On Three Defenses of Sentimentalism

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ABSTRACT: This essay shows that a moral sense or moral sentiments alone cannot identify appropriate morals. To this end, the essay analyzes three defenses of Francis Hutcheson's, David Hume's, and Adam Smith's moral sense theories against the relativism charge that a moral sense or moral sentiments vary across people, societies, cultures, or times. The first defense is the claim that there is a universal moral sense or universal moral sentiments. However, even if they exist, a moral sense or moral sentiments alone cannot identify appropriate morals. The second defense is to adopt a general viewpoint theory, which identifies moral principles by taking a general viewpoint. But it needs to employ reason, and even if not, it does not guarantee that we identify appropriate morals. The third defense is to adopt an ideal observer theory, which draws moral principles from sentimental reactions of an ideal observer. Yet it still does not show that a moral sense or moral sentiments alone can identify appropriate morals.

KEY WORDS: Ethics, Hume, Hutcheson, ideal observer, moral relativism, moral sense, moral sentiment, reason, Smith, universalism.

1. Introduction

This essay shows that a moral sense or moral sentiments alone cannot identify appropriate morals. To this end, I analyze three defenses of Francis Hutcheson's, David Hume's, and Adam Smith's moral sense theories against the relativism charge that a moral sense or moral sentiments vary across people, societies, cultures, or times.[1] The first defense is the claim

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[1] Prior to Hutcheson, the third Earl of Shaftesbury used the term 'moral sense' in writing. Hutcheson borrows the term from him. See Shaftesbury (2001: II, 27). This essay does not discuss Shaftesbury's moral sense theory since he does not much talk about the moral sense in his theory. Hutcheson thinks that we perceive moral good (virtue) or moral evil (vice) in actions by the moral sense, which is an extra sense beyond the five senses. Smith dismisses the idea of the moral sense. He introduces the idea of moral sentiments, which

that there is a universal moral sense or universal moral sentiments. I argue that even if they exist, a moral sense or moral sentiments alone cannot identify appropriate morals. The second defense is to adopt a general viewpoint theory, which identifies moral principles by taking a general viewpoint. I argue that it needs to employ reason, and that even if not, it does not guarantee that we identify appropriate morals. The third defense is to adopt an ideal observer theory, which draws moral principles from sentimental reactions of an ideal observer. I argue that it still does not show that a moral sense or moral sentiments alone can identify appropriate morals.

2. A Universal Moral Sense and Universal Moral Sentiments

Some argue that a moral sense or moral sentiments vary across people, societies, cultures, or times.[2] If the relativism charge is true, a moral sense or moral sentiments alone cannot identify appropriate morals. Yet it is possible to interpret Hutcheson, Hume, Smith, and James Wilson as claiming that there is a universal moral sense or universal moral sentiments.

Hutcheson holds that the moral sense is originally implanted in us, and it is universal. He writes,

> The Universality of this moral Sense, and that it is antecedent to Instruction, may appear from observing the Sentiments of Children, upon hearing the Storys with which they are commonly entertain'd as soon as they understand Language. They always passionately interest themselves on that side where Kindness and Humanity are found; and detest the Cruel, the Covetous, the Selfish, or the Treacherous. How strongly do we see their Passions of Joy, Sorrow, Love, and Indignation, mov'd by these moral Representations, even tho there has been no pains taken to give them Ideas of a Deity, of Laws, of a future State, or of the more intricate Tendency of the universal Good to that of each Individual! (Hutcheson 2008: 146–47)

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spring from sympathy with, want of sympathy with, or antipathy to an agent's motives, sympathy with the gratitude or resentment of a receiver (the one affected by the agent's action), and so on. Hume employs both the terms 'moral sense' and 'moral sentiment.' They are almost synonymous in his theory. They spring from sympathy with a receiver's feelings toward an action itself and its effects. Elsewhere, analyzing their theories from other perspectives, I show that the moral sense or moral sentiments in those theories alone cannot identify appropriate morals. See Iwasa (2010), (2011b).

[2] Some argue that Hutcheson's and Hume's theories support subjectivism. On Hutcheson's theory, see, for example, Mackie (1980: 32–35), Scott (1966: 208). Scott cites Hutcheson's following statement as evidence: "Every one judges the *Affections* of others by his own *Sense*; so that it seems not impossible that in these *Senses* Men might differ as they do in *Taste*" (Hutcheson 2002: 149). On Hume's theory, see, for example, Foot (2002: 76–80).

The fact that children with no moral education have the same moral tendencies implies that the moral sense is originally implanted in us, and it is universal. Hutcheson also points out our universal moral characteristics.

> "[A] State of *Good-will, Humanity, Compassion, mutual Aid, propagating and supporting Offspring, Love of a Community or Country, Devotion, or Love and Gratitude to some governing Mind*, is our natural State," to which we are naturally inclined, and do actually arrive, as universally, and with as much uniformity, as we do to a certain *Stature* and *Shape*. (Hutcheson 2002: 130)

Hutcheson claims that "if we form *true Opinions* of the Tendencies of Actions, and of the *Affections* whence they spring," the moral sense "is in itself *constant*, not subject to Caprice or Change" (2002: 106). Thus, in Hutcheson's view, the moral sense is universal.

Hume says that humans "cannot change their natures" (T 3.2.7.6).[3] He also remarks, "It is universally acknowledged, that there is a great uniformity among the actions of men, in all nations and ages, and that human nature remains still the same, in its principles and operations.… Mankind are so much the same, in all times and places, that history informs us of nothing new or strange in this particular. Its chief use is only to discover the constant and universal principles of human nature" (Hume 2000a: sec. 8, para. 7). Thus, Hume claims the existence of "the common principles of human nature" (T 3.2.6.9; cf. EPM 9.6[4]).

According to Hume, our moral sentiments rest on this unchangeable human nature. He says, "the sentiments of morality…are so rooted in our constitution and temper, that without entirely confounding the human mind by disease or madness, 'tis impossible to extirpate and destroy them" (T 3.1.2.8). This means that there is "uniformity in the *general* sentiments of mankind" (T 3.2.8.8n). Elsewhere Hume suggests the existence of "universal sentiments of censure or approbation" (EPM 9.8) and of "some internal sense or feeling, which nature has made universal in the whole species" (EPM 1.9). He also writes,

> The notion of morals implies some sentiment common to all mankind, which recommends the same object to general approbation, and makes every man, or most men, agree in the same opinion or decision concerning it. It also implies some sentiment, so universal and comprehensive as to extend to all mankind, and render the actions and conduct, even of the persons the most remote, an object of applause or censure, according as they agree or disagree with that rule of right which is established. (EPM 9.5)

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[3] Hume (2000b). The "3.2.7.6" refers to book 3, part 2, section 7, paragraph 6.
[4] Hume (1998). The "9.6" refers to section 9, paragraph 6.

Therefore, "we give the same approbation to the same moral qualities in *China* as in *England*" (T 3.3.1.14). In Hume's view, our moral sentiments rest on the unchangeable human nature, and they are universal.

In several places, Smith refers to universal moral sentiments. For example, violent hunger "is always indecent, and to eat voraciously is universally regarded as a piece of ill manners" (TMS I.ii.1.1).[5] A person with a strong tendency toward hatred and resentment is "the object of universal dread and abhorrence" (TMS I.ii.4.3). "Carelessness and want of oeconomy are universally disapproved of" (TMS VII.ii.3.16). Smith also implies that friendship, generosity, and charity gain "universal approbation" (TMS II.ii.1.3). Thus, nature has "adjusted our sentiments of approbation and disapprobation, to the conveniency both of the individual and of the society," so that they become universal (TMS IV.2.3). Smith holds that there are universal moral sentiments.

In *The Moral Sense*, Wilson discusses cultural relativism, which is "the argument that even our deepest moral sentiments, to say nothing of our more transient or ephemeral ones, are entirely the products of the culture in which we are raised and thus have no enduring significance outside that culture" (Wilson 1993: xii). This leads to the idea that "no universal moral rules exist in all cultures." Wilson argues against this idea.

> Take murder: in all societies there is a rule that unjustifiable homicide is wrong and deserving of punishment. To justify an exception requires making reasonable arguments. My critics will rejoin that if only *unjustifiable* homicides are wrong, and if societies differ radically in what constitutes a justification, that is tantamount to saying that there is no rule against homicide. I grant the force of their argument, but I suggest in response that the need to make an argument—to offer a justification for the killing—is itself a sign that every society attaches some weight to human life. (1993: 17)

Wilson also identifies a rule against incest as a universal moral rule. In his view, rules against unjustifiable homicide and incest are universal and not culturally specific.

Wilson argues that we have a natural moral sense which is universal and not culturally specific. Most historians, philosophers, and anthropologists are skeptical about the existence of a universal moral sense. According to Wilson, many researchers "have looked in the wrong places for the wrong things because they have sought for universal rules rather than universal dispositions" (1993: 225). "Most important human universals do not take the form of rules at all and hence are not likely to be discovered by scholars searching for rules" (1993: 18). Therefore, Wilson claims as

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[5] Smith (1982). The "I.ii.1.1" refers to part 1, section 2, chapter 1, paragraph 1.

follows: "To find what is universal about human nature, we must look behind the rules and the circumstances that shape them to discover what fundamental dispositions, if any, animate them and to decide whether those dispositions are universal" (1993: 226). Thus, Wilson distinguishes moral dispositions (moral senses) from moral rules, trying to find the universal character in the former. In part 1 of *The Moral Sense*, he discusses sympathy, fairness, self-control, and duty as universal moral dispositions.

Thus, one can interpret Hutcheson, Hume, Smith, and Wilson as claiming that there is a universal moral sense or universal moral sentiments. The next section shows that even if they exist, a moral sense or moral sentiments alone cannot identify appropriate morals.

3. The Necessity of External Standards

As we saw, it is possible to interpret Hutcheson, Hume, Smith, and Wilson as claiming that there is a universal moral sense or universal moral sentiments. In reality, however, there is a diversity of moral principles across people, societies, cultures, or times. How do those theorists explain the diversity?[6]

According to Hutcheson, the first cause of the diversity is "Different Opinions of Happiness, or natural Good, and of the most effectual Means to advance it" (Hutcheson 2008: 138). He writes,

> in one Country, where there prevails a courageous Disposition, where Liberty is counted a great Good, and War an inconsiderable Evil, all Insurrections in Defence of Privileges, will have the Appearance of moral Good to our Sense, because of their appearing benevolent; and yet the same Sense of moral Good in Benevolence, shall in another Country, where the Spirits of Men are more abject and timorous, where Civil War appears the greatest natural Evil, and Liberty no great Purchase, make the same Actions appear odious. (2008: 138–39)

Then how can we judge an action to be moral or immoral? According to Hutcheson, "the Approbation is founded on Benevolence, because of some real, or apparent Tendency to the publick Good." Our moral sense "determines us to approve Benevolence, whenever it appears in any Action, and to hate the contrary." In Hutcheson's view, "strange Crueltys practis'd toward the Aged, or Children, in certain Countrys" (2008: 139) are not in themselves evidence against the universality of the moral sense.

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[6] Although I do not introduce in the text, Wilson suggests the following causes of the diversity: "sentiments are not the sole determinants of action; circumstances—the rewards, penalties, and rituals of daily life—constrain or subvert the operation of the moral sense." Wilson (1993: 24). See also Wilson (1993: 225–26).

"[I]f they really be universally allow'd, look'd upon as innocent, and vindicated; it is certainly under some Appearance of Benevolence; such as to secure them from Insults of Enemys, to avoid the Infirmitys of Age, which perhaps appear greater Evils than Death, or to free the vigorous and useful Citizens from the Charge of maintaining them, or the Troubles of Attendance upon them" (2008: 139–40). As long as the practices stem from benevolence, they are moral. The laws "enacted by Lycurgus and Solon, of killing the deform'd, or weak, to prevent a burdensome Croud of useless Citizens" can still be moral because of "an Appearance of publick Good" (2008: 140). Hutcheson writes,

> If putting the Aged to death, with all its Consequences, really tends to the publick Good, and to the lesser Misery of the Aged, it is no doubt justifiable; nay, perhaps the Aged chuse it, in hopes of a future State. If a deform'd, or weak Race, could never, by Ingenuity and Art, make themselves useful to Mankind, but should grow an absolutely unsupportable Burden, so as to involve a whole State in Misery, it is just to put them to death. This all allow to be just, in the Case of an over-loaded Boat in a Storm. (2008: 141)

Anyway, Hutcheson holds that having the moral sense alone does not guarantee that we identify appropriate morals. He points out some causes which produce mistakes in moral judgment. Deficient reason is one of them. He says, "We may perhaps commit Mistakes, in judging that Actions tend to the publick Good, which do not; or be so stupidly inadvertent, that while our Attention is fix'd on some partial good Effects, we may quite over-look many evil Consequences which counter-ballance the Good. Our Reason may be very deficient in its Office, by giving us partial Representations of the tendency of Actions" (2008: 137). Also, Hutcheson claims that violent passions sometimes distort our moral sense.

> [S]ometimes violent Passions, while they last, will make them approve very bad Actions in a moral Sense, or very pernicious ones to the Agent, as advantageous: But this proves only, "That sometimes there may be some more violent Motive to Action, than a Sense of moral Good; or that Men, by Passion, may become blind even to their own Interest." (2008: 137–38)

On "strange Crueltys practis'd toward the Aged, or Children, in certain Countrys," Hutcheson says as follows: "If such Actions be done in sudden angry Passions, they only prove, that other Motives, or Springs of Action, may overpower Benevolence in its strongest Ties" (2008: 139). "A love of Pleasure and Ease, may, in the immediate Agents, be stronger in some Instances, than Gratitude toward Parents, or natural Affection to Children" (2008: 140). Besides, Hutcheson says, "the bad Conduct is not owing to any Irregularity in the moral Sense, but to a wrong Judgment or Opinion" (2008: 141). Thus, people sometimes make bad moral judg-

ments because of deficient reason, violent passions, love of pleasure and ease, and a wrong judgment or opinion. In his view, the moral sense is originally infallible, but some external causes can distort it.

If this is the case, some standard is necessary to identify the distortion. This standard must be different from the moral sense because the moral sense alone cannot recognize the distortion. If the moral sense alone could recognize it, there would not be the distortion from the beginning. Therefore, some external standard is necessary to identify the distortion. It follows that the moral sense alone cannot identify appropriate morals even if the undistorted moral sense can identify appropriate morals. Let us call this the identification problem.

According to Hutcheson, the second cause of the diversity of moral principles is "the Diversity of Systems, to which Men, from foolish Opinions, confine their Benevolence." He writes,

> it is regular and beautiful to have stronger Benevolence, toward the morally good Parts of Mankind, who are useful to the Whole, than toward the useless or pernicious. Now if Men receive a low, or base Opinion of any Body, or Sect of Men; if they imagine them bent upon the Destruction of the more valuable Parts, or but useless Burdens of the Earth; Benevolence itself will lead them to neglect the Interests of such, and to suppress them. (2008: 142)

In other words, Hutcheson thinks that narrow systems can distort our moral sense. Considering that Hutcheson upholds "universal Benevolence" (2008: 127), in his view, the broader a system, the better. Then some standard is necessary to identify the distortion. But the moral sense suffers from the identification problem.

According to Hutcheson, the third cause of the diversity of moral principles is "the false Opinions of the Will or Laws of the Deity."[7] The false religious beliefs have distorted our moral sense, producing "Follys, Superstitions, Murders, Devastations of Kingdoms, from a Sense of Virtue and Duty" (2008: 145). Then some standard is necessary to identify the distortion. But the moral sense suffers from the identification problem.

According to Daniel Carey, Hutcheson has another explanation for the diversity: association of ideas produces the diversity (Carey 2006: 176, 181). In fact, Hutcheson holds that custom and education, by association of ideas, can produce the diversity.

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[7] Hutcheson (2008: 144). On the three causes so far mentioned, see also Hutcheson (1755: bk. 1, chap. 5, sec. 7).

> [A]s Men who have the Sense of Tasting, may, by Company and Educa-
> tion, have Prejudices against Meats they never tasted, as unsavoury; so may
> Men, who have a moral Sense, acquire an Opinion by implicit Faith, of the
> moral Evil of Actions, altho they do not themselves discern in them any
> tendency to natural Evil; imagining that others do: or, by Education, they
> may have some Ideas associated, which raise an abhorrence without Reason.
> (Hutcheson 2008: 146)

> To define *Virtue* by *agreeableness to this moral Sense*, or describing it to be
> *kind Affection*, may appear perhaps too uncertain; considering that the Sense
> of particular Persons is often depraved by *Custom, Habits*, false Opinions,
> Company: and that some *particular kind Passions* toward some Persons are
> really pernicious, and attended with very unkind Affections toward others, or
> at least with a Neglect of their Interests. (Hutcheson 2002: 7–8)

Thus, the mere presence of "*agreeableness to this moral Sense*" or "*kind Af-
fection*" is not an enough sign of moral appropriateness because "*Custom,
Habits*, false Opinions, Company," by association of ideas, often depraves
our moral sense. According to Hutcheson, "even the *best of our Passions*
may lead us" to "the great *Calamities*, and pernicious Actions" when they
hurry us to action "by their Violence, and by the *confused Sensations*, and
fantastick Associations of Ideas which attend them" (2002: 110–11).

Still, Hutcheson thinks that the *undistorted* moral sense can identify
appropriate morals.

> We must therefore only assert in general, that "every one calls that Temper,
> or those Actions *virtuous*, which are approv'd by his *own Sense;*" and withal,
> that "abstracting from particular Habits or Prejudices, every one is so con-
> stituted as to approve every *particular kind Affection* toward any one, which
> argues no *want of Affection* toward others. And constantly to approve that
> Temper which desires, and those Actions which tend to procure the greatest
> Moment of Good in the Power of the Agent toward the most extensive Sys-
> tem to which it can reach;" and consequently, that the Perfection of Virtue
> consists in "having the *universal calm Benevolence*, the prevalent Affection
> of the Mind, so as to limit and counteract not only the *selfish Passions*, but
> even the *particular kind Affections*." (2002: 8)

Hutcheson holds that when "abstracting from particular Habits or Preju-
dices," our moral sense can identify moral virtues which desire or "tend
to procure the greatest Moment of Good in the Power of the Agent toward
the most extensive System to which it can reach." In other words, the
undistorted moral sense approves "the *universal calm Benevolence*, the
prevalent Affection of the Mind." It is possible to interpret this idea of
Hutcheson as a prototype of a general viewpoint theory and an ideal ob-
server theory, which I will discuss later.

Like Hutcheson, Smith holds that, although humans have universal moral sentiments, custom and fashion pervert them. According to Smith, "it is not concerning the general style of character and behaviour…but concerning the propriety or impropriety of particular usages" that custom and fashion "produce the greatest perversion of judgment" (TMS V.2.12). "In general, the style of manners which takes place in any nation, may commonly upon the whole be said to be that which is most suitable to its situation. Hardiness is the character most suitable to the circumstances of a savage; sensibility to those of one who lives in a very civilized society.… [T]herefore, we cannot complain that the moral sentiments of men are very grossly perverted" (TMS V.2.13).

Hutcheson and Smith hold that custom, education, and fashion can distort our moral sense or moral sentiments. Then some standard is necessary to identify the distortion. But the moral sense and moral sentiments suffer from the identification problem.

Although Hutcheson argues for the existence of a universal moral sense which "is natural, and independent on Custom and Education," he recognizes a strong objection to its existence. The objection is as follows: "That we shall find some Actions always attended with the strongest Abhorrence, even at first View, in some whole Nations, in which there appears nothing contrary to Benevolence; and that the same Actions shall in another Nation be counted innocent, or honourable." Hutcheson mentions incest as an example.

> Incest, among Christians, is abhorr'd at first appearance as much as Murder; even by those who do not know or reflect upon any necessary tendency of it to the detriment of Mankind. Now we generally allow, that what is from Nature in one Nation, would be so in all. This Abhorrence therefore cannot be from Nature, since in Greece, the marrying half Sisters was counted honourable; and among the Persian Magi, the marrying of Mothers. Say they then, may not all our Approbation or Dislike of Actions arise the same way from Custom and Education? (Hutcheson 2008: 145)

Hutcheson's answer to this objection is unsatisfactory. He claims that the abhorrence of incest "supposes a Sense of moral Good," but he also argues that the abhorrence stems from the idea of the deity.

> Now it is universally acknowledg'd to be the grossest Ingratitude and Baseness, in any Creature, to counteract the Will of the Deity, to whom it is under such Obligations. This then is plainly a moral evil Quality apprehended in Incest, and reducible to the general Foundation of Malice, or rather Want of Benevolence. Nay further, where this Opinion, "that Incest is offensive to the Deity," prevails, Incest must have another direct Contrariety to Benevolence; since we must apprehend the Incestuous, as exposing an Associate,

> who should be dear to him by the Ties of Nature, to the lowest State of Misery, and Baseness, Infamy and Punishment. (2008: 146)

If the prevalence of the opinion "that Incest is offensive to the Deity" is necessary to detest incest, we cannot draw the moral wrongness of incest from the moral sense alone. As Carey says, "the content of the moral sense now comes from the divine."[8] Hutcheson admits this point. He says, "in those Countrys where no such Opinion prevails of the Deity's abhorring or prohibiting Incest; if no obvious natural Evils attend it, it may be look'd upon as innocent" (Hutcheson 2008: 146). Later, Hutcheson changed his view on incest, and tried to provide a biological reason to oppose it.[9] Anyway, the moral sense in his theory alone cannot know whether incest is morally right or wrong.

Carey points out that, unlike Hutcheson, Hume and Smith provide historical account of the diversity, which can deal with difficult cases like incest. The historical account can defend a universal moral sense or universal moral sentiment about incest by placing various cultural responses to incest "on a continuum from savagery to civilisation" (Carey 2006: 193).

Still, the moral sense or moral sentiments in Hume's and Smith's theories alone cannot know whether incest is morally right or wrong. If historical or cultural circumstances may have distorted or may distort the universal moral sense or universal moral sentiment about incest, some standard is necessary to identify the distortion. But the moral sense and moral sentiments suffer from the identification problem.

Let us make a generalized remark on the diversity of moral principles. The diversity exists not only across people, societies, or cultures, but across times. From the perspective of moral sense theorists and moral universalists, the cause of the diversity is the following: although there is a universal moral sense or universal moral sentiments, something external can distort them. Then some standard is necessary to identify the distortion. But a moral sense and moral sentiments suffer from the identification problem.

4. The General Viewpoint Theory

The second defense of sentimentalism against the relativism charge is to adopt a general viewpoint theory, which identifies moral principles by taking a general viewpoint. This section examines this theory.

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[8] Carey (2006: 177). This seems contradictory to Hutcheson's idea that the moral sense is independent of the divine. See Hutcheson (2008: 96, 177, 181–82).

[9] Hutcheson (1755: bk. 3, chap. 1, sec. 10). See also Aldridge (1951).

Hutcheson proposes frequent reflection to deal with the diversity of moral principles. He says as follows: "When the Prejudice arises from Associations of Ideas without any natural Connection, we must frequently force our selves to bear Representations of those Objects, or the Use of them when separated from the disagreeable Idea; and this may at last disjoin the unreasonable Association, especially if we can join new agreeable Ideas to them" (Hutcheson 2008: 73). "We obtain *Command* over the *particular Passions*, principally by strengthning the *general Desires* thro frequent Reflection, and making them *habitual*, so as to obtain Strength superior to the *particular Passions*" (Hutcheson 2002: 32). We learn "just *Management* of all our Desires…by a frequent Consideration of the great *Calamities*, and pernicious Actions, to which even the *best of our Passions* may lead us, when we are rashly hurried into Action by their Violence, and by the *confused Sensations*, and *fantastick Associations* of Ideas which attend them" (2002: 110–11). "[I]t must be of the highest Importance to all, to strengthen as much as possible, by frequent Meditation and Reflection, the calm Desires either private or publick, rather than the particular Passions, and to make the *calm universal Benevolence* superior to them." According to Hutcheson, frequent reflection regulates not only "*unkind* or *destructive Affections*, our *Anger, Hatred*, or *Aversion* to rational Agents" but "*tender* and *benign Affections*, lest we should be hurried into *universal* and *absolute Evil*, by the Appearance of *particular Good*" (2002: 111).

The frequent reflection proposed by Hutcheson seems to be a rational ability. Hutcheson's theory grounds morality on the moral sense, but it does not necessarily exclude reason from moral judgment. Hutcheson says, "we judge of all our *Senses* by our *Reason*, and often correct their *Reports*" (2002: 150). "[W]e perceive *Extension, Figure, Colour, Taste*, antecedently to a Sense. All these Sensations are often corrected by *Reasoning*, as well as our *Approbations* of Actions as Good or Evil" (2002: 150–51). In section 4 of the *Illustrations upon the Moral Sense*, Hutcheson shows "*the Use of Reason concerning Virtue and Vice, upon Supposition that we receive these Ideas by a Moral Sense*" (2002: 173). There he says, "Our *Reason* does often correct the *Report of our Senses*, about the *natural Tendency* of the external Action, and corrects *rash Conclusions* about the *Affections* of the Agent." Hutcheson specifies two ways in which reason corrects our moral sense: "suggesting to its *Remembrance* its *former Approbations*, and representing the *general Sense* of Mankind" (2002: 178). Here we see the general viewpoint theory. Thus, reason plays the crucial role in Hutcheson's theory, which falls into moral relativism without it. Hutcheson says, "the absurd Practices which prevail in the World, are much better Arguments that Men have no Reason, than that they have no moral Sense of Beauty in Actions" (2008: 141).

It is possible to interpret Hume's theory as the general viewpoint theory or as the ideal observer theory. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord interprets it as the former. According to Sayre-McCord, "Hume does identify and defend a standard of moral judgment—fixed by the attitudes of one taking the general point of view—that controls for ignorance, adjusts for the distortions of perspective, and leaves to one side self-interest." Unlike a standard set by an ideal observer, this "standard supposes neither an impossible omniscience nor an angelic equi-sympathetic engagement with all of humanity."[10] According to Sayre-McCord, the general viewpoint is accessible to ordinary people, while the ideal observer's viewpoint is not.

At several places, Hume presents the general viewpoint theory. According to him, for stable moral judgment, "we fix on some *steady* and *general* points of view" (T 3.3.1.15). The spectator must "depart from his private and particular situation, and must choose a point of view, common to him with others" (EPM 9.6). "'Tis only when a character is consider'd in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil" (T 3.1.2.4). In Hume's view, "constant and universal" pleasures and interests "are alone admitted in speculation as the standard of virtue and morality. They alone produce that particular feeling or sentiment, on which moral distinctions depend" (T 3.3.1.30). Hume thinks that a moral theory is wrong if "it leads to paradoxes, repugnant to the common sentiments of mankind, and to the practice and opinion of all nations and all ages" (Hume 1987: 486).

Hume points out that we learn the general viewpoint through experience. "Experience soon teaches us this method of correcting our sentiments, or at least, of correcting our language, where the sentiments are more stubborn and inalterable" (T 3.3.1.16).[11] "The intercourse of sentiments, therefore, in society and conversation, makes us form some general unalterable standard, by which we may approve or disapprove of characters and manners" (EPM 5.42; cf. T 3.3.3.2).

Hume introduces the general viewpoint for the following reasons: First, humans naturally have "partiality" and "unequal affection." Hume says, "it appears, that in the original frame of our mind, our strongest attention is confin'd to ourselves; our next is extended to our relations and acquaintance; and 'tis only the weakest which reaches to strangers and indifferent persons" (T 3.2.2.8). Hume also calls this characteristic "*selfishness* and *limited generosity*" (T 3.2.2.16). In his view, our sympathy is

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[10] Sayre-McCord (1994: 203). John Bricke also rejects interpreting Hume's theory as the ideal observer theory. He claims that "the objective standpoint" is not the viewpoint of "some hypothetical ideal agent (or spectator)" Bricke (1988: 13–14).

[11] Here the language means expressions of sentiments in words. On the difference between correcting the sentiments and correcting the language, see Radcliffe (1994: 43).

naturally partial too. "We sympathize more with persons contiguous to us, than with persons remote from us: With our acquaintance, than with strangers: With our countrymen, than with foreigners" (T. 3.3.1.14). Second, the moral sentiments are variable. "In general, all sentiments of blame or praise are variable, according to our situation of nearness or remoteness, with regard to the person blam'd or prais'd, and according to the present disposition of our mind" (T 3.3.1.16). And the "nearness or remoteness" is changeable. "Our situation, with regard both to persons and things, is in continual fluctuation; and a man, that lies at a distance from us, may, in a little time, become a familiar acquaintance" (T 3.3.1.15). Hume also suggests that people's various pleasures and interests produce various moral sentiments. He says, "when we consider, that every particular person's pleasure and interest being different, 'tis impossible men cou'd ever agree in their sentiments and judgments, unless they chose some common point of view, from which they might survey their object, and which might cause it to appear the same to all of them" (T 3.3.1.30). Third, we cannot communicate our sentiments with one another without the general viewpoint. Hume says, "every particular man has a peculiar position with regard to others; and 'tis impossible we cou'd ever converse together on any reasonable terms, were each of us to consider characters and persons, only as they appear from his peculiar point of view" (T 3.3.1.15). Hume also says, "'twere impossible we cou'd ever make use of language, or communicate our sentiments to one another, did we not correct the momentary appearances of things, and overlook our present situation" (T 3.3.1.16).

Let us examine the limits of the general viewpoint theory. William Davie presents two different interpretations of Hume's general viewpoint: "The Conscious Effort View" and "The Unconscious Habit View." According to "The Conscious Effort View," the general viewpoint is "a cognitive achievement typically requiring a conscious effort of reason and imagination." This has resonance with the frequent reflection proposed by Hutcheson. In this view, "moral judging is a special, relatively esoteric activity, comparable perhaps to the aesthetic judgments of an art critic." According to "The Unconscious Habit View," by contrast, the general viewpoint is "largely a matter of habit (or custom)." In this view, we gain the general viewpoint "automatically and ordinarily without noticing or making any particular cognitive effort" (Davie 1998: 275). Davie argues that although there is textual evidence for both interpretations, "The Unconscious Habit View" best represents Hume's theory as a whole. In contrast, David Fate Norton would argue for "The Conscious Effort View." According to his interpretation of Hume, reason is responsible for correcting our moral sentiments.[12]

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[12] Norton (1982: 129–30). Norton also mentions several roles of reason in Hume's theory. See Norton (1982: 150–51).

If "The Conscious Effort View" is right, it follows that the moral sense or moral sentiments in Hume's theory alone cannot identify appropriate morals even if the general viewpoint represents appropriate morals. This is because we need to employ reason to take the general viewpoint.

Differently from what Davie presents, there are at least two ways of taking the general viewpoint: (1) focusing on what is common and ignore peculiarities or (2) taking the mean. For example, murder arouses a feeling of disapproval in almost all people. Thus, the general viewpoint—whether it is in the reading (1) or (2)—identifies murder as immoral. However, for example, when it comes to killing animals for human consumption and convenience, people's reactions diverge. While some feel disapproval of it, others do not. The reading (1) demands to focus on what is common. Therefore, there is no way to make a moral judgment on this issue. The reading (2) demands to take the mean. If 95 percent of people feel approval of killing animals for human consumption and convenience, while 5 percent feel disapproval of it, the mean is largely in favor of killing animals.

Even if "The Conscious Effort View" is wrong, taking the general viewpoint–whether it is in the reading (1) or (2)—does not guarantee that we identify appropriate morals. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord's following remark suggests why this is the case: "It might be that one person's heart beats more warmly in the cause of virtue than another's, but as they leave aside their own interests, and control for the distortions of perspective, they will inevitably approve of the same characters to roughly the same degree" (Sayre-McCord 1994: 226). A person may feel approval of a certain degree of some mental quality, while others do not feel approval of any degree of the quality. The reading (1) demands to ignore his view. But if the quality is moral, ignoring his view leads us away from appropriate morality. The reading (2) demands to take the mean. But if the higher degree of the quality one has, the more moral, taking the mean does not lead to appropriate morality. People may feel approval of different degrees of some mental quality. The reading (1) demands to take the lowest degree of the quality which people feel approval of in common. The reading (2) demands to take the mean. But if the higher degree of the quality one has, the more moral, the readings (1) and (2) do not lead to appropriate morality. Let us take sympathy as an example. Only a small percentage of people feel approval of a high degree of sympathy which extends not only to all humans but to animals being killed for human consumption and convenience. Since others feel approval of only less degrees of sympathy, in the readings (1) and (2), such a high degree of sympathy is not more moral than what those readings regard as moral. But extending the scope of sympathy is a sign of moral progress, as we have extended its scope to slaves in history. The more sympathetic, the more moral. In this example,

the readings (1) and (2) do not lead to appropriate morality. Thus, taking the general viewpoint—whether it is in the reading (1) or (2)—does not guarantee that we identify appropriate morals.[13]

5. The Ideal Observer Theory

The third defense of sentimentalism against the relativism charge is to adopt an ideal observer theory, which draws moral principles from sentimental reactions of an ideal observer. This section examines this theory.

Let us think about the characteristics of an ideal observer. John Rawls interprets Hume's and Smith's theories as the ideal observer theory. Rawls says, "Consider the following definition reminiscent of Hume and Adam Smith. Something is right, a social system say, when an ideally rational and impartial spectator would approve of it from a general point of view should he possess all the relevant knowledge of the circumstances. A rightly ordered society is one meeting the approval of such an ideal observer" (Rawls 1999: 161). Here we see some characteristics of an ideal observer. According to Rawls, an ideal observer has ideal rationality, impartiality, and "all the relevant knowledge of the circumstances." According to Sayre-McCord, an ideal observer is "[f]ully informed, free from prejudice, proportionately sympathetic to all humanity" (Sayre-McCord 1994: 203). Although there is some variation among theories, an ideal observer in general has impartiality and all the relevant knowledge. One may wonder whether the knowledge includes metaphysical one. I assume that it does not include metaphysical knowledge unless noted otherwise.

William Blackstone thinks it possible to interpret Hutcheson's theory as the ideal observer theory. He says, "Hutcheson continually stresses the need for impartiality in one's moral judgment and the need to weigh all the facts which indicate the consequences that a given act or policy of action would have for mankind as a whole" (Blackstone 1965: 70). According to Blackstone, the spectator in Hutcheson's theory has impartiality and all the relevant knowledge.

Hume demands that the spectator be impartial. The spectator must "depart from his private and particular situation, and must choose a point of view, common to him with others" (EPM 9.6). Hume writes,

> 'Tis therefore from the influence of characters and qualities, upon those who have an intercourse with any person, that we blame or praise him. We consider not whether the persons, affected by the qualities, be our acquaintance or strangers, countrymen or foreigners. Nay, we over-look our own

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[13] The ideas discussed in the last two paragraphs also appear in Iwasa (2011a: 332–33).

> interest in those general judgments; and blame not a man for opposing us in any of our pretensions, when his own interest is particularly concern' d. (T 3.3.1.17)

Hume also says, "Sympathy…is much fainter than our concern for ourselves, and sympathy with persons remote from us, much fainter than that with persons near and contiguous; but for this very reason, it is necessary for us, in our calm judgments and discourse concerning the characters of men, to neglect all these differences, and render our sentiments more public and social." These passages show that impartial moral judgment is possible when we judge "without regard to self, or the persons with whom we are more intimately connected" (EPM 5.42; cf. T 3.3.3.2). In this manner, we carry our moral approval "into the most distant countries and ages, and much beyond our own interest" (T 3.3.1.9).

Hume also demands that the spectator have all the relevant knowledge.

> [I]n moral deliberations, we must be acquainted, before-hand, with all the objects, and all their relations to each other; and from a comparison of the whole, fix our choice or approbation. No new fact to be ascertained: No new relation to be discovered. All the circumstances of the case are supposed to be laid before us, ere we can fix any sentence of blame or approbation. If any material circumstance be yet unknown or doubtful, we must first employ our enquiry or intellectual faculties to assure us of it; and must suspend for a time all moral decision or sentiment. While we are ignorant, whether a man were aggressor or not, how can we determine whether the person, who killed him, be criminal or innocent? (EPM App. 1.11)

Smith's theory fits more to the ideal observer theory than to the general viewpoint one. It features "the supposed impartial and well-informed spectator" (TMS III.2.32). On impartiality, Smith claims that when comparing opposite interests between us and another, "[w]e must view them, neither from our own place nor yet from his, neither with our own eyes nor yet with his, but from the place and with the eyes of a third person, who has no particular connexion with either" (TMS III.3.3). On the spectator's knowledge, Smith remarks as follows: "the spectator must, first of all, endeavour, as much as he can, to put himself in the situation of the other, and to bring home to himself every little circumstance of distress which can possibly occur to the sufferer. He must adopt the whole case of his companion with all its minutest incidents; and strive to render as perfect as possible, that imaginary change of situation upon which his sympathy is founded" (TMS I.i.4.6). The phrases "every little circumstance of distress which can possibly occur to the sufferer" and "the whole case of his companion with all its minutest incidents" mean all the relevant knowledge. Also, Smith calls the impartial spectator "demigod within the

breast" (TMS III.2.32). Considering these, it seems reasonable to call the impartial spectator an ideal observer.[14]

There is a reason to think that the impartial spectator has imperfect knowledge. According to Smith, the impartial spectator exists "within the breast" (TMS III.2.32). This limits the scope of the impartial spectator's knowledge. Alexander Broadie says, "The impartial spectator as a creature of a person's imagination has no more (nor less) information about what is to be judged than the agent, for the creature cannot be better informed than its creator" (Broadie 2006: 182). A normal person does not have all the relevant knowledge. So, the impartial spectator does not have it either. Therefore, "we can never say categorically that the impartial spectator's judgment is true (Broadie 2006: 183)." As Broadie says, Smith recognizes the impartial spectator to be fallible. Smith remarks, "There exists in the mind of every man, an idea of this kind, gradually formed from his observations upon the character and conduct both of himself and of other people. It is the slow, gradual, and progressive work of the great demigod within the breast, the great judge and arbiter of conduct….Every day some feature is improved; every day some blemish is corrected" (TMS VI.iii.25). Thus, the impartial spectator, "the great demigod within the breast" , is becoming perfect, and is not a perfect being. Broadie says, "The impartial spectator is after all only a demigod, to use the term Smith repeatedly employs, not God" (2006: 184). In this view, the impartial spectator does not have all the relevant knowledge.

Impartiality and all the relevant knowledge are not the only characteristics of an ideal observer. Roderick Firth proposes an ideal observer with the following characteristics:

(1) *Omniscient about non-ethical facts*. Firth says "non-ethical" because "the characteristics of an ideal observer must be determined by examining the procedures which we actually take to be the rational ones for deciding ethical questions; and there are many ethical questions (*viz*., questions about 'ultimate ethical principles') which cannot be decided by inference from ethical premises" (Firth 1952: 333).

(2) *Omnipercipient*. "The ideal observer must be able…simultaneously to visualize all actual facts, and the consequences of all possible acts in any given situation, just as vividly as he would if he were actually perceiving them all" (1952: 335).

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[14] Such figures as T. D. Campbell, D. D. Raphael, and James Otteson oppose interpreting Smith's theory as the ideal observer theory. They have in mind, as an example, Roderick Firth's characterization of an ideal observer, which I will introduce later. See Campbell (1971: 128–39), Otteson (2002: 58–64), Raphael (2007: 43–45).

(3) *Disinterested*. He "will not be influenced by interests of the kind which are commonly described as 'particular'—interests, that is to say, which are directed toward a particular person or thing but not toward other persons or things of the same kind" (1952: 337).

(4) *Dispassionate*. He "is dispassionate in the sense that he is incapable of experiencing…such emotions as jealousy, self-love, personal hatred, and others which are directed towards particular individuals as such" (1952: 340).

(5) *Consistent*. He "must be described in part as a being whose ethically-significant reactions are perfectly consistent with one another" (1952: 341).

(6) *Otherwise normal*. He does not "lack any of the determinable properties of human beings" (1952: 344).

If an ideal observer has not only impartiality and all the relevant knowledge but benevolence,[15] the ideal observer theory approximates Hutcheson's theory, which holds that disinterested benevolence is the universal foundation of morality. The ideal observer theory seems able to make better moral judgments than the general viewpoint theory.[16]

But the ideal observer theory still does not show that a moral sense or moral sentiments alone can identify appropriate morals. For Firth, an ideal observer has dispassionateness. Firth says, "an ideal observer is dispassionate in the sense that he is incapable of experiencing…such emotions as jealousy, self-love, personal hatred, and others which are directed towards particular individuals as such." Firth also considers the possibility that dispassionateness means lack of any emotion. He says, "It would also be possible…to go a good deal further and to say that an ideal observer is incapable of experiencing any emotions at all, thus bringing our conception of an ideal observer closer to Kant's conception of a 'purely rational being'" (Firth 1952: 340). However, if one defines dispassionateness in this way, there is no room for a moral sense and moral sentiments in moral judgment. It follows that a moral sense and moral sentiments are irrelevant to identifying appropriate morals.

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[15] Richard Brandt proposes two versions of the ideal observer theory. According to the first version, an ideal observer is "omniscient, omnipercipient, disinterested, dispassionate, but otherwise normal," which is close to Firth's. "The second version differs either in the addition of 'benevolent' to the above qualifications, or in the substitution of it for 'disinterested and dispassionate'" (Brandt 1998: 225).

[16] As the problem of the ideal observer theory, Sayre-McCord mentions the impossibility of gaining the ideal observer's viewpoint. Sayre-McCord (1994: 202–3). But I do not consider it a problem because I think it possible to gain the viewpoint, and even if not, to approximate it.

Some might think that there is no need to exclude all emotions from an ideal observer, and that an ideal observer can have certain sentiments. But there are no sentiments the presence of which alone enables an ideal observer to identify appropriate morals. For example, having disinterested benevolence is not enough. Let us think about child education. Love for children can take different forms. Some might indulge a child excessively, while others discipline a child moderately. Both ways of treatment can spring from love. But excessive indulgence can ruin the child. To avoid this, one must know the nature of children, namely, "The child is father of the man." Thus, one must have proper knowledge to act properly, and having benevolence is not enough. The same applies to other kinds of education including spiritual education. In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates insists that wisdom, truth, and "the best possible state of your soul" are "the most important things," while "wealth, reputation and honors" are "inferior things."[17] But if one does not know how to perfect the soul, merely having benevolence may not help. As in the child education example, an action springing from benevolence can have a negative effect on perfecting the soul if one does not understand the nature of the soul.[18] Ancient Chinese thinker Confucius says, "To love humanity and not to love learning—the latent defect is foolishness."[19] Having disinterested benevolence is not enough for an ideal observer to identify appropriate morals.

Having sympathy is not enough. Let us consider child and spiritual education. An action springing from sympathy with a nagging child can indulge and ruin him. Similarly, an action springing from sympathy can have a negative effect on perfecting the soul if one does not understand the nature of the soul. To avoid these, one must know the nature of children or the soul. Having sympathy is not enough for an ideal observer to identify appropriate morals.

Also, having fairness is not enough because what one feels fair can vary according to his beliefs. In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls thinks it unfair that people should enjoy a better life merely because they won the natural lottery, for example, they were born into wealthy family or have certain "natural talents and abilities" (Rawls 1999: 63). However, from the perspective of karma, what Rawls considers unfair becomes fair. According to *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, karma is "the force whereby

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[17] Plato (1997: 29e–30a). The pagination is that of the Stephanus edition.

[18] For example, there is a view that pain and suffering exist for our moral and spiritual growth. Contemporary philosopher and theologian John Hick upholds this view in his soul-making theodicy. See Hick (2001), (2010: 253–61). If the view is true, helping someone merely escape pain and suffering can slow down or stop his spiritual growth. For his spiritual growth, it is important to help and encourage him to overcome the pain and suffering in the right way.

[19] Confucius (1997: bk. 17, chap. 7). Some versions put it into book 17, chapter 8.

right and wrong actions bring benefits and punishments in this or a future existence. This occurs not arbitrarily, but by law."[20] Positive or negative karma accumulated in one's past lives explains his circumstances and natural stature. If one is suffering in this life, that is due to negative karma accumulated in his past lives. Yet it is possible for one with negative karma to struggle against his bad inheritance and live a righteous life, accumulating positive karma. It is also possible for one with positive karma to waste his good inheritance by living a sinful life. From the perspective of karma, what Rawls thinks unfair becomes fair. In this way, what one feels fair can vary according to his beliefs. To know true fairness, one must at least know whether the law of karma exists. Having fairness is not enough for an ideal observer to identify appropriate morals.

To identify appropriate morals, one must at least have relevant knowledge of the true nature of reality. The knowledge of the true nature of reality is something other than a moral sense and moral sentiments. It follows that a moral sense or moral sentiments alone cannot identify appropriate morals. There are no sentiments the presence of which alone enables an ideal observer to identify appropriate morals. Those who oppose this claim need to show the existence of such a sentiment.

Lastly, let us think about a case where an ideal observer has godlike qualities. Such an observer could make a perfect moral judgment. Yet there is a problem of how we can gain the viewpoint. Even if we can, gaining the viewpoint introduces knowledge on the divine, something other than a moral sense and moral sentiments. This also supports that a moral sense or moral sentiments alone cannot identify appropriate morals.

6. Conclusion

Analyzing the three defenses of sentimentalism against the relativism charge, I showed that a moral sense or moral sentiments alone cannot identify appropriate morals. The first defense is the claim that there is a universal moral sense or universal moral sentiments. However, even if they exist, a moral sense or moral sentiments alone cannot identify appropriate morals. The second defense is to adopt the general viewpoint theory. But it needs to employ reason, and even if not, it does not guarantee that we identify appropriate morals. The third defense is to adopt the ideal observer theory. Yet it still does not show that a moral sense or moral sentiments alone can identify appropriate morals.[21]

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[20] *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., s.v. "karma."

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