of a person is through *loving*; or of a work of art, through *appreciating*. Here I will leave this possibility open, as well as the possibility that these also reduce to congeries of desires.

The value experience thesis is developed and defended in depth in *Value, Reality and Desire*.<sup>18</sup> My main purpose here, though, is to put the conjecture to work to explain the puzzling asymmetry. The point is really quite a simple one. While the belief that P is good does not necessitate the desire that P, there is clearly a connection between the belief and the desire, one which typically makes it a bit odd to espouse the one without having the other. The oddness can be explicated as an instance of what I will call the shadow of Moore’s paradox.

## 10 Moore's paradox and its shadow

We start with the well-known paradox, discovered by G.E. Moore, which bears a superficial similarity to the asymmetry problem. Consider the following schema:

*Q is true, but he doesn't believe that Q.*

There are many instances of this schema that someone could truly utter while pointing at me (*viz.* most of the true propositions can be substituted for Q). Further it is entirely unproblematic for you to point at me and affirm of some particular proposition that it is true, but that he doesn't believe it. However, it is highly problematic for me to affirm:

*Q is true, but I don't believe that Q,*

even while I can happily concede that almost all true propositions are such that I don't believe them.

A pretty good explanation for this asymmetry involves the notion of conversational implicature. When I assert Q, I not only affirm Q itself, but I thereby express the proposition that *I believe Q*. Although in affirming Q I do not explicitly *say* that I believe Q, I do thereby express the fact that I believe Q. It is not an implication of *what* I affirm that I believe Q, but it is an implication of my *affirming* Q. By affirming Q I *conversationally* imply that I believe that Q because the proposition that X affirms Q sincerely does entail that X believes Q. So in my original affirmation what I say implies that I don't believe Q and conversationally implies that I do believe Q. That's why it is odd.

Let's now turn to a related phenomenon, which as far as I know has not been discussed. It the shadow of Moore's paradox. You can assert, unproblematically, the following of me:

*Q is true although Q doesn't seem true to him.*

However it does sound a bit odd for me to say:

*Q is true although Q doesn't seem true to me.*

Now this utterance isn't as obviously paradoxical as the Moorean assertion. But in typical circumstances there is something a little bit odd about it.

This oddness can also be explained by the notion of conversational implicature. When I assert, under typical conditions, that Q is true, there is a conversational implicature that I believe that Q is true (Moore's insight), but there also seems to be some sort of *presumption* that I have evidence for Q (typically I do not assert things for which I have no evidence) and one standard source of such evidence is Q's seeming true to me. Of course, even if Q seems to me to be true, this is still only a defeasible reason for believing Q to be true. I can see a rose as bright red even though it is not (I might be looking at a white rose through red-tinted glasses). And I might not see it as bright red even though it is (I might have blue-tinted glasses on). In the latter case I might well affirm an instance of the odd-sounding schema above. However, for the most part, I base my beliefs about the visual properties of things on the way they present themselves to me in experience, and so, absent odd conditions, an assertion like "the rose is bright red but doesn't seem at all bright red to me" is a little bit jarring. The asymmetry between the first and third person assertions in this case is not nearly as pronounced as it is in Moore's paradox. We might call it the shadow of Moore's paradox.

Substitute *P is good* for *Q* in the schema, and abbreviate *P is good is true* to *P is good*:

*P is good but P doesn't seem good to him.*

That's a claim you might assert unproblematically of me. But it sounds a bit odd for me to say:

*P is good, but P doesn't seem good to me.*

When I assert that P is good, there is the standard conversational implicature that I believe P is good. But if P doesn't *seem* good to me then I don't have a, perhaps the, standard reason for believing that it is good. So much simply lies in Moore's shadow.

Now let's add the value experience thesis to this. My desire that P just is P's seeming good to me. So the above is equivalent to:

*P is good but I don't desire that P.*

Whatever oddness attaches to this can be explained in terms of the oddness of the proposition above which (according to the value experience thesis) is necessarily equivalent to it, namely: *P is good, but it doesn't seem good to me*. The utterance is an acknowledgement that my experience of goodness (how good things seem to me) and my evaluative beliefs (how good I believe things to be) have come apart. That's not impossible, of course. Indeed, it is not so very unusual. But acknowledging a belief that something is the case, while also acknowledging things don't seem that way to me, does require a bit of explaining. The table summarizes the explanation of the puzzling asymmetry.

	<b>Not odd</b>	<b>Odd</b>
<i>Moore's paradox</i>	Q, but he doesn't believe Q	Q, but I don't believe Q.

<i>Moore's shadow</i>	Q, but it doesn't seem that Q to him	Q, but it doesn't seem that Q to me.
<i>Substitute</i> P is good <i>for</i> Q	P is good, but P doesn't seem good to him	P is good, but P doesn't seem good to me.
<i>Substitute</i> X desires that P <i>for</i> P seems good to X.	P is good, but he doesn't desire P.	P is good, but I don't desire P.

The value experience thesis thus has at least one attractive consequence — it enables the cognitivist to explain the puzzling asymmetry without violating independence. If desires are experiences of the value of states of affairs, then it follows immediately, even on the standard Humean account, that *experiences* of value are intrinsically motivating. The experience of P as good would necessarily motivate one to promote, pursue or embrace P, because it would simply *be* the desire that P, and desires are intrinsically motivating. It is not the evaluative belief that P is good that is intrinsically motivating, and so the independence of belief and desire is not threatened. However, there is an appropriate internal connection between a desire and an evaluative judgement. The desire that P is the experience of P's being good. An experience should not be confused with a belief, not even with the belief which the experience would, under normal circumstances, give one some reason to adopt. But if desires are the experiences which ground our beliefs about the good, then that would also explain why value judgements — which clearly involve beliefs about the good — do not typically float entirely freely of motivation.

So by means of the value experience thesis we can vindicate the essential insight driving internalism. Suppose I know that P is good and I know so by direct acquaintance with the goodness of P. That is to say, P is genuinely good, I believe P is good, and I believe so because I

directly experience P as good. My direct experience of P's goodness is a reason (and, let's suppose, a good one) for my believing that P is good. Then, given the value experience thesis, my experiencing P as good is my desire that P. If I know the goodness of P in this way, by direct perceptual acquaintance, then *ipso facto* I am necessarily motivated to pursue or preserve P. So the value experience thesis explains the puzzling asymmetry, allows for the appropriate value-desire gaps, but also explains the internalist insight that certain kinds of *knowledge* of value would be intrinsically — i.e. necessarily — motivating.

## 11 The perspectival nature of experience

The merit connection, recall, says that the good is what merits desire. If this were right, then presumably if I were desiring properly or adequately or ideally, I would desire things just to the degree that they are good. But given the value experience thesis, that means that ideally I should experience value-reality as it is in itself. Anything less than an *isomorphism* between value and desire would be a defect in a responder to value. Call this the *isomorphic response thesis*: that for one to be experiencing value appropriately one's desires must be perfectly isomorphic to the structure of value. That seems very far-fetched. Something has to give.

Consider two cases. Imagine I have a badly fractured limb caused by a skiing accident, part of the femur is protruding through the skin, and the thing is excruciatingly painful. A stranger skiing the same slope just behind me has suffered a similar fracture, and he is now lying in the snow alongside me, suffering what appears to be the same degree of pain. I would like his pain to cease, naturally, but I am even more desirous of the cessation of my own pain. When the stretcher team appears it turns out they have only one shot of morphine left. Since the relief of the stranger's pain is just as valuable as the relief of my pain, the merit principle demands that I be indifferent as to whose pain is treated. But I am not.

Or imagine I am in that unhappy situation in which my daughter is drowning a hundred

yards from where some other girl is drowning, some stranger's daughter. As is the norm in such cases, I can't save both. I certainly would like to be able to save both, but I cannot do so, and not surprisingly I have a stronger desire to save my daughter while the other girl drowns, rather than to save the other girl while my daughter drowns. Now I know that, in all probability, my daughter's life is no more (or less) valuable than the life of the stranger's daughter, or that my happiness is no more less valuable than the stranger's. But even though I know that, I cannot desire to save the stranger's daughter as much as I desire to save my own daughter.

We face a dilemma here. Given the isomorphic response thesis, I should be indifferent between saving my daughter and saving the stranger's daughter. If that's what value demands of desire then it is a defect of me, as a valuer and desirer, that I am not completely indifferent about who I save. And that seems wrong. However, if it is not a defect then it is hard to see how my desires give me any reason at all for corresponding value beliefs. If it is quite in order for me to want to save my daughter (or to want my pain to cease) more than I want to save the stranger's daughter (or to want the stranger's pain to cease), even though the one is not more valuable than the other, how can my desires be construed as any kind of evidence of value?

In neither case does it strike me as at all plausible that I should be indifferent, that my desires (or the stranger's) should track the actual values. Rather, it is perfectly in order for me to desire the cessation of my pain more than I desire the cessation of the stranger's pain. And it is also perfectly in order for me to desire to save my daughter somewhat more than I desire to save the stranger's daughter. In fact I would be regarded as something of a monster if I had to toss a coin to decide which of them to save. And it isn't clear how I could have a pain just as bad as the stranger's and yet have identical desires concerning the cessation of both. If this is right then there is something very wrong with the merit connection, at least as I have stated it.

Suppose desires are experiences of value, just as sensory perceptions are experiences of the material world. Suppose I look into the heavens at the setting sun and the rising moon. The

sun is much bigger than the moon, of course, but the moon looks the bigger of the two. That's because the sun is much further away. Are my experiences here defective? Would my perceptual apparatus be better if it always yielded an appearance of the sun as vastly bigger than the moon, no matter which position I took up with respect to them? That doesn't seem right. I am having a perfectly apt experience of the two celestial bodies given that I am located on earth. That is exactly how one would expect those two bodies to look from earth to a human being whose perceptual apparatus is in perfect working order. Clearly you cannot be expected to perceive things exactly as they are no matter what your situation is with respect to them. Nor should you believe that things are exactly as you perceive them to be no matter how you are situated with respect to them. The relation between experience and the world and one's beliefs is more complex and interesting than that.

If desires are experiences of value, and valuers are differently situated with respect to value, then we should expect something analogous to the phenomenon of perspective. And the two cases illustrate this. While my pain and the stranger's pain are equally bad, I am clearly situated very differently with respect to my pain than I am with respect to the stranger's. In fact, part of what makes pain bad is surely the fact that its bearer badly wants it to stop, and that is clearly not under any direct control. (That's why we need morphine.) I cannot be expected to detach myself from that desire and be indifferent between the cessation of my pain and the cessation of the stranger's pain. So, it is perfectly in order for me to want my pain to stop more than I want the stranger's pain to stop.

What about the drowning girls? Just as with pain, I am very differently situated with respect to my daughter and her survival than I am with respect to the stranger's daughter and her survival. I love my daughter, fiercely, in a way that completely precludes me from being indifferent between her death and the death of a stranger's daughter. And it would be absurd to demand that my love for my daughter not inform the strength of my desire for her to go on

living.

It is not that I don't care about the stranger's pain, or the death of his daughter. I am not indifferent to either of them. I certainly believe them to be as bad, respectively, as my own pain, and the death of my own daughter, and in addition I do desire their well-being. But given that I care about myself and my daughter more than I do about the stranger and his daughter, I cannot be indifferent as to where good and evil flow.

Consider size and perception of size again. An observer, even an ideal one, has to take up a wide range of different observation posts in the world, and his perceptual apparatus should be appropriately sensitive to variations in perspective. Even to an ideal observer in my current position, the sun should appear smaller than the moon, even if to an ideal observer equidistant from both, but within viewing range, they should look just the reverse. The moon should look bigger than the sun from the vantage point of earth and it is no defect of the observer that it appears that way to him.

So, even though the facts about size are observer-independent, experiences of size are appropriately observer-dependent, since they depend on the situation, point of view, or perspective of the observer. Analogously, even though facts about value are valuer-neutral, experiences of value can and should be valuer-relative, since they depend on exactly where the valuer is situated with respect to the objects of desire. In general we do not require that a perceiver's experiences be isomorphic to reality for that he to be perceiving appropriately. Analogously we should not require that a valuer's desires be isomorphic to value for her to be responding appropriately. Now, if desire has a perspectival component — as the two examples suggest — then the merit connection, as stated, has to go. So we need not demand that a person, adequately responding to value, desire things exactly to the degree that they are good.

Interestingly Hume himself noted the heavily perspectival nature of value experiences in the passages quoted at the start of this paper.

‘Tis as little contrary to reason to prefer even my own acknowledg’d  
 lesser good to my greater, and have a more ardent affection for the former  
 than the latter. A trivial good may, from certain circumstances, produce a  
 desire superior to what arises from the greatest and most valuable  
 enjoyment; nor is there anything more extraordinary in this, than in  
 mechanics to see one pound weight raise up a hundred by advantage of its  
 situation.<sup>19</sup>

Hume is using this to press his case for the thesis that the passions cannot be contradictory with the truth. But that does not quite follow. The moon looks larger than the sun, and the content of that experience does indeed contradict the truth. What makes it, nevertheless, a perfectly appropriate experience to have is the fact that the sun is much further away. So it is entirely “reasonable” or “fitting” to experience things that way, even if the experience does in fact contradict the truth of the matter.

If desires are experiences of value, and experiences of value not only can but should be perspectival, then this goes a long way to explaining away what is otherwise a deep problem for realism about value. We can embrace a world of agent-neutral value without condemning as defective or perverse the persistently agent-relative nature of desire. But also, the perspectival nature of value experiences no more undermines their claim to yield a glimpse of value, than the perspectival nature of ordinary perception undermines its claim to yield data about the material world.

## **12 Further work**

The value experience thesis has done some good work here, dissolving some puzzles and

explaining the attractions of various Humean themes. It can do more. It can explain the attractions of the Meinongian thesis that emotions provide us with epistemic access to value, just to the extent that they do. Most emotions have a desiderative component, and thus incorporate value data. But it can also explain why emotions are a tricky source of value data. It can explain the role of Frankfurtian higher-order desiring in our attempts to get a firmer grip on value. It can explain the *value* of having accurate experiences of value. It also raises some problems which have to be tackled. Is value idealism —the idea that value supervenes on value experiences, on desires — an option? How do we refine our desires in extending and improving our value beliefs? What can we say about perverse desires which presumably lead us away from the truth about value rather than reveal it? What can we say about the phenomenon of disappointment, of finding desire-satisfaction to be bad rather than good, and so on? To do all this, however, one would need to write a book.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This paper draws heavily on chapter 2 and parts of chapters 3 and 8 of my book *Value, Reality and Desire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). I wish to thank the Editor for granting me permission to reprint material from the book here.

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<sup>2</sup> Bk. II, Pt. III, Sec. III para. 4 of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, in Hume [2006], 62.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> On this construal cognitivism is the conjunction of two distinct theses that can be pried apart: (1) that value judgements have propositional content, and (2) that endorsing a value judgement is a matter of affirming the truth of the associated proposition. Mark Kalderon [2005] has suggested that a fictionalist is a non-cognitivist who accepts the first of these but rejects the second. For the fictionalist endorsement is some attitude to the value proposition other than belief. See Demetriou and Oddie [2007] for an analysis and discussion.

<sup>5</sup> See Oddie [2005] for an extended argument.

<sup>6</sup> See Oddie and Demetriou [2007] for a fuller discussion.

<sup>7</sup> Hume [2006], 62.

<sup>8</sup> Hume [2006], 72.

<sup>9</sup> Smith [1991].

<sup>10</sup> Anscombe [1957], Smith [1987], and Humberstone [1992].

<sup>11</sup> Smith [1991], 400.

<sup>12</sup> Hume [2006], 62.

<sup>13</sup> Smith [1991], 401.

<sup>14</sup> Clearly, desire sets can embody incoherencies the elimination of which reason demands — see chapters 4 and 5 of Oddie [2005] for an extended discussion.

<sup>15</sup> See Oddie [2001].

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle [1962], Brentano [1969], Meinong [1972], Scheler [1973], Broad [1930], Chisholm [1986], Mulligan [1998]. A recent defense of this kind of view can be found in Johnston [2001].

<sup>17</sup> Broad [1930], 283.

<sup>18</sup> See Oddie [2005].

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<sup>19</sup> Hume [2006], 62.

<sup>20</sup> And the book is, of course, *Value Reality and Desire* (Oddie [2005]).