Davidson on the Objectivity of Values and Reasons

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Abstract

Although he did not write on ethics, Davidson wrote a few papers on the objectivity of values. His argument rests on his holistic conception of interpretation of desires. I examine whether this argument can be sufficient for his objectivism about values. And supposing that the argument were correct, would it entail a form of realism about normativity and reasons? I argue that it falls short of giving us a genuine form of moral realism. My case will rest on an examination of Davidson's conception of value in relation to what he had to say about emotions and their relations to values.

Keywords: Davidson, values, reasons, moral realism, objectivity, emotions.

1. Introduction

Davidson's views on ethics have received much less attention than his views on meaning, mind and action. This is understandable, since he did not write much on ethics, although he often said that for him the most fundamental issues in philosophy are those of ethics. This concern surfaces in many of his writings, for instance in his early interest in Plato's *Philebus*, in his essay on weakness of the will, in his discussions of self-deception and in his late discussion of Spinoza (Davidson 1999).[1] And there is a field of ethics that he dealt with quite explicitly: meta-ethics. In three essays "Expressing evaluations" (1984), "The interpersonal comparison of values" (1986a) and "The objectivity of values" (1994), he drew some consequences of his conception of interpretation and rationality for the nature of moral values, and has defended an objectivist conception of these. His argument rests on the idea that interpretation of desires has to be holistic and presuppose a large pattern of agreement, which cannot fail to track objective truths about the values of agents. The argument raises several questions. First, is it correct? Can one reach the claim that values are objective on the basis of the constraints on interpretation? Second, supposing that the argument were correct,

[1] There is indeed room for developing a full-blown conception of ethics on the basis of Davidson's views in other domains, and this has been done, in particular by Bilgrami 2006, Rovane 2013 and Myers 2012.

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would it entail a form of moral realism? Third, how can it give us a realistic account of normativity and reasons? I argue that although one can develop an argument along these lines on the basis of Davidson's views on values, it falls short of giving us a genuine form of realism about reasons. My case will rest on an examination of Davidson's conception of value in relation to what he had to say on emotions and their relations to values.

2. Davidson's Argument from Interpretation to Objective Values

Before his two papers on value, Davidson had not dealt explicitly with issues about meta-ethics, although most of his work on action has close connections with moral psychology. His famous account of reasons (1963) bears clearly on the explanation of action and on what are often called motivating or explanatory reasons, although it does not deal explicitly with normative reasons in the sense of reasons based on normative beliefs about what is valuable or what one ought to do. In his article on weakness of the will (1970), however, Davidson deals with moral dilemmas and sets up a framework for the discussion of evaluative judgements. Although he does not bring this point to the fore in 1970, his account presupposes that there are genuine moral conflicts, involving real but incompatible values. He points out that Kantianism and utilitarianism, which are supposed to be objectivists about values, deny the existence of moral conflicts and dilemmas, whereas a number of philosophers, such as Williams or Foot, argued that moral dilemmas entail that values cannot be objective. In opposition to both, Davidson claims that there can be genuine conflicts between perfectly objective values. But Davidson tells us that he is not a moral realist in the sense in which this view would carry an ontological commitment to the existence of values as independent entities, a view which is open to the familiar anti-realist charge that such entities, if they existed, would be "queer" and hard to find in the natural world. Nor does he subscribe to a theory which, like McDowell's and Wiggins', insists that values are response-dependent in the way secondary qualities are so, although they track real properties in the world. But the issue, according to Davidson, is not *where* moral properties can be located in the natural world:

> Objectivity depends not on the location of an attributed property, or its supposed conceptual tie to human sensibilities; it depends on there being a systematic relationship between the attitude-causing properties of things and events, and the attitudes they cause. What makes our judgments of the "descriptive" properties of things true or false is the fact that the same properties tend to cause the same beliefs in different observers, and when observers differ, we assume there is an explanation. This is not just a platitude, it's a tautology, one whose truth is ensured by how we interpret people's beliefs. My thesis is that the same holds for moral values (Davidson 1994, 2004: 46).

His argument is not ontological, but epistemological: once we understand clearly how we can ascribe evaluative attitudes to people on the basis of their evaluative judgments, we shall be able to conclude that these attitudes are bound to track objective values.

Davidson invites us, as he does in many other contexts, to start from the necessary features of interpretation. The familiar claims are the following.[2]

(i) The task of interpretation is to ascribe to an agent propositional attitudes, such as beliefs, desires, intentions and preferences, which have certain contents. Interpretation has to start from publicly observable features of agents and of their environment and must rest on an evidential basis.

(ii) Holism: the contents of someone's attitudes necessarily depends on the contents of many other attitudes.

(iii) Charity: given that the contents of attitudes are necessarily interconnected, one must presuppose that there is at least a minimal coherence among these contents, and ascription of coherent sets of content cannot be made unless the interpreter presupposes that the agent shares a large number of true beliefs with him.

(iv) If agents are to be interpretable, they not only must share attitudes and contents that are largely similar to ours, but that are also largely correct.

Let us call this the *argument from interpretation*. On the basis of these necessary features of interpretation, which in most of his earlier writings he applies to the interpretation of beliefs and meanings, and derives from it a refutation of radical scepticism: since interpretation presupposes a massive degree of agreement on beliefs which are largely correct, these beliefs have to be about an objective world (Davidson 1981). Later on, Davidson applies this reasoning to desires, then to values, expanding (iv) into

(v) If agents are to be interpretable, they share values which are largely similar to ours, correct, and objective.

Even assuming that it works for beliefs,[3] the argument is even less straightforward for desires. *Prima facie* it should not be, for a central claim of Davidson's "unified theory of meaning and action" (Davidson 1980) is that we must interpret beliefs and desires *jointly*. Any interpretation of belief has to go through an interpretation of desires as well. Davidson insists on the fact that the pattern of desires in an agent not only is just as holistic as the pattern of his beliefs, and that they actually depend on each other when we interpret his actions:

> An interpreter cannot hope to determine the contents of a person's desires, without also determining what the person believes; and there is no way to determine the contents of either of these attitudes in a sufficiently detailed way without linguistic communication, which requires interpretation of the person's speech (Davidson 1994, 2004: 48).

But this dependency of the interpretation of desires on the interpretation of beliefs, and in turn on the interpretation of speech does nothing by itself to show that there is an argument parallel to (i)-(iv) for desires. At best, what it shows is that the argument from interpretation applies to desires *and* beliefs. But how can one apply it to those desires which are, in some sense, revealing of values held by an agent? Much here depends upon what one means by "desires". In Davidson's

[2] Here I more or less follow the very clear presentation by Myers 2012 and of Myers and Verheggen 2016; see also Myers 2004, Lillehammer 2007.

[3] Which is far from evident, as many critics have argued. See in particular Stroud 1999.

earlier writings, desires were ranked among "pro-attitudes", which can include wants, mere attractions, urges and whims (such as, to take one of his examples, the "sudden desire to touch a woman's elbow"), as well as long-standing desires, but also more elaborate attitudes of a normative kind, such as desires about what one believes to be good, worthwhile or obligatory. The latter he calls "enlightened" desires. There is a sense of "value" which applies to desires in the broad sense, which is the one that is used by decision theorists, under the name of *desirabilities* or *utilities* which, together with probabilities, determine an agent's action. But these are subjective values by definition, which do not yield any objectivity about value in general. What people individually desire can differ hugely from person to person. These are actually those gaps in having common desires which give rise to the problem of interpersonal comparisons of utility[4]. *Prima facie* what is needed for objectivity is at least some convergence of individual values susceptible to being shared by agents, possibly an agreement on these values. How do we reach such a convergence? Clearly, it is much harder to discern holistic patterns of desires within an agent than it is to discern such patterns for beliefs. If one ascribes to an agent the belief that a cloud is passing over the sun, it is natural to ascribe to him the belief that opaque objects can hide a source of light. But if one can ascribe to an agent a desire to eat an ice cream, it is hard to ascribe to her a desire, say, to eat a strawberry ice cream, or to eat an ice cream cake. Interpretation must presuppose that agents are aiming at what is *good* in general. So only "enlightened desires" about what one *believes* to be good will do. The desires that can be the basis of interpretation have to be *evaluative desires*, involving not simply an attitude of an agent towards an object, but also the belief that a certain object is valuable. In other words, they must be *normative desires*, that have propositional contents to the effect that so and so in desirable and valuable:

> To what extent do these considerations apply to the evaluative attitudes? It is possible, I think, to show that the justified attribution of values to someone else provides a basis for judgments of comparisons of value, what is called the interpersonal comparison of values. But the comparability of values does not in itself imply agreed-on standards, much less that we can legitimately treat value judgments as true or false. Now I want to go on to suggest that we should expect enlightened values—the reasons we would have for valuing and acting if we had all the (non-evaluative) facts straight—to converge; we should expect people who are enlightened *and fully understand one another* to agree on their basic values. An appreciation of what makes for such convergence or agreement also shows that value judgments are true or false in much the way our factual judgments are (Davidson 1994, 2004: 49).

Davidson makes clear here that by "values" he means three sorts of things: (a) basic values, (b) enlightened values, (c) converging values. It is not clear what the basic values could be. They could correspond to basic human needs, such as those for food, security or sex, but also to values such as justice, equality or freedom. The enlightened values are presumably those that involve what an agent considers reflectively as a value, his normative desires, on which he bases his reasons for acting. The converging values would be the end products of the process of understanding each other. But it is not clear what these would be. Would they be related

[4] Davidson actually deals with this problem in his 1986a article.

to what Bernard Williams (1985) calls "thick" concepts (such as shame or courage) or to "thin" concepts (such as *good* or *just*)?

But even if we concentrate on enlightened desires, what guarantee do we have that we shall converge on our values? It seems that what would be needed would be an equivalent of the principle of charity for desires. Sometimes, Davidson seems to suggest that there is such a parallel principle: "In our need to make him make sense we will try for a theory that finds him consistent, a believer of truths, and a lover of the good (all by our own lights it goes without saying)" (Davidson 1969; 1980: 222). But even if there were such a principle, it would function, like the principle of charity for beliefs, as an *a priori* principle of interpretation. Although such a principle is, by definition, supposed to be necessary, this would not yield a convergence on the objectivity of values[5]. For that, one needs the argument (i)-(v) above, and the holistic condition on beliefs and desires. Davidson's argument for the convergence of normative desires and values is clearly an epistemological argument, on a par with his convergence argument from interpretation of beliefs. He is quite clear that this convergence will not yield objective values in the ontological sense of separate entities, and he discards the ontological way of posing the problem of moral realism in the way Mackie (1977) and Jackson (1998) pose it: where are values? How is one to "place" them in nature? Values, for Davidson, are neither in the mind, as projections of our desires—as anti-realists and expressivists would argue—nor "out there" in the natural world or in some non-natural ideal world. If they are real, it is not in the sense of having a certain ontological status, but in the sense of being the product of a convergence in our judgements about values. When such convergence is reached, we will be able to say that our values are objective and that our judgments about them are true:

> Before we can say that two people disagree about the worth of an action or an object, we must be sure it is the same action or object and the same aspects of those actions and objects that they have in mind. The considerations that prove the dispute genuine—the considerations that lead to correct interpretation—will also reveal the shared criteria that determine where the truth lies (Davidson 1994; 2004: 47).

As Davidson is aware, the problem is that such a convergence is not guaranteed *a priori* by the holistic requirements on the interpretation of beliefs and desires. It implies that we have criteria of convergence and of divergence when we disagree on values:

> [I]f I am right, disputes over values (as in the case of other disputes) can be genuine only when there are shared criteria in the light of which there is an answer to the question who is right […] When we find a difference inexplicable, that is, not due to ignorance or confusion, the difference is not genuine […] The importance of a background of shared beliefs and values is that such a background allows us to make sense of the idea of a common standard of right and wrong, true and false (Davidson 1995; 2004: 50-51).

[5] Part of this question rests on whether the scholastic principle *Nihil appetimus nisi sub ratione boni,* which present day writers have renamed "the guise of the good" is a substantial ontological principle in moral theory or a principle of interpretation of desires. See Velleman 1992, Tenenbaum 2007, for instance.

But how can we make sure that we have such shared criteria? To say that that these are the conditions of convergence on enlightened values would be circular. The criteria of evaluation of disagreements over, for instance, the concept of "justice" are themselves evaluative, and themselves subject to disagreement. Davidson 's suggestion is obviously that such disagreements will in the end be assessable and that a core of shared values will be reached, but it is not clear that an important amount of indeterminacy will not remain, and, as Lillehammer (2007: 214-5) has remarked that "there is a uniquely fixed and determinate set of particular features of the world the positive or negative evaluation of which all agents must share if they understand each other and are otherwise well informed about the (non-evaluative) facts". The success Davidson's argument for the objectivity of moral values, however, does not turn only on his holistic interpretation argument. It turns on his capacity to be described as a theory of objective *reasons*.

3. Could Davidson Be a Reason Fundamentalist?

The recent tradition in metaethics, at least since Nagel's *Possibility of Altruism* (Nagel 1970) has accustomed us to formulate issues about moral realism and moral objectivity in terms of the concept of *reason*: can our reasons for acting, and in particular our moral reasons, be objective and is the notion of reason primitive? And traditionally two main kinds of answers have occupied the terrain: on the one hand, the Humean view, according to which reasons can be analysed as combinations or beliefs and desires, understood in instrumental terms, and on the other hand a Kantian or neo-Kantian views, according to which reasons are primitive, and considerations which make us favour certain courses of action, moral or not. This debate over the nature of reasons has many dimensions. One concerns psychology and the question of whether reasons can be causes. Another concern moral psychology and the nature of motivation. And yet another concerns the ontology of reasons.[6]

Let us, along with a recent tradition, distinguish three views about attitudes and reasons. One is that there is a distinction between motivating reasons and normative reasons: reasons for which one acts or believes (reasons one *has*), and reasons which justify an action (or a belief) and that make it rational in the eyes of the agent and of his interpreters (reasons there *are*).[7] The second concerns the nature of the attitudes: do they consist mainly in beliefs and desires, which exhaust the list of reasons to act and to believe, as Hume famously argued? Or is the notion of reason autonomous and in some sense more fundamental? The third concerns the way reasons motivate: should we accept the "Humean theory of motivation", according to which reasons have to motivate us, and must at least involve desires? The answer that one gives to these questions determine what kind of stance one takes on the ontological problem of the nature of values and norms: are these in some sense real and objective?

Davidson is notoriously a defender of the Humean view of motivating reasons: reasons are causes, and his 1963 article "Actions, Reasons and Causes" is a landmark. But he also accepts that there are normative reasons. These are the

[6] As any reader who knows the field will immediately see, I simplify excessively. Some of the main references in these debates are Nagel 1970, Williams 1979, Smith 1994, Scanlon 1998, 2014, Dancy 2000, Parfit 2011, Skorupski 2010.

[7] For an excellent overview and account of these and related distinctions, see Alvarez 2009.

reasons that an agent or a believer takes to be his best reasons and those in the light of which an interpreter must evaluate the reasons of the interpretee. These reasons are governed by the "ideal" of rationality and the principles of interpretation. The motivating reasons of an agent are never fully separated from his normative reasons: the first are not only the reasons for which the agent acted (or believed) but also those for which he *would* have acted, were he rational. Because of this rationality requirement, the answer to the second question is more complex. Like Hume, Davidson takes attitudes to be basically beliefs and desires. He always said that his main inspiration was not only Hume, but also Ramsey. His early work in decision theory[8], as well as his reading of Anscombe on intention, led him to formulate the view that reasons, as psychological states, are composed of beliefs and desires, which are the basic mental states. In many of his later writings, including in his views on interpretation, he entertained the hope of basing his whole analysis of actions and beliefs on two building blocks: a theory of beliefs on the one hand and a theory of desires, conceived *à la Ramsey* as credences and utilities, and two basic attitudes, *holding true* and *preferring true*. This minimalism permeates most of his conceptions in the philosophy of action, of meaning and of mind. He hopes to account for mental states such as intentions, hopes, regrets, surprises, and other attitudes in terms of beliefs and desires alone, and with the less possible intentional notions. The same kind of minimalism inspires his view of meaning: a theory of truth, plus the constraints on the interpretation of beliefs should be sufficient without positing meanings or senses as separate entities. Very often, as in the case of intention and of meanings, he is led to revise his minimalism, and to distinguish various levels and kinds of intention, and to introduce speaker's meanings within his initial theory. But the goal of accounting for complex notions in terms of more simple ones was always his ideal. In spite of this basic Humeanism about the nature of attitudes, which make his views seem to be close to those of functionalists in the philosophy of mind, Davidson is not a strict Humean about attitudes, since he holds that there are normative desires, desires about what we ought to desire, or about what we have reasons to desire. As we saw in the previous section, he takes these desires to track objective values and norms. Indeed, he also holds that there are normative beliefs. So he clearly has a place for normative reasons in both his psychology and his ontology of attitudes. Turning, then, to the third question: does Davidson defend the "Humean theory of motivation"—that motivation goes by way of desires (Smith 1994)? He clearly subscribes to it, in the form of what has often been called (Williams 1979) an "internalist" requirement on reasons, which he formulates in his article on weakness of the will as a "principle of continence": "perform the action judged best on the basis of all available relevant reasons" (Davidson 1980: 46) but that we can, following Myers and Verheggen (2016: 149, 159) formulate thus: "Rationality requires people always to form motivating states in line with their normative beliefs, and so always to do what they have most reason to do." In others words, there is always a "practicality requirement" on rationality and reasons: "There could be truths about what people have reason to do only if people's motivating states could be, in an appropriate sense, either correct or incorrect."[9] This requirement

[8] See Davidson, Suppes and Siegel 1957, as well as a number of essays in Davidson 1970, 1980, 2004. On these early views see in particular the interesting essay by Harnay 2010.
[9] Myers 2012: 376, Myers and Verheggen 2016: 158.

entails that although there could be cases (such as *akrasia*) where we could contingently fail to act on the basis of our best reasons, we ought, all things consider, act on the basis of the reasons that we ideally and rationality consider to be the best.

The combination of these answers by Davidson to our three questions yields a view which is hard to describe as a form of Humeanism about reasons, in spite of the fact that it involves a strong Humean basis. Davidson agrees with Hume that motivation has to go by way of desires and with the internalist or practicalist requirement. Thus, he would agree with Humeans such as David Lewis (1988) that motivation could not go by way of beliefs, and not even normative beliefs about what is good or right.[10] But Davidson would not agree with the Humeans and other anti-realists that values are not objective, and are constituted by projections of our pro-attitudes, such as desires. For a Humean, simple or sophisticated, values can never be objective in the sense that there are truths about what we have reasons to do or to believe. Davidson is in this sense clearly a realist about reasons. But could he subscribe to "reason fundamentalism" in the sense in which philosophers like Parfit, Dancy, Scanlon or Skorupski have claimed that reasons are primitive, non-psychological and normative attitudes? According to such views—and to simplify outrageously—reasons are not combinations of beliefs and desires. They are "considerations" which "favour" certain courses of action or beliefs, which cannot be analysed further. And most importantly they are not psychological states. They are facts, either as autonomous entities in the world or true propositions.[11] For Davidson, reasons cannot be fundamental in this way. Although he uses the term "reasons" in the normative sense, he still considers them as combinations of (normative) beliefs and (normative) desires, in the Humean way. And he subscribes, as we just saw, to a form of internalism and of a practicality requirement, which some reasons fundamentalist accept, but which strong moral realists like Parfit (2011) do not accept. Thus, in discussing Christine Korsgaard's (1996) version of this requirement, Parfit writes:

> We have returned to one of our main questions: how we should understand normativity. Korsgaard would be right to claim that, when realists appeal to facts about what is normatively necessary, or about what we must do in the decisive-reason-implying sense, these people do not thereby explain how we are *motivated* to act in these ways. That is an objection to normative realism if, like many Naturalists and Non-Cognitivists, we assume that normativity is, or consists in, some kind of actual or hypothetical motivating force. But realists reject that assumption. When realists claim that we have decisive reasons to act in certain ways, they are not making claims about how, even in ideal conditions, we would be motivated or moved to act. On this view, as I have said, normativity is wholly different from, and does not include, motivating force (Parfit 2011, vol. 2: 422).

Davidson could not agree with this. Although he is not a constructivist in the way that Korsgaard is, Davidson considers reasons to be essentially tied to what is *believable* and *desirable*, or with what an agent ideally would believe or desire. And he always considers his objective reasons to be capable of motivating us. And if

[10] In other words, Davidson could not accept the existence of "besires", i.e., of states which could be both beliefs (susceptible of being true or false) and desires (motivating). See my essay Engel 2015.

[11] See in particular Dancy 2000, Parfit 2011, Skorupski 2010, Scanlon 2014 and Alvarez 2009.

reasons are facts, it is not because the facts are, so to say, out there. It is because we have converged on them through a process of interpretation[12]. So, he is certainly not a moral realist in the strong sense in which this view involves the irreducibility of reasons.

A further consideration for doubting that Davidson can be a full-blown realist about normative matters concerns his reluctance to accept the existence of real norms in the epistemic domain. The principle of charity, the principle of total evidence and truth itself are norms of interpretation, but Davidson rejected strongly the suggestion that truth could be a norm for belief.[13]

4. Davidson on Emotions and Values

That Davidson is not a moral realist in this strong sense has to do with one of his other basic commitments: a commitment to a form of naturalism, albeit of a non-reductive kind. Davidson would never describe himself as a "cognitivist" about moral values, and as a "non-naturalist", both being labels that philosophers like Dancy, Parfit and Scanlon are prepared to accept. But rather than describe his views in abstract terms, it seems to me better to consider these in the light of his views about the relation of pro-attitudes and judgements about values. All his discussions of realism about values are formulated in terms of one central pro-attitude, desire. But many contemporary views about moral realism have been formulated in terms of another kind of attitude, namely *emotions*. Many forms of moral realism and of anti-realism are conceived in terms of the relation of emotions to values. Examining how Davidson's view could be placed in relation to such forms of realism can give us give us hints about how he could reply to the objections about his interpretation argument formulated in the first section above.

Why should Davidson have considered his argument for moral objectivism in terms of the relation between emotions and values, rather than between beliefs, desires, and values? Because, as we saw in the first section, his holistic argument seems insufficient to give us the appropriate objectivity, and because the psychological basis on which he rests this argument is too unspecific and narrow. Our judgments of values are not only based on beliefs and desires. Most classical and contemporary views say that they are based on other mental states, of the affective kind, namely emotions. Although Davidson never explicitly considered this possibility, we can try to reconstruct what his view was when we attend to what he has to say on emotions.

Davidson wrote very little on the nature of emotions, a topic which was, at the time when he wrote his main essays on action and mind, not as fashionable as it is today.[14] He nevertheless dealt with emotions in his essay on Hume's cognitive theory of pride (1976), on weakness of the will (1970), on paradoxes of irrationality. Although his essay on Hume is mostly exegetical, it suggests very

[12] In this sense, Davidson is probably closer to Kantian constructivism than to the form of Platonism defended by Dancy, although he is not a constructivist. Neither would he accept Parfit's kind of realism about reasons.

[13] See his reply (1999) to Engel 1999, which he reiterated in his replies to me in the volume directed by Kotatko, Pagin and Segal 2001. His reluctance to accept an ontology of norms permeates his writings, in spite of his acceptance of normative desires.

[14] He nevertheless shows that he was acquainted with the main views of his time in the Anglophone literature, e.g. those of Ryle 1949, Kenny 1963, Thalberg 1977, Solomon 1980, Gordon 1987, Pitcher 1965, Lyons 1980, Rorty 1987.

clearly views which Davidson shares with Hume. The logical space of theories of emotion is wide (and all the more so that the field of emotions is rather imprecise: there are passions, sentiments, moods, feelings, which can all be more or less occurrent or dispositional). Almost all writers agree that emotions are associated with various kinds of behaviour and bodily expressions, that most of them involve certain feelings and have a certain phenomenology, that they involve a form of appraisal and a valence, that they are related to certain informational states, on which they are based, and many writers hold that they involve judgments about values or about value properties. Many theorists accept that emotions can have reasons, but not all accept that they can be rational. Not all writers accept the idea that emotions can be objectively assessed as correct or appropriate. Depending on the weight which they put on these respective features, theories differ. The James-Lange theory insists on the behavioural component, most psychologists accept the view that emotions motivate and are associated to desires, and cognitivist theories focus on the judgements associated to emotions. The diversity of views is equally great when it comes to the relations of emotions to values. Humean theories take emotions to be the bases of evaluative judgements, which cannot be objective and true. Perceptual views of emotions and most intuitionist views hold that emotions are based on perceptions and intuitions about values. Other theories, which I shall examine below, take them to be based on the fittingness of our attitudes.[15]

Davidson's view of emotions is mostly of what is called the cognitive kind: emotions are associated to judgments. In his article on Hume on pride he tells us that Hume's theory rests on the idea that pride involves a relation to propositions:

> Hume's account of pride is best suited to what may be called propositional pride—pride described by sentences like, 'She was proud that she had been elected president'. Hume more often speaks of being proud of something—a son, a house, an ability, an accomplishment—but it is clear from his analysis that cases of being proud of something (or taking pride in something, or being proud to do something) reduce to, or are based on, propositional pride. If Hume's theory is to cope with the other indirect passions, a propositional form must be found for each of them (Davidson 1980: 277-78).

The problem is: how to conceive the relation between the state or attitude in which the emotion consists and the proposition in question? Davidson is clear that the emotion involves two sorts of things: first some perceived feature (for instance, with fear, the perception of something frightening), and second a judgment (that the perceived thing is frightening). According to Davidson Hume's theory is causal:

> The basic structure of pride and its etiology as Hume saw them is clear: the cause consists, first, of a belief, concerning oneself, that one has a certain trait; and second of an attitude of approbation or esteem for anyone who has that trait (Davidson 1980: 284).

It seems clear that Davidson himself subscribes to this analysis. But there are

[15] For good summaries on the various theories, see Deonna and Teroni 2011, Tappolet 2016.

three ways of conceiving the relation of an emotion to a judgement. The strong cognitivist holds that emotions are identical to beliefs and to associated judgements. This seems to hold for some emotions such as surprise, hope and regret, which are not clearly associated to specific behaviours, although this leaves out the feeling element. A weak cognitivist will say that emotions have a propositional component or presuppose belief, but that this component is not identical to the emotion itself. This is the case for Hume's indirect passions: pride, humility, vanity, love, hatred, envy, pity, malice, esteem, benevolence, respect, and compassion. One can also envisage a form of moderate cognitivism: emotions have "cognitive bases", which are the representations associated to them, but these bases need not be judgments (they may be representations of some sort, or perceptions which are not propositional). This seems to fit various sentiments, such as the feeling of familiarity, or the feeling of knowing. Hume is a weak cognitivist. He describes the causes of pride, and does not say that pride is constituted by one's entertaining a belief and having an attitude of approval. He just says that these are components of an emotion. Likewise, Davidson's view seems to be closer to the weak cognitivist view (Green 2013). His view seems to be summarised in the following passage of his article "intending": "If explicit judgements represent pro-attitudes, all pro-attitudes may be expressed by value judgements that are at least implicit" (Davidson 1980: 86).

This leads us to the way in which he conceives the connection between emotions and values: Davidson takes emotions to be a kind of pro-attitude, in the very wide sense which he gives to this term, and that they are at least partially associated to desires. But he does not take them to be subjective, in the sense that they would always be relative to a specific agent or circumstance. On the contrary, there are indications that Davidson takes emotions to be assessable objectively. Some signs of this can be found in his lifelong interest for Plato's *Philebus*, on which he wrote his 1949 dissertation (Davidson 1990). Plato explicitly says that some pleasures and emotions can be false. The *Euthyphro* dilemma implies that certain features of emotion, such as love, can be either response dependent or objective: either piety is being loved by the Gods or Gods love piety because it is pious. So, emotions can be, as judgments about values, the basis of values which can, as we saw in the first section, objective and true. From all this it seems clear that Davidson cannot defend another model of the relation between emotions and values, according to which values are real entities which can be in some sense perceived. There are many such views, depending on what one takes the perception in question to be. Some sort of intuition in the style of theories moral intuitionism? A perceptual judgement basing the access to the emotion? Or some non-conceptual kind of representation (Tappolet 2016)? Although he does not address this issue, Davidson cannot subscribe to any of these views, not only because he finds the causal relation which is supposed to hold between perceptions and values to be mysterious and not naturalistically explainable, but also because he never takes the ontology of values to be that of entities present in the world or in some non-natural world.

We have seen the difficulties that Davidson encounters with his interpretation argument. They would be the same if he chose, instead of judgments of value based on desires and on beliefs, another kind of analysis, to which I now turn.

5. Davidson and the Fitting Attitude Analysis of Values

This analysis is what is now called the *fitting attitude* analysis of value. It is, in a sense, a cognitivist and judgmental view, since it takes values to consist in a certain relation between attitude and judgments about the correctness of the attitude. In a nutshell, values are neither the expressions of our attitudes nor independent realities that could be perceived. They are the "formal objects" of our attitudes. Evaluative concepts have to be explained in terms of fitting or appropriate emotions. To use one of the possible formulations of this view (borrowed from Tappolet 2016, Ch. 3):

(V) X is a value if and only if there is an attitude which is fitting (or appropriate or correct) in response to x.

On this view, values are response-dependent, as they are for Humeans, but they are neither subjective nor projections out of our attitudes. They are based on our judgements about the correctness, or the *reasons* that one has to have these attitudes. In this sense, they entail a version of the "reasons first" conception of values: the main normative concepts are not axiological, but judgmental and associated to our reasons.[16]

Davidson does not explicitly discuss this view, which has roots in Brentano, but he was certainly familiar with it from his reading of Kenny's *Action, emotion and will* (1963) and of Chisholm, the main representative of Brentano in the U.S., whose views on action he both knew and discussed intensively.[17] The fitting attitude analysis starts from emotions. It does not say that they can be true or false, but that they are fitting or not, and this fittingness is itself an objective matter. The basic idea, which Davidson knew from Kenny (1963) is that emotions have a formal object, which is a value property.[18] Thus the formal object of fear is the *fearable*, the formal object of love is the *lovable,* the formal object of admiration is the *admirable*. But how can the view be made something other than a tautology? One can fear objects which are not *fearable* (little innocuous spiders) or which do not exist (monsters). How can the view yield objective values?

Davidson would probably have rejected the notion of a formal object of emotions and of other attitudes, mostly because he would have seen in it the reintroduction of an ontologically loaded notion of intentionality, which would violate his strictures on interpretation. But apart from these ontological worries, the main difficulty is: what kinds of facts can secure the fit between emotional attitude and

[16] This is why the view is sometimes called the "buck passing" account of values: the buck is passed to reasons. Scanlon 1998, 2014, Skorupski 2010 are the main contemporary defenders of such a view.

[17] See Brentano 1889, Chisholm 1957, 1976, and Davidson's essays in reply to Chisholm in Davidson 1980.

[18] When he deals with the formal object of actions, Kenny tells us that one encounters the problem of "variable polyadicity" of action verbs: how can they have a single formal object, given that actions are relative to all sorts of circumstances, such as when, how, where, by whom the action was done? Davidson's answer to this problem in "The logical form of action sentences" (1967, in Davidson 1980) is well known: he proposes to add to action predicates argument places for events, and to construe action sentences as quantifying over them. Thus, he breaks down the very notion of a formal object into a core property (expressed by the action verb), events and the properties of these events. This entails the rejection of the very notion of a formal object of actions. One can presume that Davidson would have rejected in the same way the notion of a formal object of emotions.

value? Facts about human nature? Or biological facts? Or social facts? It is hard to accept such views without falling back into a form of reductive naturalism, and without running into Moore's open question argument: any account of values or norms in terms of natural facts lose the normative character of such concepts. Another related difficulty is: how to specify the notion of fittingness? In other terms, how can we be sure that the reasons that are supposed to make an attitude correct, hence to secure the objectivity of values? Here we find again the opposition between a Humean view of reasons, which takes them to be relations of means to ends of any kind, and an objectivist notion. I may, for good instrumental reasons (say because I want a promotion or not to lose my job) find admirable something which is not admirable (*e.g.* my boss' tie, which is ugly) and desirable something which is not desirable (a saucer of mud).

Could Davidson have accepted such a view? There is an obvious similarity between his argument about the objectivity of values on the basis of convergence in judgments about values and the role which the fitting attitude analysis confers on our judgments on values. But where Davidson aims to solve the objectivity problem through his holistic conception of interpretation, the fitting attitude analysis aims to capture directly the objective values from the rightness or correctness of the emotions associated to it. But it is not clear that it can succeed better than the holistic approach. Considering the difficulties just mentioned, Ronald de Sousa argues that the appearance of tautology of the fitting attitude analysis (the formal object of love is the lovable, of fear the fearable) can be dispelled "because the attainment of success for emotions—the actual fit between the object or target of the emotion and its formal object—depends on a vast holistic network of factor that transcend my actual responses (de Sousa 2005). But if this is the case, what is this "holistic network", if not the one which makes our attitudes and beliefs holistically dependent? Holism went out by the window. It seems to have been reintroduced through the door.

6. Conclusion

The way out of these difficulties has been suggested by a number of partisans of the fitting attitude analysis of value: the conditions of the correctness of emotions and attitudes should not be specified in descriptive or factual terms, since no amount of facts could account for values and norms. The conditions have to be specified in terms which are themselves normative. (V) above should thus be reformulated:

(N) X is V iff there is an attitude which is required in response to x.

This obviously runs the risk of circularity: emotions are governed by norms which are defined by their formal objects, which in terms are defined in normative terms. What angers me must be wrong. What kind of "explanation" is that? Clearly it cannot be an explanation. But this is not an obstacle, once we understand that the fitting attitude analysis does not aim at defining the applications conditions of the norms for an emotion. It aims at stating what can be inferred from our practices. It involves necessarily an element of idealization. The attitudes that are correct are not those that are made so by a certain range of natural facts, but those that one ideally would reach if one turned one's back on those facts, and tried to adopt an impartial point of view. This form of idealization is nothing different from the objective standpoint on values and norms, which Davidson meant to be reachable from his interpretation argument. So the conclusion is that, even if he had adopted,

as I have suggested that he should have, the fitting attitude analysis, he would not have landed in a too different place from the one that he actually reached.[19]

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[19] I agree in this respect with Myers and Verheggen 2016, that in this sense Davidson's view may be close to that of Scanlon 2014.

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