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# The Primacy of the Passions[1]

ABSTRACT: Value is not perceived as the empirical world is perceived but is constituted by the order and structure reflection and deliberation impose upon desires - the passions in our souls - that furnish the basic currency of evaluative and normative thought both as input ("intuition") and output (considered normative judgements). Perception, like our other cognitive resources, is nonetheless shaped and informed by the passions in our soul as they in turn shape and inform it. Evaluative reason and justification is driven by our passions and ultimately grounded in them. While locally we generally desire things because they are valuable, globally, in the last analysis, they are valuable because we (at our best) desire them. Here the role of desire is grounding and global but it is still not Archimedean: it is not a matter of raw, brute desire but of evaluation informed by all the substantive ideals from which the whole complex web of our evaluative and normative thought itself is woven.

KEYWORDS: Value; Desire; Reason; Perception; Moral epistemology.

James Lenman

## 1.

This afternoon I rather fancy going for a walk. So I'm going for a walk. If my friend Septimus fancies coming along he may very well do so. As well as going for walks Septimus is quite partial to watching old westerns on TV with his friend Olivia. Happily it's a partiality Olivia shares and so that is what they will be doing this very evening.

Perhaps I shouldn't. Perhaps Septimus shouldn't. Perhaps Olivia shouldn't. Perhaps I am supposed to be teaching all afternoon. Perhaps Septimus promised his wife he would stop seeing Olivia. Perhaps Olivia promised her probation officer she would stop seeing Septimus.

But perhaps no such defeating conditions obtain. What more then do I, do Septimus and Olivia need to do, as responsible autonomous agents, to justify acting as we do, going for a walk, watching The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance?Not, surely, a whole lot. It's natural to think that if I want to go for a walk or watch a western that normally just about suffices, absent defeaters, to make it a good idea, to do so.

"Normally" is important. One way things might fail to be normal is if certain general considerations of coherence fail to obtain.[2] Often, though certainly not always, a desire to do something is linked to a belief that, when I do it, I will like doing it.[3] If such a belief turns out false there is normally a problem. I watch a TV show about skiing and think, That looks fun. I want to do that, So I book myself a skiing holiday and can't wait to go. Then I do go and, it turns out, I hate it. It's cold. It's frightening. The food is awful. The people ghastly. I made a

[1] Conversations with Anna Bergqvist and Luca Barlassina have helped me immensely. So have comments by Chris Bennett, Robert Cowan and Valerie Tiberius

[2] For more detailed thoughts about the coherence and stability of pleasure and desire see Lenman 2011.

[3] See Lenman 2011, p. 146.

mistake. Skiing is not for me. That is familiar enough. We all make those sort of mistakes in life.

Something odder, rather less normal, would be if I didn't entertain the false belief that I would enjoy skiing. I confidently expect to hate it. Puzzled you press me, So why do you want to go? Perhaps for some instrumental reason as I subject myself to other disagreeable experiences – visits to the dentist, say – for instrumental reasons? No, I say, I just want to. Then my desire looks odd, fetishistic, arbitrary, like a random desire to turn on a radio, not for the sake of the music and the pleasure of hearing it, just for the sake of turning it on.[4]

On a good day our desires are reasonably stable over time. At six I want to listen to Just a Minute on the radio at half six. At six fifteen I still want to do this. Tuning in a half past I still want to do this. And now, at six forty-five, listening away, this still what I want to be doing. Of course when we've got hold of the desired thing talk of desire may become a little strained. We most often speak of desiring things we lack. Once we see the desired state of affairs has come into being we speak of liking it or welcoming it rather than desiring it. But I think it's harmless enough to abstract a little. We say I want to go for a walk and then I like going for a walk. Or we can say I'm all for going for a walk before I go and, when it lives up to expectations, still all for it when it is under way. Going for my walk, I am doing what I want to be doing.[5]

There's certainly a pro-attitude, a desire broadly construed (and I will for the most part be construing "desire" very broadly to cover all the passions in our soul), that's stably present across this process at those times when things go well. I want now to have then what I expect still to want then and thenceforth. This is a basic kind of coherence deriving from the interest I take at any time in how it is with me at other times. If my six o'clock self cares about my six forty five self, then he's ordinarily unlikely to desire something for himself that he will then hate. If he doesn't care, it would be odd if he bothered forming desires about what radio shows six forty-five me shall or shall not listen to. Unless perhaps my six o'clock self has some spiteful desire that my six forty-five self have an unpleasant time. That would be rather an odd way for a human being to be. I don't much want to be like that.

More generally a desire I have at a given moment to do this or that can conflict with a more global desire to be a certain kind of person or live a certain kind of life. I wake up every morning with a desire to lounge around in bed till midday. And I truly expect to enjoy lounging around in bed till midday. But I don't want to be the sort of guy who is given to lounging around in bed till midday. So I make myself get up. (Well, on a good day.) But for such short-term, morally innocent desires as desires to take walks or watch westerns, such ideals of the person don't necessarily kick in.

Of course the mere fact that you want to do something is not much of a reason to do it. I have a lot of desires many of them very weak or very transitory. I have desires from which I am more or less alienated and view with disapprobation and disgust. A desire needs to be of

[4] Quinn 1993.
[5] Cf. Oddie's discussion of the"Platonic thesis", 2005, pp. 70-72.

significant strength and reasonably durable to have much claim on my attention. And it needs to cohere with my values and ideals. Taking walks and watching westerns seems to be good stuff to be doing, for all sorts of reasons, better ways to pass the time than poisoning pigeons or watching porn. One might perhaps insist that desires should have no normative weight at all.[6] I want to read Madame Bovary and I should read it, not because I want to but because it is likely – as I have abundant testimony-based reason to believe to – very good. Indeed it is for that reason I want it and it is that reason and not that my wanting it that gives me reason to do it. This thought is certainly on to something. As we've seen I want my pro-attitudes to what I'm going to do to cohere with my pro-attitudes to what I'm doing now and my pro-attitudes to what I've done. I ordinarily want the things I want to be things that, when they happen, I welcome or enjoy and that, after they happened, I don't regret. But when this stability and coherence is in place, it seems hard to deny some normative weight to what I firmly and stably desire. It is important to most of us that the world conform as much as can realistically be hoped to our pro-attitudes even if we resist the fallacy, popular with some economists, of thinking that is all that matters. If Lewis really wants, and has for some time really wanted, to climb Snowdon, then Lewis has a reason to climb Snowdon, more of a reason than Louise who has no such desire even though the inherent worthwhileness of climbing Snowdon may give them both some reason to do so. Climbing all the Munros is a wonderfully worthwhile project and many people want to do it for that reason. But it would be an odd project to undertake just for that reason if you have no desire to. Indeed, still using "desire" broadly to cover any pro-attitude, an attitude with world-word direction of fit, it would be quite odd to deny all such attitudes any measure of normative weight. If you love to cook but hate to clean and your spouse has the opposite attitudes to those, it's pretty obvious what domestic division of labour will make most sense for you both and why.

2.

When we do epistemology we worry that justification is subject to a regress problem. As an epistemically responsible believer I might expect to be invited to justify my belief that Z and I might seek to justify it by invoking some other belief that Y that I take to warrant it. But why believe that? Well, maybe because X. But then… Of course there are three familiar ways to go now. One has it that this chain of justification stops somewhere, one that it goes on forever, and one that it goes round in a big circle. There are problems of course with all three of these possibilities and talking about them makes up quite a lot of epistemology.

One nice strategy is that sometimes at least the regress bottoms out with desires, mental states that do not aim to fit the world and so don't themselves call for epistemic justification. If the universe is to remain well-behaved enough for inductive reasoning to make sense, then it makes sense to use it but we'll find ourselves in the soup if we don't if we don't. If it is not, we'll be in the soup whatever we do. We don't want to be screwed. So let's use it. If I have a lot more to gain, given my preferences, by believing God to exist should he do so than I have to lose by falsely so believing should he not. So, given my preferences, it makes sense to believe. Not believing you all have minds if you do would be a bigger disaster for me, again

[6] Cf. Parfit, 2011, volume 1, chapter 3.

given my preferences, than believing you do if you don't. So it's rational to take that gamble.[7] But there's always a worry here that epistemic reasoning, the business we're in when we seek to justify beliefs, demands epistemic reasons, not the more pragmatic kind of rationale supplied by speaking to our desires or preferences. Indeed there can seem to be something a bit disreputable about such pragmatic reasons. We may insist we want epistemic reasons for beliefs, reasons that speak directly to the truth of the thing to be believed to think things are true. However when we are concerned the normative domain, with practical reason this worry might seem less stark. Practical reason, especially on a roughly Humean picture of it, helps us to figure out how best to serve ends that our desires largely shape so what more natural place than desire for us to seek its ultimate ground.

3.

Beliefs have two big problems. They turn out to be wrong, misrepresenting the world. And they conflict with each other. Epistemic reason is how we try to respond to and fix those problems. Desires have, to begin with, one big problem. They conflict. Practical reason is how we respond to that. Reflective critical normative thought of the kind that takes us beyond mere problem-solving intelligence has these two problem, conflict and error, as its parents. But with practical thought, plausibly, conflict is the more fundamental of the two.

In thinking about practical conflict, we turn naturally for inspiration to Frankfurt and his rich descriptions of the hierarchical character of desire.[8] There are the desires with which I identify, the desires which I disown, the things I want which I want to want, the things I want which I do not want to want or am indifferent to wanting. If I can cure my mild shortsightedness by taking a pill that will relieve me of my weakness for lemonade I will take the pill like a shot. If I can cure it by taking a pill that will relieve me of my love of the operas of Britten or of my friend Alice's company, I will abstain and continue to put up with wearing specs. I highly value being someone who loves Billy Budd and Alice's daft sense of humour. I'm not especially wedded to being a lemonade-drinker. There are features of my complex endowments of desires and aversions, loves and hates that I embrace, others I repudiate and disown. There are passions in my soul that I reflectively endorse, others I reflectively reject. Indeed it is natural to suppose that such reflective endorsement when it is decisively wholehearted and stable, is what valuing is.[9] That thought in turn invites an expressivist picture where what judgements of value express is just such states, stable higher order desires and/or ground floor desires ratified at the court of stable reflection.

Some are unimpressed by this picture. What, they demand to know, is so special about higher-order desires? What could endow them with any special authority? But this challenge, famously levelled by Gary Watson, seems to me one we can meet.[10] The thing to remember is where we began, with the problem of conflict. Pre-reflectively, my desires are a chaotic bloody mess. I want to stick in here and keep writing this paper. I want to go home and watch

[7] Pascal 1670, pp. 355ff, Reichenbach 1938, chapter 5, Lenman 1994.
[8] Frankfurt 1988.
[9] Cf. e.g. Lewis 1989.
[10] Watson 1975.

the snooker. I want to order all the dishes on the menu, stay slim and save money. I want to be a rebellious free spirit. I want the contentment and security of stable bourgeois respectability. Post-reflectively, I'm sorry to inform you, I still want all these things. The ground floor of the structure that is my hierarchy of desires is irreparably disorderly and it is always going to be. So is yours. So is everybody's. It might be otherwise were we very different kinds of animals but we're not and it's not. That's human condition stuff. The higher stories, however, are, or at least can be made, more orderly. It's a humanly realistic aspiration to arrive at a pattern of reflectively sanctioned, wholehearted desires, at what we might call an evaluative sensibility, that is at least tolerably coherent. *That's* what's special about the higher order.[11]

But even when I stably and wholehearted endorse some wanting or liking of mine, there is a possibility that that stability might break down in the light of further, or better, reflection, ("better" here taken as expressive of my evaluative sensibility as a whole). Were I more like the kind of person I am disposed, stably under reflection, to want to emulate and admire, a person, that is, who is, by my lights, virtuous, I might not value what I now value. The valuings I am most confident about are those I am most confident will pass this test. The worry that some of my evaluations might fail it is readily to be understood as the worry that they might be wrong or, as we might say, false. And so begins the familiar transition from old school Stevensonian expressivism to quasi-realism. Normative facts and properties enter the scene at this point; truth and error. Desires speak or fail to speak to desires. Values serve or fail to serve values. Standards kick in and with them the kind of systematic normative discipline that permits evaluative utterances to behave, syntactically and logically, like assertions. When all this happens a space of desire comes to determine a space of reasons, of considerations that speak to the desires we endorse and embrace.

On the Humean view I defend[12], a space of reasons is a space of desires where the latter are the desires of a creature with a reasonably stable affective psychology that engages in reflection and deliberation in an effort to resolve the problem presented to it by the fact of conflict. And that creature, or one of those creatures, has got to be me. From a detached third personal perspective, there is nothing more going on than the unfolding of prosaically descriptive psychological facts. Normativity enters the picture when these psychological facts are facts about me, when I am myself the creature – or one of the creatures – who inhabits this psychology and seeks to direct his action wisely enough to shape a life that will bear his survey. Reasons are desires seen from inside, desires that, from their bearers' perspective are apt to confer importance on their objects, not least when they express deep features of our natures such as our instinct for self-preservation and our sociability. Only as the subject of a space of desires does one feel the volitional pull, the magnetism that Humeans take to lie at the heart of normativity.

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[11] I think this thought – or something very close to it - is at work in Bratman's very rich discussions of Frankfurt and Watson. See his 2007, especially essays 3 and 10, especially section 7 of the latter.

[12] See further Lenman 2009A, Lenman 2009B, Lenman 2010.

Once we are in this business, desire moves, in large measure into the background of deliberation[13] and it is reason, not desire, that structures our thought. Now evaluation and desire can diverge in ways that allow us to distinguish deliberative normative weight from motivational strength. The unwilling addict's[14] reflective endorsement of his desire for health and clean living assigns it a priority over his desire for narcotics despite the latter being too strong to resist.[15] The backgrounding of desire also makes way for objectivity. Normative and evaluative thought pursued over years and generations endows us with complex normative and evaluative sensibilities that respect the kind of objectivity that insists that, while judgements of value may express desires, desires nonetheless do not determine values. My evaluative sensibility is constituted by a complex, aspiringly coherent set of reflectively endorsed desires. In having it I take certain things to be important and take their importance not to depend on my so taking them.[16] So that my sensibility, while constituted by desires may or may not accord desires as such any normative significance. Chances are it will accord a good deal to some, but none at all to others.

4.

Now an imaginary reader might object that in saying what I just said I have gone back on what I said at the beginning. All that stuff in section 1 about wanting to do something as a reason for doing it. All that stuff in section 2 about desires as termini for justification. Didn't I just, in the last paragraph, take it all back.

No. I stand by section 1. Absent all kinds of things that might act as defeating conditions, morally innocent, short term desires like the desire to go for a walk or watch a western, can give us reasons to act on them. That's a very weak, very modest claim. It's not the claim that reasons talk reduces to talk of desires or talk of what would satisfy desires. That claim is a species of reductive naturalism that I just rejected. It is a view that is widely argued against on the grounds that (a) it analyses normative claims in ways that strips away their normativity and (b) it has repellent substantive consequences about what reasons people might have or might lack, for example that someone who is indifferent to future agony would have no reason to avoid it.[17] My expressivist view has no such consequences. As I stressed in the preceeding section, it contrasts with any reduction of normative and evaluative talk to prosaically descriptive third person talk about our psychology precisely in capturing the dynamic, practical significance so plausibly essential to the former. And it has little or nothing by way of substantive normative consequences, repellent or otherwise. If I think you have reason to avoid the future agony to which you are indifferent, the fact of your indifference does not make me wrong to think that.

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[13] Cf. Pettit and Smith 1990.
[14] Frankfurt 1988, essay 2.
[15] A useful discussion of deliberative weight from an expressivist standpoint is Gibbard 2003, pp.188-191.
[16] See Blackburn 1984, pp. 217-220.
[17] See e.g. Parfit 2011, chapters 3 and 24.

However the claim about the normative significance of desire in section 1 is a substantive claim internal to normative talk. It is not a claim that attributes some kind of Archimedean significance to desire. It's not a claim that is part of or that is implied by the metaethical position articulated in section 3. And yet I do want to claim, as I did in section 3, that ultimately desire, the passions in our souls, is the source of normativity. And I do want to claim, as I did in section 2, that desire is where justification, ultimately starts. How and in what sense? I'll address that question in the final section of this paper.

5.

Do we perceive value? It is widely supposed that we do and in various ways. Desires.[18] Emotions.[19] Moral intuition.[20] Regular sensory perception.[21] All these have been proposed as ways this is meant to happen.[22]

Sensory perception might certainly do the trick if we were reductive naturalists about value. On that view, evaluative and normative questions are straightforwardly empirical questions to be addressed in the very same way as empirical questions of other kinds. And perhaps also if we are nonreductive naturalists about value.[23] Thus Richard Boyd famously asks: "What plays in moral reasoning, the role played in science by observation?" and responds, "I propose the answer: 'Observation'."[24] But such empiricist views seem unpromising to me. In the light of a given substantive normative or moral perspective, certain moral questions may indeed reduce to empirical questions, Which options best promote human welfare? Or whatever. But it is much harder to envisage straightforwardly empirical ways of confirming or measuring the truth of the substantive perspectives such reductions inevitably presuppose, at least it is hard if our warrant for putting our trust in any test we apply is to be sufficiently independent of the very thing we are testing for the test to be at all meaningful.[25]

Moral intuition, as understood by the more robust species of realist, is readily viewed with some suspicion, a dubious appeal to a poorly understood and desperately underdescribed species of, in effect, extra sensory perception whereby we somehow just "see" that we can turn this lethally targeted trolley this way in this case but not in that case. As Gibbard writes, "If this is what anyone seriously believes I simply want to debunk it. Nothing in a plausible, naturalistic picture of our place in the universe requires these non-natural facts and these powers of non-sensory apprehension."[26] And while many philosophers do continue to accord intuition a central role in the methodology of normative ethical thought, this role has long

[18] Oddie 2005.
[19] Döring 2003.
[20] Huemer 2005.
[21] Boyd 1988, Audi 2013.
[22] The critical survey of these ideas that follows is very quick and dirty. For one that is slow and painstaking see Cowan 2011 (his criticisms are not the same as mine).
[23] Boyd 1988, Brink, 1989. The position defended by Oddie 2005 seems to me to be a kind of non-reductive naturalism.
[24] Boyd 1998, p. 124.
[25] See Zangwill 2008, Lenman 2013 for more detailed versions of this thought.
[26] Gibbard 1990, p. 154. Cf. e.g. Williams 1985, p. 94.

been the target of considerable criticism and scepticism.[27] Yet, if we don't embrace the Harean optimism that the whole edifice of our normative and evaluative can be constructed on the slender basis of "logic and the facts"[28], it can seem hard to see how we could hope simply to dispense with it.

I have myself defended a role in moral inquiry for intuitions where these are understood, along expressivist lines, as, in the first analysis[29], desires rather than as beliefs or as quasi-perceptual seemings. More precisely, I have defended a conception of moral intuitions as attitudes of unwillingness. So when I say I have a strong intuition that killing children for fun is wrong I express an unwillingness to accept or conform to any set of rules for the regulation of my community that permits members of that community to kill children for fun. This unwillingness is important to me and it is affirmed wholeheartedly. It resounds, as Frankfurt would say, through the higher orders.[30] This is a good theory because it demystifies intuition. It doesn't regard intuition as a mysterious species of extra sensory perception that puts us in touch with a domain of values constituted prior to and independently of our engagement with it. Indeed it doesn't regard intuition as a species of perception at all. It is also a good theory because it helps us to see why intuition is important in moral inquiry. Moral inquiry is, most centrally, the practice in which we deliberate together about how to live with one another in moral community. When we arrive at the table of codeliberation sharing confident intuitions, they can be, as it were, banked, as considerations that will shape and constrain further reflection, not ordinarily to be supposed open to revision. Less confident intuitions are nearer the periphery of the web and may be more readily up for revision but will still have a shaping and constraining role to play. When I arrive at the table with an intuition you don't share, that's something, if our project of moral community is to succeed, that you need to respect and engage with, seek to reason me out of, be open to reason yourself into, accommodate, work around, in any case, not disregard. The foregoing picture of moral epistemology is of course a highly moralized one but that should neither surprise nor concern us. Moral epistemology need not and should not aspire to moral neutrality.[31]

That leaves the passions in our souls, emotions and desires.[32] These certainly frequently respond appropriately to the value we encounter in our lives. The smell of curry flooding the street as I pass the restaurant brings on a craving to eat some. I respond to your kindness with love and, much later perhaps, having come to love you, respond to your death with grief. That said, they very frequently do not so respond. The teenage palate doesn't see anything to like in the taste of Bruichladdich. We see plenty. The crowds who line the street cheering the tyrant think they are looking at moral greatness. They are not. A good deal of emotion and desire misperceives value. Sometimes they do match up nicely but they only do so reliably and pervasively if one is a perfect phronimos and none of us, alas, can claim to be is one of

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[27] See e.g. Hare 1971, Brandt 1979, Posner 1999, Singer 2005, Appiah 2008, chapter 3, Kelly and McGrath 2010. I discuss some of these critics in Lenman 2007, Lenman 2015A and Lenman 2015B.

[28] Hare 1981, pp. 6, 101ff.

[29] Only in the first analysis as (a) with expressivism there is always a quasi-realist second analysis in the offing and (b) a certain kind of finessing is likely to be needed to evade wrong kind of reason worries: not just any old unwillingness for any old reason will do.

[30] Frankfurt 1988, pp. 21, 167.

[31] Cf. Lenman 2015A.

[32] Construing "desire" broadly as I do here, I don't sharply distinguish these. Cf. Oddie's remarks in his 2005, pp. 74-78.

those. Sense perception, by contrast, is normally reliable enough and only goes wrong in special circumstances as when we are drunk or mad or the light is playing tricks on us. But our desires are constantly going off in wrong directions, forever in need of policing by reflective scrutiny.

Moreover a great many desires and emotions are not responses to their objects at all. My desire to go for a walk is not and cannot be a response to the walk I have yet to go on, even if my subsequent enjoyment of it is. Some day, *he'll come along, the man I love*, thinks Bridget yearningly, after Gershwin. But her yearning is not very readily supposed to be caused, in anything like the manner of a perception, by its object. The loved man in question, alas, has, ex hypothesi, failed, as yet, to materialise and is thus in no position to cause anything where Bridget's feelings are concerned. Of course we are normally responding to something in our experience. I have come, over the years, to know all about walks, what they are like and how they can be nice and that kind of general experiential knowledge shapes and directs the formation of my desires. But that kind of shaping over a history of experience seems much more analogous to a kind of induction than to the non-inferential immediacy we associate with perception.

If a robustly realist picture of intuition as perceptual or quasi-perceptual contact with independent evaluative or normative facts seems mysterious and poorly motivated, a similarly robustly realist understanding of emotion or desire as so placing us doesn't look like much of an improvement. It simply takes the same not very credible story and clips it onto a rather different bit of our evaluative phenomenology. When we move away from realism to some more idealist take on the evaluative things might get less mysterious but at the same time close analogies with perception will perhaps become rather less natural. Certainly on my own account our experience over our lives of emotion and desire can be expected to shape and inform our evaluative and normative sensibilities but this is more naturally unpacked as a process of self-constitution or self-interpretation than a perceptual engagement with an externally constituted evaluative reality.

6.

Do we perceive value? It may still seem very natural to suppose we do. The passions in our souls light up (and sometimes darken) the world and we experience it so illuminated (and so darkened). The sunlight on the snows of the high peaks. The paintings in the gallery. The faces and bodies of loved others. The tastes and smells of the restaurant quarter. The rich experiential landscapes of nature and art are awash with beauty and wonder and the more we explore them the more we find.

And yet the idea that we perceive value quickly comes under strain. With moral value his is perhaps especially clear. Often enough good and evil look very much the same. A case of wilful murder, carefully observed, can look exactly the same as a case of conscientious professional care. Here is a doctor administering an injection to a patient. What we see is not, on its surface, a whit different whether he is a good doctor treating her or a wicked doctor murdering her. Justice is likewise elusive. Here is a judge pronouncing a sentence. Here is a woman writing a cheque. Perhaps an injustice is being done. Perhaps a fraud is being

perpetrated. Just looking won't tell you unless you know a lot of other, offstage, facts.[33] But those too are still just facts. The vice escapes you as long as you consider the object.[34] Even with the hedonic and aesthetic cases emphasised above, it is plausibly the sentiment within the onlooker's breast by which the object is, by speaking to it, lit up. Warthogs, no doubt, sometimes look extremely sexy and alluring to other warthogs. To us they look, well, like warthogs. It's not that they can see something we can't – at least we have no reason to believe they can. They just like what they see in ways we don't.

There's a physical world out there, most of it not of our making. It's mostly constituted prior to and independent of our cognitive engagement with it. It's made of atoms. It was there before we came along and it will go on being there after we're gone. We know about it through perception, whereby it causally impacts on our receptive organs and surfaces. That's how we know to avoid the bits of it that we might bump into or that might eat us, how to find the bits that are useful or just nice. Nothing about it, considered by itself, tells us what to do. That only happens when we start to care about something. Eating. Not being eaten. Sex, money, friendship, shelter, love, beauty, truth. The things we want. The things we like. Of course our wants make themselves known to us through experience but not exactly through sensation: reflective, not original impressions.[35] Of course too our wants are not dumb, raw things. Nussbaum's "neo-Stoic" view of emotions as judgements of value is plausibly an overcorrection of the view she opposes it to that sees them as "unthinking energies that simply push the person around, without being hooked up to the ways in which she perceives or thinks about the world"[36] but the latter is certainly a view that cries out for some correction. Our passions are, or can be, intelligent things, things that inform themselves by our engaging cognitively with the world in all the myriad ways we know of engaging with the world: perception, induction, testimony, imagination (and of course that engagement with the imaginations of others that is literature and the other arts). Our passions shape and structure and informs our perceptual scrutiny of the world and it in turn shapes them.

7

It may help to consider the familiar order of explanation problem that philosophers sometimes raise about value and desire.[37] Are things valuable because we desire them or do we desire them because they are valuable? It is sometimes tempting to respond Both and urge that the dichotomy is a false one. Consider Zuleika. Zuleika is, notoriously, immensely, overwhelmingly attractive. But what makes her so? Plausibly the fact that she possesses many characteristics that many people are disposed, pervasively and stably, to find attractive. It is just our stable, pervasive and patterned habits of attraction that make these characteristics attractive ones. It's just our liking them that makes them nice. Once people have stable, pervasive and patterned habits of response and attitude, we can start to speak of things in the world as having the property of being such as to elicit such responses, the property in this

[33] Cf. Broad 1944, pp. 142-147.
[34] Hume, 3.1.1.26.
[35] Hume, 1.1.2, 2.1.1.
[36] Nussbaum 2001, pp. 24-25.
[37] See e.g. Griffin 1986, II, 3, Oddie 2015.

case, so conspicuously possessed by Zuleika, of being attractive. But now that this property is up and running we can ask the question, How are we to explain the fact that the Duke of Dorset, in particular, on this particular occasion, a dinner at Judas College, comes to be attracted to her? And in response we can invoke, informatively and non-trivially, the significant fact about Zuleika that she is attractive. So she is attractive because folk are attracted to her. And folk are attracted to her because she is attractive.

Only, you see, I cheated there. I made things too easy for myself. "Attractive" is rather weak kind of evaluative concept. It's a bit like "funny" in the sense on which something is funny if it makes us laugh even if we wish it didn't, even if we ought not to. Notoriously, in his "Proof" of the Principle of Utility Mill errs, or appears to err, in supposing "desirable" is like that. [38] ("[T]he sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable is that people do actually desire it.") Being desirable is not just being disposed to elicit desire but being such as to merit desire. So we can't surely say, in the same way, that something is desirable because we desire it or because it is the sort of thing people desire.

If we are to moralise (or valorise) one of our explanatory relata, and if we are to avoid being pressured towards reductionism, we will plausibly want to moralise (or valorise) both. It's not that it is the sort of thing people desire but that it is the sort of thing good people desire. But is it desirable because it is the sort of thing good people desire? Well, no. It's desirable because of what it is, not because of how we (even if we are good) respond. It is, let's say, a long sought peace treaty. And peace treaties are desirable. Peace treaties are desirable because they end war. And wars are undesirable because they are hugely costly in death and suffering and because they are extremely suboptimal ways of settling conflicts that are highly favourable to power and largely indifferent to justice. And justice is desirable because… And so the story goes on. Its desirability is a matter of its place in the whole Big Web of reasons and values, not the mere fact that it triggers some psychological response. So do good people desire it because it is desirable? Well, yes, of course they do. But we needn't understand that as a perceptual process where the good people "see" its value, simply as one where they see it clearly for what it is and bring their evaluative sensibilities to bear on it. The Big Web is made of desires but it is not always very immediately interested in them. It is interested in justice and peace and the avoidance of suffering and a million other things. That's what pushes desire into the background amplifying the quasi-realist turn in favouring the realist side of the order of explanation question. Locally at least, we desire things because they are valuable but not vice versa.

## 8.

The Big Web is awfully big. It's the space of reasons constituted by the whole of my moral sensibility. In fact it is really much bigger even than that. Evaluative and normative thought is not something we do on our own. Moral inquiry, particularly but by no means peculiarly, is dialogical. It's a conversation we have with the rest of our community about how that

[38] Mill 1861, chapter 4.

community should be ordered and what goods it should pursue. And that conversation does not start now, from here, but has been going on for as long as there have been people to conduct it. It is shaped by centuries of tradition that we have no hope, should we want to, of stepping outside and starting anew. Not least because it has "thickened" our very conceptual repertoire, shaping the most basic verbal tools we have to reflect on justice, generosity, fidelity, integrity, nobility, and everything else that is important to us. Our sensibility is ineliminably shaped by our communities and by our histories even when we bring it to bear on critical reflection on the often dubious practices of those very communities and the often ugly barbarities that often disfigure those very histories. That is why so much of the best work in contemporary metaethics emphasises the central role in moral theorising not of perception but of interpretation.[39] Such work often represents itself as hostile to the kind of Humean picture I offer here but it needn't be. The two are not opposed. Understanding the evaluative as intimately linked to and ultimately expressive of the passions in our soul should not lead us into what we might call the Existentialist Fallacy that the process of normative self-constitution is something to be undertaken ex nihilo right now from a standing start. It isn't and cannot be like that. It's a project we inherit and pass on.

9.

By the Big Web then I mean human evaluative sensibility, or at least human evaluative sensibility at its best. It is, as I have said, awfully big. Almost all the time we are inside it, engaging with the space of reason with desire in the background. Why is it justice good? Because I like it? No, silly. Justice is good because we are social animals and it allows us to live together in orderly, peaceably communities sharing the benefits of cooperation on terms acceptable to us all. Or whatever. And so on. Inside the space of reasons, the currency is reasons. It's a space animated by the passions in our souls but so unobtrusively we barely notice and the practice of normative inquiry is almost exactly as the most robust of realists would say it should be. Our passions furnish the very fabric of our thought but it is not about our passions or at least not about them in particular.

But we may distinguish global and local questions. The local questions are the ones we ask and seek to answer inside the Big Web inhabiting the complex evaluative sensibilities we bring to bear on them. We ask them all the time every day, big questions and small. What is a just society? Where shall I do this weekend? Here, inside the Web, the epistemology is coherentist as we seek to shape and order our thoughts towards something like reflective equilibrium. Then there is the global question, not about any part of the Big Web but about the whole damn thing. Looking at the Whole Thing in its totality, we want to ask, What justifies that? This, it seems to me, is the point where desire comes out of the background and even the quasi-realist has to qualify their line on mind-independence. This is where we say, You know what: it's just us[40]. It's just what we wholeheartedly want, drawing its authority simply from our willingness to embrace and endorse it. And that's us all right, for from this supremely comprehensive perspective what want is who we are: Just us humans in all our

[39] See e.g. Hurley 1989, Dworkin 2011.
[40] Pace, of course, Nagel 1999.

stark contingency and the best moral sense we can make of our world given the kind of beasts we are and the kind of stuff we care about. It's just us but we, at our best, we suppose, by our own lights, are not so bad. We can be, we often enough are, quite horrible, but taken at our best, we find, or hope to find, ourselves able to embrace being who we are. Inside the Big Web the epistemology is coherentist but there is a foundational story to tell about the whole thing that comes to an end with the brute contingency of what we care about, comprehensively considered and our basic willingness to embrace and affirm our being that way.[41] Locally we desire things because they are valuable but globally, in the last analysis, they are indeed valuable because we (at our best) desire them. Here the role of desire is grounding and global but it is still not Archimedean: it is not a matter of raw, brute desire but of evaluation informed by all the substantive ideals from which the web itself is woven. Even when we tell our foundational story we remain inside the web. Outside it there is normatively speaking nothing to say. The passions in our souls light up the world and we find on reflection that, so lit, it is not a bad place to be and we will be sorry to leave it. Or let's hope we do. If we don't we have a problem philosophy cannot solve.

[41] Even Dworkin comes close to recognising this: "External scepticism should disappear from the philosophical landscape. We should not regret its disappearance. We have enough to worry about without it. We want to live well and to behave decently, we want our communities to be fair and good and our laws to be wise and just." 2011, p. 68.

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