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Russell on Naturalism and Practical Reason

ABSTRACT

This response to Paul Russell looks at how we should understand the moral sentiments and their role in action. I think that there is an important tension in Russell's interpretation of this role. On the one hand, aspects of Russell's position commit him to some kind of rationalism about the emotions: for instance, he has argued that P. F. Strawson's account of the reactive is crudely naturalistic; and he has claimed that emotions are constitutive of our sensitivity to moral reasons. On the other hand, he has explicitly endorsed a Humean view of motivation which, I will argue, is incompatible with these rationalist commitments. As well as pointing out the tension and arguing that it should be resolved in the direction of rationalism, I sketch the kind of rationalism that Russell needs: that reason can, through the autonomous progress of moral inquiry, give rise to new forms of emotion.

This response¹ to Paul Russell's stimulating collection, *The Limits of Free Will*,² looks at the question of how we should understand the moral sentiments and their role in action. I am in broad agreement with Russell's view that emotion plays an important role in morality, but I think that there is an important tension in Russell's interpretation of this role. The source of this tension concerns the relation between reason and emotion. On the one hand, aspects of Russell's position commit him to some kind of rationalism about the emotions: for instance, he has argued against P. F. Strawson's account of the reactive attitudes on the grounds that, as he sees it, it is crudely naturalistic; and he has claimed that emotions are constitutive of our sensitivity to moral reasons. On the other hand, he has explicitly endorsed a Humean view of motivation which, I will argue, is incompatible with these rationalist commitments. This suggests that the role of reason in emotion, and hence of emotion in morality, is something of an unresolved issue for Russell. As well as pointing out the tension and arguing that it should be resolved in the direction of rationalism, then, I also sketch the kind of rationalism that Russell needs, looking at the possibility that reason can, through the autonomous, self-governing progress of moral inquiry, give rise to new forms of emotion.

¹ I am grateful to Joe Saunders and to an anonymous reviewer for helpful comments on a previous draft.

² Paul Russell, *The Limits of Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). In-text references are to this work.

1.

An influential attempt to draw practical conclusions from the role of emotion in our lives is P. F. Strawson's 'Freedom and Resentment.'³ Strawson attempts to justify a 'withdrawal of goodwill' from wrongdoers by appeal to the fact that we naturally have certain emotional tendencies. While clearly finding it important, Russell thinks that Strawson's strategy fails. According to Russell, Strawson's project can be understood as containing a rationalistic strategy and a naturalistic strategy. According to the rationalistic strategy, determinism does not threaten moral responsibility because it is not a reason relevant to the reactive attitudes, and hence not a reason for forsaking the reactive attitudes in favour of the objective attitude. According to the naturalistic strategy, reactive attitudes and the types of relationship they sustain are so deeply embedded in our psychology and forms of life that we could not abandon them on the basis of a merely intellectual argument. Strawson thinks that these two strategies hang together. The naturalistic strategy supports the view that no external justification of our reactive attitudes is necessary or even possible; the result of which is that the only justifications relevant to the rationalistic strategy are those internal to the life of the reactive attitudes. However, Russell claims that neither of these strategies is convincing in Strawson's presentation of them; and that they are not as compatible as Strawson appears to think. The naturalistic strategy, Russell thinks, undermines the rationalistic strategy and renders it redundant, yet leaves us regarding our susceptibility to reactive attitudes as a brute inevitability.

Our question at the moment is not about the accuracy of Russell's reading of Strawson, but rather what it tells us about the naturalistic understanding of moral sentiments that Russell himself supports. Talking about the parallel case of fear, he argues that, while 'the whole framework of fear comes with our human nature,' and that we 'no more need to, or can, justify the fact that we are susceptible to fear than we need to, or can, justify the fact that we have two kidneys' (pp. 35-6), we should distinguish the (correct) claim that our susceptibility to some type of emotion needs, and can have, no justification, from the (incorrect) claim that our susceptibility to particular tokens of that emotion on a given occasion needs, or can have, no justification. The upshot of this, in Russell's

³ P. F. Strawson, 'Freedom and Resentment,' in G. Watson (ed.), *Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

hands, is not simply that fear should be seen as a fallible responsiveness to reasons for fear, or that while the fear of a well-functioning agent may tend to track reasons for fear, it does not always. Russell thinks we should also be prepared to countenance the view that, 'given our circumstances we are never justified in being afraid (i.e., we are never justified in entertaining any tokens of fear)' (p. 37). While he thinks that it is implausible that such circumstances might obtain, he clearly thinks that it is not impossible that they could; and crucially he thinks that if it were turn out that they did 'then it is not implausible to suggest that in these circumstances we should cease, and are capable of altogether ceasing, to entertain or feel (tokens of) fear.' (p. 38)

Now if I have interpreted it correctly, Russell's argument against what he takes to be Strawson's naturalistic strategy is one place where Russell commits himself to the rationalist view that thinking about whether we are or are not justified in feeling and acting in certain ways can alter our dispositions to feel and act. Another place where this might seem to come up is in Russell's commitment to some notion of normative competence. Russell thinks that a plausible version of Strawson's rationalistic strategy requires the development of an account of 'normative competence' – some kind of capacity of responsiveness to (moral) reasons – as a basis for responsibility, such as is argued for by R. J. Wallace, and by Fischer and Ravizza. This compatibilist strategy is approvingly described by Russell in a number of places, and, in his account of Daniel Dennett, is credited with having the power to dissolve 'mid-level' scepticism about free will that targets our capacity to act for a reason and justify ourselves to others (pp. 224-5).

Furthermore, Russell's discussion of moral sense is also couched in terms of a responsiveness to reasons. Russell argues that there is an 'intimate connection between moral sense and the kind of rational self-control that enables us to grasp and be guided by moral reasons,' and his argument for including emotion as a precondition of responsibility has to do with its capacity to give agents a sense of what matters.

'Agents who lack moral sense are missing something that is vitally important and that "normal" moral agents do and must possess. More specifically, when an agent lacks moral sense her *sensitivity* to moral considerations is diminished and

her motivation to be guided by these considerations is impoverished and limited.' (p. 55)

In this passage about moral sense, Russell mentions two separate things that he thinks emotion is necessary for, one cognitive and one motivational. Whereas I am sympathetic to his claim that emotion is necessary for sensitivity to certain sorts of reasons, I now want to claim that making emotion independently *motivationally* necessary (that is, motivationally necessary independently of its cognitive content) is not compatible with the rationalist commitments we have just looked at.

2.

To begin the argument for this, I turn to Russell's discussion of Christine Korsgaard's anti-Humean 'Skepticism About Practical Reason.'⁴ Hume famously argues that reason has no power to motivate in its own right, and can only direct pre-existing motivation. Following Korsgaard, we can call this 'motivational scepticism.' Hume also argues that reason can only deliberate about means, and cannot set ends. We can call this 'content scepticism.' Korsgaard's aim is to argue that motivational scepticism derives whatever force it has from content scepticism. In particular, she wants to combat the Humean view that reason must be the wrong kind of thing to motivate anyone because it lacks the right kind of causal heft, in the absence of pre-existing motivation, to put the body into motion. On motivational scepticism, the fact that someone finds the conclusion of a practical argument compelling and inescapable cannot by itself alter motivations or create them where there are none. If motivational scepticism is independent of content scepticism then questions about the content of practical argument, or about the nature of our powers of rational moral inquiry, are otiose if there is no relevant pre-existing motivation. Korsgaard argues that motivational scepticism is untenable. She argues that even a theorist who, like Hume, admits only instrumental reasons should allow for what she calls 'genuine irrationality,' where an agent fails to act on a reason the force of which they recognise. However, if genuine irrationality is possible then it must also be possible that the recognition of a reason is something that could and should have

⁴ C. Korsgaard, 'Skepticism About Practical Reason,' *Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986), pp. 5-25.

motivated the agent. In which case the issue of whether reason can motivate is agreed on all hands, and the only remaining question is about content.

Russell is not convinced, however. While compelling theoretical arguments might be sufficient to explain an alternation in *belief* in rational agents, he argues that 'the specific feature we are trying to account for' when we theorise about practical reason is precisely the point where they differ from theoretical reasons: the fact that they 'do work in the world in a way that beliefs, as such, do not;' the 'setting the body in motion' that is a '(natural) effect of pure practical reasons.' (p. 127). (By '(natural) effect,' I take it that he means an effect that takes place in the world of cause and effect.) On Russell's view, Korsgaard simply refuses to account for this feature, appearing rather to think that it is explained by the internalism requirement that practical reasons *just are* the kind of thing that motivate the rational agent. To Russell, this is precisely the thing that we need to explain:

'the question remains about how it is that the operations of pure practical reason are able to move the agent (i.e., without the appearance of "occult" causation). It is here that we require some psychological bridge building, if we are to explain how motivation is generated whereby reasons result in action.' (p. 127)

He thinks that Humeanism, by contrast, can provide the necessary psychological link, since it 'identifies the source of motivation as being located with some relevant passions or desires. Since reasons always attach to existent desires and inclinations of some kind, it is possible, on this theory, to explain how our reasons carry motivational force.' (p. 127)

Now the question that I want to raise is whether this motivational scepticism is compatible with the claims that Russell makes against Strawson's naturalism, and which point to the responsiveness of our emotions and actions to reason. Can we really be responsive to reason if our responsiveness is beholden to the motivational force of pre-existing desires and inclinations?

3.

I want to suggest that what appears to Russell to be a gap in Korsgaard's argument is better understood as a central plank. This is the underlying claim that the Humean conflates two orders of explanation: the logical space of reasons; and the logical space of law-like causes. The Humean, she thinks, demands a law-like, non-rational psychological explanation for changes brought about by reason. Her point, however, is that such an explanation need not, and indeed cannot, be given. To attempt to give such an explanation would be to leave the space of reasons entirely. To make this point, Korsgaard need not deny that explanation of the same events (if indeed they are identifiable as such) could be given in terms of law-like causes. But, on my reading, such explanation would leave out something distinctive about human action, or perhaps fail to capture it as action at all. The Humean seeks to explain changes brought about by rational inferences in terms of causal determination by psychological forces. But appeal to psychological forces with causal heft, on the Korsgaardian view, would simply be the wrong kind of thing to count as a relevant explanation.

To illustrate the conflation, Korsgaard draws a parallel between practical and theoretical reason. We need no further non-rational explanation of the way in which becoming convinced by new evidence, or by a theoretical argument, leads one to a change in belief. Of course, we must have non-rational capacities that enable – and, indeed, at some level of explanation *constitute* – rational changes. But terms like 'evidence', 'convincing,' 'decisive,' and so on, have their home in a different order of explanation. It is a category mistake to think that one order of explanation needs to be supplemented by another in order to explain how belief, or action, comes about. There is therefore no metaphysical mystery about how reasons can motivate that has to be resolved by finding a law-like psychological mechanism; there is only a discontinuity between orders of explanation. The trick is not to give into the Humean temptation to mix these orders up, interpreting notions such as 'reason' or 'evidence' in terms more appropriate to the order of laws of nature.

Korsgaard thinks that the Humean is *also* committed to this conclusion as long as they recognise the causal efficacy of an agent's grasping the principle of instrumental reason. For Korsgaard, instrumentalism about practical reason also must assume that grasping the rational authority of instrumental reasons is sufficient to lead to changes in

motivations. If it does not then it has forsaken the logical space of reasons and cannot allow cases of genuine irrationality. It would only be giving an explanation in the logical space of law-like causes, where ascriptions of irrationality make no sense. This point bears on the interpretation of Russell's use of 'pure practical reason'. On one way of interpreting it, 'pure practical reason' might be taken to mean categorical reasons, reasons the force of which is independent of any end we may contingently happen to have. However, this would be an uncharitable reading of Korsgaard. As I say, Korsgaard thinks that the efficacy of reason is on display in instrumental reasons just as much as it is in categorical reasons, and that our responsiveness to instrumental reasons demonstrates her point. After all, in the arguments Russell is concerned with, Korsgaard is only attacking motivational scepticism, and leaves content scepticism untouched. For the purposes of these argument, then, she is granting that there may only be instrumental reasons. This suggests another reading of 'pure practical reason': that practical reason explanations do not need to be supplemented with a further non-rational causal explanation when the agent is motivated by their grasp of the reason, since the explanation we seek takes place in the logical place of reasons. In this sense, hypothetical imperatives would also count as pure practical reasons. Therefore it is not content-sceptical instrumentalism about practical reason that Korsgaard is denying. She is only denying that motivational scepticism is a good way of arguing for content scepticism.

4.

Russell disagrees, and in a revealing passage, insists that Korsgaard leaves an explanatory gap that can be filled as follows:

'The Humean has a general theory about how reasons are able to provide and "transmit" motive force. The explanation, on their account, is that our reasons derive their motive force from our passions and desires, and this is how reasons are capable of moving us. When a consideration fails to draw on any of existing passions or desires then it cannot motivate the agent and so it cannot be a practical reason.'

Thus the Humean, on Russell's view, will say that it makes all the difference in the world that reasons for emotion and instrumental reasons are able to 'draw on' some pre-existing motivation. However, to assess this view, we should ask what is meant by the metaphor of 'draw on.' What we are trying to explain, say, is the change in one's feeling and motivation that comes about when one grasps the fact that there are no reasons, in one's circumstances, for feeling fear. One thing that might be in Russell's mind here is the thought that there is a psychological mechanism – the pre-existing motivation of fear – that explains this change. However, it can't be the motivation of fear itself that explains the ceasing of fear. For motivations like fear presumably have no power to alter themselves without some external influence – they would just continue on their merry way. Presumably what the Humean thinks they can give in the case of fear is an explanation of where some *new* psychological force comes from that has the power to alter how someone acts, and which allows the recognition of rational necessity to be psychologically real and effective. Thus there must be some other motivation related both to the recognition of the reason and to the original motivation that is being 'drawn on,' a psychological force which is strong enough, at the level of causal heft, to alter the occurrent motivation. But what can that new motivation be? A natural thought might be that this new psychological force is a belief. After all, Humeans think that desires are sensitive to instrumental beliefs. However, if Russell were to take this route, he would then be granting beliefs causal force in the world. And in that case, he will no longer be able to dismiss changes in belief that come about through the rational grasping of evidence as disanalogous to '(natural) effects' brought about by practical reason. The two would be parallel in the sense that beliefs would also be able to bring about real changes to motivations.

The problem is that the relation of 'drawing on' some motivation is used by Russell's argument in two incompatible ways. In the sense in which I grasp a rational necessity relating to acting on that motivation, the relation of 'drawing on' some motivation means the motivation 'counting in favour of' the action. Whereas what Russell complains is lacking in the Kantian picture is an explanation (presumably in terms of some psychological mechanism that goes beyond the way in which our education or experience may attune us to such justificatory reasons) of the causal relation between my recognition of something as counting in favour of altering my motivation and the

alteration of my motivation. Here he is looking for a sense of 'draw on' in the sense of 'have a causal impact on,' and where the recognition of a reason by a suitably attuned agent is not enough to explain that causal impact – presumably because it does not involve reference to a mechanism that operates in a law-like way. But in order to show that that is necessary, I suggest, he would need to show that the search for such a thing is not a conflation of different orders of explanation.

5.

Another way of understanding Russell's commitment to motivational scepticism might be that he takes it to be an implication of his moderate form of naturalism. Russell thinks that the kind of naturalism found in Strawson is too strong, but he supports a weaker form of naturalism (he calls it 'type-naturalism') on which, while emotions can be states with propositional, cognitive and ethical content, we cannot alter or eradicate our liability to certain emotions without altering or eradicating our distinctively human nature. Furthermore, he thinks that it is an implication of this moderate naturalism that '[w]hile it is possible that our token reactive attitudes could be systematically discredited from within, there remains no need or possibility of providing an external, rational justification of a more general kind for our (natural) propensity to these emotions' (p. 100) Thus, if we accept type-naturalism, we are committed to the view that external rational arguments are powerless to influence or alter our basic propensity to the emotions. However, a corollary of this is that, insofar as rational arguments do have the power to alter emotions, this must be because they come in some way from *within* the perspective granted to us by the emotions. And one might think that another way of putting that is that the only reasons we can draw on to alter the emotions are reasons that *themselves* draw on the emotions. However, if we now ask why we should accept moderate naturalist claims, it might look as though Humean motivational scepticism provides a ready answer. Russell might think, then, that we have to draw the Humean conclusion that only reasons connected to the emotions can stand in the way of an emotion in order to ground the moderate naturalist claim that external rational justification is powerless to shift our fundamental liability to the emotions.

However, I now want to argue that Russell is not committed to motivational scepticism by virtue of his moderate naturalism. To see this, consider that an alternative way of grounding a moderate naturalism is to adopt some form of what Korsgaard calls 'content scepticism' (or 'content-limitation': perhaps it is only scepticism in relation to an extreme Kantianism about content). Instead of explaining the powerlessness of 'external' rational justification by positing a necessary link between reasons and pre-existing motivations, we can instead explain it by reference to some form of coherentism (or holism) about justification. Something can count for us as a justification, on such a view, only by having some intelligible connection to what we already (take ourselves to have reason to) count as a justification. This rules out external justification because such justifications by definition do not appeal to the justificatory standards internal to a given network of justifications or 'space of reasons.' External justification would appear, from a perspective within the network, to be entirely unmotivated.

External justification is powerless with respect to our susceptibility to the emotions, then, insofar as only emotions are entangled with the evaluations that are central within our space of reasons. Furthermore, it is plausible that they are so entangled for two reasons. First of all, because emotions tend to track our sense of what is important (at least in the reasonably well-integrated self); and secondly, because the emotions to which the type-naturalist thinks we are ineradicably susceptible are not mere reflexes like the startle or gape responses, but are states rich with cognitive and evaluative content. It is part of our physiological nature that we are creatures of basic emotion, of course; but it is an important part of acculturation that those basic emotions have been elaborated and transformed by becoming attuned to, and led by, our developing thinking about what we have reason to value. At least for an agent whose evaluative stance is reasonably well integrated with their emotions, then, the limits to justification set by the logical space of their evaluative stance will thus coincide with the limits of the emotions they could imagine experiencing in given situations. This explains why external rational justification should be powerless over our basic susceptibility to the emotions without resorting either to the view that our emotions are therefore simply basic emotions, or to motivational scepticism.

6.

Moderate naturalism can thus help us to see why reason, emotion and morality are interconnected, and can therefore ground an objection to the formalistic rationalism of some Kantian approaches to practical reason. But it does so without appeal to motivational scepticism. At the same time, as we will now see, there is good naturalistic reason to think that the reasons that are internal to the perspective of the emotions may be quite extensive. Russell allows that, while certain emotions are an ineradicable part of human nature, we should admit that it is possible that there are in fact no situations in which it is 'reasonable and appropriate' to experience such emotions; and that we should further admit that if there were no such situations, we should and could respond to reason and not experience the emotions in question. On this view, as we have seen, reasons can be effective as long as they are capable of showing that existing emotions are not 'reasonable and appropriate'. But what should we understand Russell to mean by those terms? And how far do those considerations of 'reasonableness and appropriateness' have to 'draw on' pre-existing emotions in order to be able to alter them?

On one restrictive way of elaborating Russell's moderate naturalism, there would indeed be reasons to which our emotions could be expected to be responsive, but those reasons would be internal to the particular moral sentiments themselves. On this interpretation, we have to hold open the possibility that fear might be inappropriate because these reasons internal to the emotion might find no application. Nevertheless, there is no questioning the rationality of the perspective presented by those emotions. It is only if the emotions are not fitting to situations that they can be inappropriate – the perspective of the emotions themselves just comes with being human.

One thing that might follow from such a restrictive approach, therefore, is this. Say E is an emotion towards which Russell would have us take up a moderate naturalism. Now say that it would be fitting to feel E on a given occasion, in the sense that the situation corresponds to the perspective presented by this emotion, or accords with the 'formal object' of the emotion. As I am understanding the restrictive version of moderate naturalism, the emotion is 'reasonable and appropriate' in virtue of the fact that the situation accords with the formal object of the emotion. Furthermore, say that E

typically prompts agents to action-type A (A is the action-tendency of the emotion). On this restrictive interpretation, it follows from the fittingness of the emotion that I have a pro tanto justification for doing A given the fittingness of feeling E.

Call this interpretation Practical Reasons from Formal Object Fittingness (PRFOF): if a situation conforms to the formal object of emotion E such that the emotion is fitting to that situation; and if that emotion involves action-tendency A; then a subject S who is susceptible to E is justified in A-ing. While PRFOF may be the kind of moderate naturalism that Russell has in mind in his attack on Strawson and elsewhere, it is false. The restrictive approach to moderate naturalism has to be abandoned and a more generous version adopted. While an emotion may be fitting in the sense that the situation aligns with its formal object, we should not accept that this gives us even a pro tanto reason to act on that emotion. One reason for this is that there are emotions – such as malice, spite, Schadenfreude, perhaps – to which we are susceptible but that we ought not to have.

The reader may disagree with these examples, or think the point pious. However, my claim does not rest on these examples. For consider that many emotions in any given situation might fall under PRFOF. Perhaps, for instance, both Schadenfreude and compassion are fitting to a given situation. These emotions have action-tendencies that are incompatible with one another. If PRFOF were true then we would be justified in taking either of two incompatible courses of action. It might be argued that this can be fine. Practical reason, it might be said, is not like theoretical reason, and such incompatibility does not imply contradiction. However, while such indeterminacy is sometimes fine, it is not always fine. If it were, there would be no such thing as the emotional sensitivity or insensitivity that Russell's account of moral sense alludes to, and there would be no such thing as educating our emotions. Sometimes, then, having a certain emotion reveals that the subject fundamentally misses the significance of the salient feature in the situation. They see the situation merely as cause for Schadenfreude, when it is compassion that is called for. (Or, conversely, they only feel compassion and miss the deliciousness of the Schadenfreude that is all that the arrogant fool deserves.) In other words, sometimes an emotion is inappropriate because it precludes some other emotional response. This seems like a datum of ethical life that

Russell's considered account of the relations among emotion, reason and morality should not rule out.

Thus we can see that PRFOF cannot be sufficient to justify action. Practical reason for creatures susceptible to emotion requires an ability to adjudicate conflicts between emotions. However, if this is true then presumably such creatures are likely to develop a practice of reflecting on their emotions in order to resolve such conflicts. Such reflection cannot start from nowhere, of course, and so, to begin with at least, is unlikely to be emotionless, or detached from the kinds of things we are concerned about given the emotions we have. But while reflection is likely to start with the emotions, it does not seem obvious that it cannot go beyond them. The various emotions whose formal objects may be satisfied in any given situation all present some view of what matters in that situation, and how to respond to it. The need to come to a decision about how to react involves adjudication. This requires emotional-but-rational agents like us to think about what *really* matters in a situation and what the right way to respond to what matters in it is.

However, once we have a practice of inquiry into 'what matters' up and running, it seems at least possible that these questions might get their own momentum, and that this might lead to the development of concepts and forms of argument the validity of which participants in the practice no longer take to rest on the emotions. If this happened, however, would it not therefore be the case that the autonomous momentum taken on by this inquiry had developed a justificatory perspective that was external to the perspective of the emotions? That is, that the concepts that those in this practice might find it necessary to develop as they seek a better grasp on what matters, and the conditions of application of those concepts, might come no longer to refer to the emotions that were the genesis of the inquiry, or to be in any direct sense derivative of those emotions?

7.

Humean content-scepticism can be thought of as the denial that inquiry that begins from the need to adjudicate between actual competing motivations could become autonomous in this sense while remaining an inquiry into the question of what an agent

has reason to do. According to the Humean, we leave the terrain of inquiry into practical reason once we are no longer inquiring into the satisfaction of elements of our subjective motivational set. However, what grounds does the Humean give for this claim? We might think that if this claim turns out to be true it could only be found so through the experience of humanity engaging in the practice of practical inquiry over the long term, rather than by an a priori investigation into the nature of practical reason. Indeed, this idea that we should look to experience to determine the limits of human motivation by reason might be said to be in the spirit of Humeanism itself. It seems wrong for an empirically motivated view like Humeanism to set a priori limits to the way the practice of reasoning about practical reasons could develop – this would be what C. S. Peirce called ‘blocking the road of inquiry.’ In which case one might reasonably say that it is too early to say where the practice of inquiry into practical reasons will lead us. Nevertheless, many people claim, of course, that it is of the essence of moral requirement that it is categorical, and applies to us independently of pre-existing desire. It is not obvious that the practice of moral inquiry thus far has disproven the existence of categorical imperatives. Furthermore, even Hume had difficulty accounting for the morality of keeping contracts and promises and obeying authority when it is not in our (non-moral) interests to do so – yet it seems intuitive that, at least sometimes, we have such obligations.

Could the Humean nevertheless claim that such a road of inquiry, while it might be of abstruse theoretical interest, could never become practical? Humean motivational scepticism implies that, even if practical inquiry that has become autonomous of its emotional starting point could give us *external* reasons, i.e. reasons that we could appreciate as counting in favour of acting in such-and-such a way, we could never become motivated to act on such reasons unless they speak to some already existing motivation. However, one further crucial counter-argument to such motivational scepticism seems again to be that this possibility is just something that good empiricists should not rule out a priori. Russell, as we have seen, might claim on empirical grounds that such a thing is highly unlikely, and that we have no evidence of it happening. However, I have argued that, in explaining the action through the grasping of a reason, we have all the explanation we need in the space of reasons.

8.

I said at the outset that I was sympathetic to the idea that emotions are central to morality, but that I wanted to keep open the possibility that, rather than being only ever being led by the emotions, reason may, through an autonomous process of development, give rise to new forms of emotion. I want to close by sketching one such possibility. This is where the practical inquiry conducted by a culture over many centuries delivers an understanding of what is important in a given situation-type, and what the right way to respond to it is, which comes to be entrenched in the social imagination. In the case I am imagining, what inquiry delivers is a view on which we sometimes have reason to perform actions that acknowledge or do justice to what is important in the situation, by virtue of being *expressively powerful* in relation to that situation. For instance, such actions do justice to the situation in the way that kneeling in church might be expressively powerful in relation to being in the presence of a being of incomparable worth; or actions of self-dissociation and penance might be expressively powerful in relation to a situation in which one has violated the demands of the moral community one takes to represent one's true identity. In the presence of God, whom one takes to be incomparably higher, one kneels; and in the situation in which one violates the demands of one's true self, one withdraws respect from oneself. Now imagine that such discourse becomes so entrenched over many centuries that it is taken up in the 'higher' emotions and comes to form their basis, so that when we experience awe, we tend to drop to our knees, and when we experience guilt, tend to withdraw practical respect from ourselves in self-denial. Such emotions, then, would not be primitive, but culturally-elaborated. Of course, elaborated guilt would not exist unless we had primitive emotions. But we have sketched a way in which those primitive emotions could be taken up and transformed by the conclusions of inquiry. If this story were plausible – and of course, we would need much more argument to show that it is – we would have a case of which Russell's claim that emotions are constitutive of a kind of culturally variable sensitivity to a domain of moral reasons might be true.⁵ But we would not need an a priori Humean commitment to motivational or even content scepticism in order to see how emotion might play such a role in morality.

⁵ For a little more detail on this story, see my 'Expressive Actions,' in C. Abell and J. Smith (eds), *The Expression of Emotion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 73-94.

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