

# DAVID HUME, IMMANUEL KANT, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF AN INCLUSIVE MORAL DIALOGUE

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## I. Introduction

Immanuel Kant and David Hume developed moral theories that diverged from each other in many respects. Hume famously claimed that reason is the slave of passions and it cannot provide a motive for the human will to attain an end. Kant explicitly rejected this claim and equally famously argued that pure reason by itself can be practical and determine the will independently of our passions. Besides the power reason has to determine the will, the two philosophers also disagreed about the nature of moral judgment. Hume believed that our moral judgments arise from feelings of approbation and disapproval. According to him, when a moral agent reflects on an action, she develops certain sentiments about the moral value of the action and makes a moral judgment. Kant, however, believed that because there is a moral law we can appeal to regardless of our inclinations in order to identify the moral value of an action, we can make moral judgments that do not reflect our sentiments.

My first main aim in this paper is to show that Hume's anti-rationalist sentimentalist account of moral judgment faces an important problem. Hume's account leads us to a point where a moral dialogue in which moral agents with conflicting sentiments about a morally significant situation can be included is impossible. I argue that Hume's sentiment-based theory of moral judgment fails to lay the basis for an inclusive moral dialogue for moral agents who do not share the same set of sentiments with respect to a moral issue due to differences about the social contexts of their upbringing and education. On a model of moral dialogue based on Hume's account of moral judgment, the members of different societies who are socialized to have conflicting feelings about the same morally significant issue are hardly capable of engaging in a moral dialogue on social problems.

I also present two responses to this objection against Hume's theory of moral judgment. The first response is based on a distinction between two types of sentiments and emphasizes the idea that when Hume argues that our moral judgments arise from sentiments, he is referring only to *moral* sentiments that are the products of what Hume calls 'the common point of view'. And according to this response, once moral agents take this point of view, they have a basis for a moral dialogue in which one can be included regardless of her non-moral arbitrary sentiments. I show that even though this response looks promising, it is actually incompatible with Hume's idea that moral judgments are not conclusions of causal reasoning that reflect matters of fact. And the second response

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to the objection I raise appeals to the idea that Hume provides not only a psychological explanation of how we make moral judgments, but also a theory of moral language. So this response suggests that in order to make a moral judgment one has to use the moral language by satisfying its requirements including universalizability and impartiality. I argue that if we accept the idea that there are criteria such as universalizability and impartiality that we all have to satisfy to make a moral judgment, this would entail that there are certain factors that guide and determine our moral judgments regardless of our sentiments. However, in developing his sentiment-based account of moral judgment, Hume explicitly rejects this.

My second my main aim is to show that Kant's principle-based moral philosophy does not face the objection raised against Hume's ethical theory. I argue that Kant develops a moral principle that can be the basis of a moral dialogue in which we can be included whatever sentiments we have. This principle is the categorical imperative. Although the categorical imperative does have the form of an imperative, it is actually a description of how a purely rational agent would act. And it demands that a moral agent is to justify her actions only on the basis of considerations that can be endorsed by each and every rational agent. For this reason, according to Kant, as long as she is a rational, moral agent a moral agent justifies her actions on mutually endorsable terms without appealing to any sentiment or feeling that may work as argument-stoppers in our moral dialogues.

## II. Hume's Sentiment-Based Ethical Theory and the Possibility of An Inclusive Moral Dialogue

Sentiments play a series of central roles in Hume's ethical theory. One role they play concerns how we acquire moral knowledge and make moral judgments. In a famous passage, Hume states that '... the distinguishing impressions, by which moral good or evil is known, are nothing but particular pains or pleasures ...'<sup>2</sup> Hume here formulates his well-known epistemological view that our moral knowledge and judgments are products of feelings of pleasure and uneasiness. According to him, when we make a moral judgment by applying a certain classification such as virtuous or vicious to a particular morally significant situation, that judgment and the moral classification arise from a feeling of approbation or disapproval that the situation creates in us.

Kenneth R. Westphal makes an important distinction between two ways in which sentiments can have a place in our moral judgments. On the one hand, according to what Westphal calls the *weak thesis* 'sentiments are a necessary component or basis of moral judgment'<sup>3</sup>. The idea that our moral sentiments are the media through which we acquire moral knowledge and make a moral judgment is compatible with this thesis. Since he thinks that '... the distinguishing impressions, *by which* moral good or evil is known, are particular pains and pleasures ...' Hume is committed to this thesis and he believes that sentiments or feelings of approbation and disapprobation are at least the moral media for us.<sup>4</sup> This thesis does not entail, however, that an action or a character is a virtuous

<sup>2</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, David F. Norton & Mary J. Norton, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), vol.1, 303.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth R. Westphal, *How Hume & Kant Reconstruct Natural Law: Justifying Strict Objectivity without Debating Moral Realism* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2016), 43.

<sup>4</sup>David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, David F. Norton & Mary J. Norton, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), vol.1, 303, (emphasis added).

action or virtuous character *because* it arouses in us certain feelings of pleasure or approval.

However, according to the *strong thesis*, ‘sentiments form the sole and sufficient basis of moral judgments (or classifications).’<sup>5</sup> Westphal rightly argues that in his ethical theory Hume goes beyond the weak thesis and endorses the strong thesis. Hume states in the passage I quoted from above the following:

an action, or sentiment, or character is virtuous or vicious; why? because its view causes a pleasure or uneasiness of a particular kind ... to have the sense of virtue, is nothing but to *feel* a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character.<sup>6</sup>

And just after claiming that the feeling of satisfaction constitutes our positive moral attitude towards a character, Hume continues by arguing that we go no further than this feeling ‘nor do we enquire into the cause of the satisfaction’.<sup>7</sup> He also states that

... moral distinctions depend *entirely* on certain particular sentiments of pain and pleasure, and that whatever mental quality in ourselves or others gives us satisfaction, by the survey of reflection, is of course virtuous; as everything of this nature, that gives us uneasiness, is vicious.<sup>8</sup>

The strong thesis implies that our moral judgments and our moral classifications of actions and characters into moral categories are derived entirely from sentiments. So according to the strong thesis, when I make a moral judgment and claim that an action is virtuous, it is because I have a feeling of approbation with regard to that action. In other words, the action is virtuous because it creates a certain feeling in me. Hume argues that it is impossible to find vice in an action that we take to be vicious when considered in itself and says that ‘you never can find it, till you turn your reflection into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action’<sup>9</sup>. However, the strong thesis creates a serious problem and Hume’s ethical theory faces an important objection.

To formulate this objection I will appeal to a scenario in which you are in a situation where a person who was raised in a culture radically different than the culture you were raised and educated makes a moral judgment about a morally significant action. Even though you consider the judgment and the action carefully, you do not understand why that person is making that judgment and classify the action as an instance of vice or virtue. Suppose further that the judgment your friend makes is also in the form of a call for action. In other words, the judgment is of the form ‘we ought to do A’. However seldomly, we encounter cases like this and as rational beings, in these cases, we do not simply act on the moral judgment another person makes. Before we act on the moral judgment, we want to understand why that moral judgment constitutes a sufficient basis

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<sup>5</sup> Kenneth R. Westphal, [How Hume & Kant Reconstruct Natural Law: Justifying Strict Objectivity without Debating Moral Realism](#) (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2016), 43.

<sup>6</sup> David Hume, [A Treatise of Human Nature](#), David F. Norton & Mary J. Norton, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), vol.1, 303.

<sup>7</sup> David Hume, [A Treatise of Human Nature](#), David F. Norton & Mary J. Norton, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), vol.1, 303.

<sup>8</sup> David Hume, [A Treatise of Human Nature](#), David F. Norton & Mary J. Norton, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), vol.1, 367, (emphasis added).

<sup>9</sup> David Hume, [A Treatise of Human Nature](#), David F. Norton & Mary J. Norton, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), vol.1, 301.

for action. And if Hume's account of moral judgment and its strong thesis is correct, the person will explain why her moral judgment is a reasonable moral judgment by indicating that she has a feeling of approval towards action A.

It would be safe to assume at this point that the culture in which one is raised and educated has a considerable impact on the moral feelings one has towards actions. So given that your culture is extremely different than the other person's culture, we may assume that you have a moral sentiment about the action in question that leads you to a conflicting moral judgment. And when you are asked why your moral judgment is the reasonable one to make, according to Hume's account of moral judgment and classification, you will state that you have a contrary feeling towards action A. The problem here is that if we preserve Hume's thesis that sentiments are the sole and sufficient basis of our moral judgments and classifications, then because which sentiments are superior to others cannot be determined with an appeal to sentiments alone, once the parties in a moral dialogue disagree with each other by making conflicting moral discriminations on the basis of their different feelings, they go no further than citing their sentiments of approval or disapproval to each other and end up at a position where there is hardly any prospect for further moral discussion.

One might here that we recognize that sentiments and feelings do work as argument-stoppers in our moral dialogues and indicate that appealing to a feeling or a sentiment to explain why a moral judgment is a reasonable one is not something we usually do. So it might be claimed that when we explain why our moral judgments are reasonable, we appeal to certain moral considerations by leaving aside what we feel towards an action. For instance, when I observe that a child is hit by her parent, I make the moral judgment that hitting the child is not a virtuous action. And I explain why my judgment is a reasonable one not by saying that I have a feeling of disapproval toward the action but by saying something like 'children are not moral agents who are responsible for their actions'. But does Hume's theory of moral judgment allow us to explain why our moral judgments are reasonable by appealing to moral considerations like this? If it does, then in our scenario the person can explain why the moral judgment 'A ought to be done' is reasonable using similar considerations by leaving her sentiments aside and there is still a good prospect for further discussion. To determine this, consider again explaining why the judgment that hitting the child is not a virtuous action is reasonable by appealing to the consideration that 'small children are not agents who are responsible for their actions'. One of the most peculiar aspects of considerations like this is that when a person appeals to them as an explanation of why her judgment is reasonable, she commits herself to her moral judgment regardless of her feelings towards the action that the judgment is about. In other words, someone who believes that hitting a child is not virtuous because small children are not moral agents with responsibilities is prepared to claim that a child ought not to be hit by her parents even though her feelings towards hitting a child are feelings of approval. Hence, explaining why a moral judgment is a reasonable one on the basis of moral considerations without appealing to our feelings entails that one will be committed to her moral judgment as a conclusion of these considerations independently of what one's feelings are. However, Hume's sentimentalist anti-rationalism does not allow this because he believes that moral distinctions are not the conclusions of reasoning but '... depend *entirely* on certain peculiar sentiments of pain and pleasure'<sup>10</sup>. For this

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<sup>10</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, David F. Norton & Mary J. Norton, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), vol.1, 367, (emphasis added).

reason, the only possibility for the person in our scenario to explain why her moral judgment is reasonable is to appeal to her feelings of approval and disapproval towards action A.

An important point to recognize here is that in our scenario if the other person has sentiments that converge with yours, then you can share your feelings and judgments based on them, and discuss what practical measures must be taken to execute the action on which you have feelings of approbation or to prevent a state of affairs towards which you have a sentiment of disapproval. Therefore, if Hume's ethical theory is correct, moral agents with the same kind of sentiments towards an action can engage in a moral dialogue and can also include another person who has the same sentiment to their moral conversation. However, if another moral agent has a conflicting sentiment about the same action, she is excluded from the conversation the moment she makes why her judgment is a reasonable one explicit.

Whether a moral theory makes it possible for us to engage in a moral dialogue without encountering argument-stoppers depends to a large extent on the basic elements in terms of which it characterizes moral judgment. If a moral theory selects such subjective states of awareness as sentiments, then on that theory it becomes impossible to make moral judgments that could address different individuals independently of what they feel or what their emotions are. These subjective states of awareness vary significantly across different historical periods and regions. What is closely tied to this point is that an important function we expect moral philosophy to fulfill is to provide us with a basis on which we can address moral problems that concern different societies with different cultures.<sup>11</sup> However, under a moral theory that appeals to subjective states of awareness that vary culturally and historically to characterize the nature of moral judgment it is hardly possible to address these social problems. There are morally pressing social problems that concern different social groups with members who have strong tendencies to develop conflicting sentiments about these problems. If Hume's sentiment-based account of moral judgment is correct, we simply have no way to address and solve them through dialogues that include not only parties who happen to share our feelings of approbation but all concerned ones.

### III. Two Responses

#### III.I. The Common Point of View as a Ground for Moral Dialogue

What are the possible ways to save Hume's ethical theory from the objection raised against it above? Here I will present two ways to respond to that objection. The first one will be based on an interpretation of Hume's notion of the common point of view that Rachel Cohen she develops in her paper 'The Common Point of View in Hume's Ethics'. This response is extremely important and needs to be addressed because the objection in the second part does not take Hume's notion of the common point of view into account. One can argue that an objection against Hume's ethical theory that does not recognize the central place the common point of view has in it is misguided. My evaluation of the first response to the objection raised above will recognize the importance of the common point of view in Hume's ethical theory.

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<sup>11</sup> One can argue that this may not be a *requirement* that each moral theory should satisfy. However, we may at least reasonably think that a moral theory that fulfills this function is superior to another one that cannot.

Cohon's reading intends to show, first, that when we take the common point of view, we are not making an inductive causal inference to make a moral judgment and, second, that the common point of view is morally privileged because of the fact that when we make moral judgments we also make causal judgments and these causal judgments tend to be correct and consistent with each other if we take the common point of view. In order to argue that the moral judgments we make from the common point of view are not the products of causal reasoning and preserve Hume's anti-rationalist view that '... the distinguishing impressions, by which moral good or evil is known, are nothing but particular pains or pleasures ...', Cohon develops what she calls the two-sentiment interpretation.<sup>12</sup>

Cohon calls the sentiments that arise when we reflect on a morally significant situation 'from our ordinary, individual perspective' without taking a general point of view which we can share with other moral agents 'situated sentiments'.<sup>13</sup> Situated sentiments reveal our particular points of view when we consider an action or a character. Our situated sentiments might be influenced by self-interest or other non-moral factors. Therefore, situated sentiments are not 'moral sentiments'. Moral sentiments arise in us when we reflect on a morally significant situation from a *steady* and *general* point of view. As Hume argues, when we make a genuine moral judgment '... we fix on some *steady* and *general* points of view; and always, in our thoughts, place ourselves in them, whatever may be our present situation'.<sup>14</sup> We have moral sentiments only if we take a common point of view. According to Cohon's reading, the sentiments that arises from our ordinary, individual point of view can also be corrected by the sentiments we have when we reflect from a general and steady common point of view but, as Hume himself points out, 'the passions do not always follow our corrections'.<sup>15</sup> For this reason, it might be the case that '... we feel two sentiments toward the same character trait'.<sup>16</sup> And when this is the case, the two sentiments produce two different judgments about the same character trait. However, 'the one that arises from imagining oneself occupying the common point of view is the source of moral judgment'.<sup>17</sup>

According to Cohon's reading of Hume's notion of the common point of view, Hume believes that in order to make a moral judgment, one's judgment must be grounded on a sentiment that arises when one takes the common point of view. Moreover, Hume argues that when one takes the common point of view and has a moral sentiment, the interest or pleasure that is taken into account is '... that of the person himself, whose character is examined, or that of persons who have a connexion with him'.<sup>18</sup> For this

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<sup>12</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, David F. Norton & Mary J. Norton, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), vol.1, 303.

<sup>13</sup> Rachel Cohon, 'The Common Point of View in Hume's Ethics', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 57/4 (1997), 834.

<sup>14</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, David F. Norton & Mary J. Norton, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), vol.1, 372.

<sup>15</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, David F. Norton & Mary J. Norton, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), vol.1, 374.

<sup>16</sup> Rachel Cohon, 'The Common Point of View in Hume's Ethics', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 57/4 (1997), 836.

<sup>17</sup> Rachel Cohon, 'The Common Point of View in Hume's Ethics', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 57/4 (1997), 837.

<sup>18</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, David F. Norton & Mary J. Norton, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), vol.1, 377.

reason, Cohon points out that the common point of view is the same for every reflective moral agent.<sup>19</sup> In other words, according to Hume, the common point of view leads each and every person to the same moral judgment.

Now one can respond to the objection raised above against Hume by indicating that it takes each and every sentiment we have when we reflect on a morally significant situation as a moral sentiment. It might be argued that we need to make the distinction that Cohon makes between our situated sentiments and moral sentiments and in the objection this distinction is missing. According to this response, my objection also treats every point of view in which we have some sentiment as a moral point of view. However, this is not, it might be argued, Hume's view. There is a moral perspective we each take to make moral judgments and this moral perspective is the common point of view. Therefore, Hume's ethical theory is capable of providing us with a ground on the basis of which we can engage in moral dialogues whatever our situated sentiments are. The common point of view constitutes this ground for inclusive moral dialogues. One can continue by arguing that since the common point of view is the same for each person, if the disagreeing parties in a moral dialogue take the common point of view, they will reach the same moral judgment and resolve their disagreement. For this reason, the parties in the scenario I considered in the second part above should take the common point of view if they are to make moral judgments and when they take it, they will resolve their disagreement.

The first point to note about this response is that the point of view that Hume thinks is the proper moral point of view may be taken by two individuals but they may still disagree with each other by making contrary moral judgments. To see this, consider Hume's idea that when one takes the common point of view, one reflects on the effects a character has on the person who possesses it or on the individuals who have some direct relationship with that person. If we grant the idea that 'once we do adopt the common point of view, our moral sentiments respond to what we imagine', by taking the common point of view, one might imagine that an action has a great negative impact on those around the individual who performs it while another person imagines that the same action is extremely beneficial both to the individual herself and to her social group.<sup>20</sup> For instance, think about the question of gay marriage. Reflecting on this question and imagining its possible effects, someone might come up with the judgment that gay marriage is evil because it has a destructive influence upon the institution of family and, for this reason, the people around those who are in a gay marriage will be influenced negatively. However, another person may form the judgment, from the common point of view, that gay marriage would be beneficial and produce pleasure not only to individuals who want to have a right to gay marriage but also to those who have a relationship with gay couples since gay marriage may be taken as an expression of freedom and societies that allow gay marriage tend to create a tolerant atmosphere for its members.

Given the fact that individuals who take up the common point of view might disagree with each other, how can they engage in an inclusive moral dialogue and try to resolve their disagreement through discussion without encountering argument-stoppers? Can Hume's notion of the common point of view provide an answer to this

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<sup>19</sup> Rachel Cohon, 'The Common Point of View in Hume's Ethics', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 57/4 (1997), 840.

<sup>20</sup> Rachel Cohon, 'The Common Point of View in Hume's Ethics', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 57/4 (1997), 846.

question? If it can, the objection I presented above can be successfully responded to. It might be argued that individuals who disagree with each other in a moral dialogue can discuss the effects a certain action has on the person who undertakes the action or on the people around that person because the common point of view is a point of view that focuses on these effects and they can avoid any appeal to situated sentiments that lead them to argument-stoppers. So one of the disagreeing parties in a moral dialogue can point out to the other party that the action they reflect on would have a negative or positive overall effect on the person herself and those around her. She can try to convince his opponent by indicating the possible consequences of the action. The other party can accept that judgment or reject it by arguing that the action would not have the predicted consequences. In this way, one can argue, we can engage in a moral dialogue without argument-stoppers and try to resolve our moral disagreements even though our initial moral sentiments conflict with each other.

Hume's ethical theory may enable us to engage in a moral dialogue and try to resolve our disagreements by reflecting on the effects of an action. But this response is actually incompatible with Hume's explicit anti-rationalism. One of the most basic tenets of Hume's anti-rationalism is his view that our moral judgments are not conclusions of reason but arise from our sentiments. One reason why Hume thinks that moral judgments are not conclusions of reason is that moral judgments do not reflect matters of fact which are the proper objects of causal reasoning. According to the model of moral dialogue this response brings forth individuals who disagree on a morally significant situation reflect on the consequences of an action on a particular person or a group of persons and make causal predictions and inferences about possible effects the action in question could produce. On the basis of this causal reflection they convince each other and agree on a particular moral judgment. Therefore, the moral judgment they end up with is a product of causal reasoning. However, as Cohon also argues, this flatly contradicts Hume's basic idea that '... vice and virtue are not matters of fact, whose existence we can infer by reason'.<sup>21</sup>

### III.II. Speaking the Moral Language as a Requirement of Moral Dialogue

Another response to the objection raised against Hume's ethical theory can be developed on the basis of Henning Jensen's interpretation of Hume in which Hume is presented as a theoretician of moral language who is '... extremely preoccupied with the disagreements which occur in our sentiments and beliefs'.<sup>22</sup> In his paper 'Hume on Moral Agreement', Jensen criticizes the view that the sole aim of Hume's ethical theory is to provide a psychological account of the nature of our moral judgments. Jensen thinks that if this narrow reading of Hume's ethical theory is rejected and a broader view is adopted, we will realize that '... the broader concerns of [Hume's] ethical theory forced him at key points ... to deal with issues which go beyond a purely psychological approach and which relate to problems involving conceptual analysis and moral language'.<sup>23</sup> In other words, according to Jensen, besides providing a psychological account of how we make moral judgments, Hume also develops a theory of moral language.

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<sup>21</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, David F. Norton & Mary J. Norton, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), vol.1, 301.

<sup>22</sup> Henning Jensen, 'Hume on Moral Agreement', *Mind*, 68/344 (1977), 499.

<sup>23</sup> Henning Jensen, 'Hume on Moral Agreement', *Mind*, 68/344 (1977), 500.



One of the key elements of the theory of moral language that Jensen attributes to Hume is the idea that to make a moral judgment, we must be using the moral language. For this reason, the requirements that the moral language has sets limits to what can be counted as a moral judgment. Jensen argues that according to Hume's theory, '... to employ moral language is to be committed to setting restrictions on what we are prepared to regard as a moral term or moral judgment'.<sup>24</sup> Jensen's reading seems to be reasonable. For instance, Hume states the following:

When a man denominates another his *enemy*, his *rival*, his *antagonist*, his *adversary*, he is understood to speak the language of self-love, and to express sentiments, peculiar to himself, and arising from his particular circumstances and situation. But when he bestows on any man the epithets of *vicious* or *odious* or *depraved*, he then speaks another language, and expresses sentiments, in which, he expects, all his audience are to concur with him.<sup>25</sup>

On the basis of passages like this, Jensen argues that Hume has a theory of moral language and he articulates some of the requirements that this language involves. The crucial point for our purposes is that if we accept that Hume does have a theory of moral language that must be used to make moral judgments, we may think that in a moral dialogue where the parties disagree on a morally significant situation, one of the parties may not be using the moral language at all. In such a dialogue the other party may note to her that she is not making a moral judgment because the language she uses is not the moral language and that if she uses the moral language by satisfying its criteria, then she can be included in the moral dialogue and the dialogue can proceed within the boundaries of the moral language. Therefore, one can respond to my objection against Hume's ethical theory by arguing that Hume has a theory of language with a set of restrictions on what is to be counted as a moral judgment, and the moral language that theory articulates can provide a ground for an inclusive moral dialogue for individuals who have a moral disagreement between them.

Now let's look at the requirements that Jensen believes Hume's theory of moral language has. Jensen argues that to make moral judgments '... our judgments must be universalizable. And in so judging we are required to be impartial ... Finally moral language is described as employing certain terms such as 'virtue', 'vice', and 'justice' whose very function is to express praise or blame'.<sup>26</sup> So in order to make a genuine moral judgment, one needs to make universalizable judgments with notions such as virtue from an impartial point of view. It seems fairly reasonable to say that the requirements that Jensen puts forward as the requirements of the moral language are among the requirements that we generally committed to when we make moral judgments or criticize the moral judgments others make. We often reject moral judgments because they reflect a partial perspective or because they are not universalizable in the sense that they express '... purely private sentiments occasioned by some particular circumstance at some particular time'.<sup>27</sup> However, the problem this idea of the moral language creates for Hume's ethical theory is that its requirements seem to be authoritative regardless of our sentiments or how we feel about a morally significant situation. If Jensen's reading is

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<sup>24</sup> Henning Jensen, 'Hume on Moral Agreement', *Mind*, 68/344 (1977), 502.

<sup>25</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals*, J. B. Schneewind, ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), 75.

<sup>26</sup> Henning Jensen, 'Hume on Moral Agreement', *Mind*, 68/344 (1977), 502.

<sup>27</sup> Henning Jensen, 'Hume on Moral Agreement', *Mind*, 68/344 (1977), 502.

correct, then Hume is articulating a conception of moral language which has a series of requirements that must be met in order to make moral judgments whatever sentiments or feelings we have. On Jensen's reading, universalizability and impartiality are among the conditions we must pay attention to and satisfy when we are making moral judgments regardless of our sentiments. This means that our moral judgments must have the character of universalizability and be made from an impartial perspective even though we do not have any sentiment with regard to that character of universalizability and impartial perspective. The idea that universalizability and impartiality are among the criteria of the moral language which we have to use to make a moral judgment entails that our concern with universalizability and impartiality guides us when we are making moral judgments. And this would show that at least an important part of the basis of our moral judgments is completely independent of how we feel or what our sentiments are. However, according to Hume's sentimentalist anti-rationalism '... moral distinctions depend entirely on certain peculiar sentiments of pain and pleasure'<sup>28</sup> and 'the very *feeling* constitutes our praise or admiration'.<sup>29</sup>

Turning back to the previous response, another point that deserves to be mentioned here is that a model of moral dialogue that is based not on the notion of a moral language but on that of the common point of view faces the same problem. As I mentioned above, one might argue that in order to make a genuine moral judgment, one has to take the common point of view. This would entail that there are certain requirements that our judgments need to meet in order for us to make a moral judgment because taking the common point of view demands a certain way of reflecting on morally significant situations. And we know that Hume argued that the common point of view is a perspective that is *steady* and *general*.<sup>30</sup> So according to Hume's notion of the common point of view generality and steadiness are among the criteria that a judgment needs to satisfy in order to be counted as a moral judgment. In other words, according to Hume's account of moral judgment, when we make a moral judgment we make them in the light of certain standards that reflect the character of a certain type of judgment. However, this entails that when we are making a moral judgment we are guided by our concern with taking a certain point of view by fulfilling its criteria of generality and steadiness even if we do not have any sentiment about neither that point of view nor its requirements. This means again that at least part of how we make moral judgments is to be accounted for independently of sentiments.

#### **IV. Kant's Principle-Based Ethical Theory and the Possibility of an Inclusive Moral Dialogue**

A moral theory with a principle that specifies a procedure through which we can give and demand reasons for our moral judgments regardless of our feelings does not face the objection I raised against Hume's sentiment-based theory. By having such a principle, a moral theory recognizes a fundamental fact about our moral lives. In our moral lives, we convince each other and make moral judgments by critically discussing our reasons for

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<sup>28</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, David F. Norton & Mary J. Norton, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), vol.1, 367.

<sup>29</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, David F. Norton & Mary J. Norton, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), vol.1, 303.

<sup>30</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, David F. Norton & Mary J. Norton, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), vol.1, 372.

or against possible courses of action in different situations without appealing to any fact about whether we like them or not. Therefore, a moral theory that has a principle by which these practices can take place satisfies a demand that our daily moral interactions create. As I tried to show above, Hume's ethical theory does not provide us with a ground that we can use to engage in a moral dialogue independently of our feelings as he construes these judgments as judgements based on feelings that may significantly vary among individuals and cultures. In this part, I argue that Kant's moral philosophy does not face this problem since it omits justificatory appeals to such subjective affective mental states as sentiments, and develops a principle by which moral agents can give and ask for reasons for their moral judgments.

The question that is central to my argument in this part is the following: What kind of a moral agent is a *rational* moral agent? In order to address this question, I will appeal to Kant's idea of a purely rational will. Kant's idea of a purely rational will, will enable me to point out some of the essential characteristics of a rational moral agent according to Kant. Seeing these essential characteristics will, in turn, allow us to figure out the moral principle that actual rational agents follow in their moral dialogues.

In a passage on the 'fundamental law of practical reason' Kant says the following: ... pure reason, *practical of itself*, is ... immediately lawgiving. The will is thought as independent of empirical conditions and hence, as a pure will, as determined *by the mere form of law*, and this determining ground is regarded as the supreme condition of all maxims. The thing is strange enough, and has nothing like it in all the rest of our practical cognition.<sup>31</sup>

Here Kant begins by telling us one of his major claims about moral motivation. Practical reason can provide us with the sufficient motivational ground for action. Practical reason has this motivational power because it is capable of generating a pure *a priori* moral law. But this moral law is a *formal* moral law. The idea of a formal law is based on Kant's distinction between the form and matter of a practical principle. Kant thinks that the matter of a practical principle is the representation of an object of an affective state such as desire.<sup>32</sup> However, Kant believes that the fundamental principle of morality is not a principle with a material component. It only has a formal component. The moral law does not assume any empirically given object that can be desired by a moral agent.

Pure practical reason generates its practical law by excluding any empirical affective state. The reason for this exclusion is the very fact that a purely rational moral agent is an agent who '... omits all empirical desires, motives, urges, inclinations, or preferences and all considerations of the agent's capacities and resources for achieving ends'.<sup>33</sup> In other words, a purely rational moral agent does not determine itself to act on the basis of any empirical factor that pertains to a particular individual agent. Therefore, such a moral agent does not act according to what a desire, inclination, feeling or a sentiment would dictate.

If this is the case, then what exactly is the principle that a purely rational agent acts on? Nothing other than the categorical imperative: 'Act only in accordance with that

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<sup>31</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, Marry J. Gregor, ed. & trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 164.

<sup>32</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, Marry J. Gregor, ed. & trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 155.

<sup>33</sup> Kenneth R. Westphal, *How Hume & Kant Reconstruct Natural Law: Justifying Strict Objectivity without Debating Moral Realism* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2016), 68.

maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.’<sup>34</sup> Kant thinks that this principle actually takes the form of an imperative when it is applied to beings that can be determined to act by empirically given motives like us. But when it is understood as the practical law of a purely rational being, it is a descriptive principle. So the fundamental principle of pure practical reason describes how a purely rational moral agent acts. A purely rational moral agent always acts in such a way that he is guided by maxims that can also always count as universal laws. The crucial point here is that in order for a maxim to be counted as a principle of universal legislation, it must be capable of being followed not only by the particular moral agent who holds it but also by all other rational beings that it universally applies to. Therefore, a purely rational moral agent recognizes whether an action is universalizable or not by considering whether the maxim guiding the action can be consistently endorsed by all other rational agents in the relevant situations.

An essential part of what it is to act on the basis of maxims that can be expected to be followed by all rational beings is to justify one’s actions by appealing only to factors that can be endorsed by other rational beings. In other words, a purely rational moral agent justifies his actions in terms of those considerations that all rational parties can be expected to endorse. This means that a pure rational moral agent is an agent who justifies his actions without making a reference to contingent empirical states including sentiments because these states cannot be expected to be shared by all rational moral agents. It is perfectly possible to have moral agents who have conflicting moral feelings in relation to an action. Their mutual endorsement would be solely out of contingent factors including the social context of upbringing.

Now, our question is whether Kant’s moral philosophy can provide us with a ground for an inclusive moral dialogue in which no one is excluded because of a contrary feeling she has. The answer is yes. As we just saw, purely rational moral agents justify their actions on the basis of considerations that every rational party can be expected to endorse. The crucial implication of this point is that as long as a particular moral agent is a rational moral agent, she justifies her moral judgments by appealing only to considerations that can be expected to be mutually endorsable. Hence, as rational moral agents when we engage in a moral dialogue where there is a conflict between our moral judgments, we follow the principle that demands that if we are to justify a moral judgment in a moral dialogue, we appeal only to reasons that can be expected to be endorsed by each party in the dialogue. This principle rules out appeals to feelings as a ground of our judgments. Feelings and sentiments cannot be expected to be shared by each rational party.

Because it develops a moral principle which omits appeals to feelings that cannot be expected to be shared by each and every moral agent in a moral dialogue and which demands that our moral judgments be mutually endorsable, Kant’s moral philosophy lays a common basis for different moral agents who have different social backgrounds and different sets of sentiments towards the same action to engage in a moral conversation. According to Kant’s moral philosophy, the fact that the parties in a moral dialogue are from different cultures with different moral feelings is simply not important. As long as they appeal to mutually endorsable reasons for their claims as rational beings, they are included in the same moral dialogue.

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<sup>34</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, Marry J. Gregor, ed. & trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 73.

## V. Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to show that even though Hume's naturalist account of moral judgment may look like a better approach to moral judgment than the rationalist alternatives including Kant's, it is incapable of showing how we will engage in moral dialogues given the fact that we are members of different cultures and societies that promote different and often conflicting sentiments about moral problems. It seems that if we construe the nature of moral judgment in terms of affective mental states such as sentiments, then we should better give up the possibility of engaging in moral dialogues about social and political problems which would include all concerned parties from different societies.

As I mentioned in the second part, we expect moral philosophy to provide us with a basis on which we can address moral and political problems that concern all of us even though we belong to different societies with different cultures. Kant's rationalist account of moral judgment is much more promising in providing us with that common basis and in this sense superior to Hume's ethical theory. And because it can provide this basis, Kant's moral philosophy also gives us reasons to be optimistic about the possibility of engaging in moral dialogues despite all the differences in our emotional reactions towards moral problems. As a rationalist account, Kant's theory of moral judgment gives a central place to reason and this emphasis on reason is also an emphasis on something that is common to each and every one of us. But reason is common to all of us not in the same way that sentiments are. Reason is common to all of us in the sense that it is the source of a normative principle that applies to and applied by each human being regardless of her affective states. When we follow that principle we appeal to rational considerations that another moral agent can be expected to endorse, not to affective argument-stoppers.