

Constructing a Moral Semantics for Hume's Moral Ontology

David Hume arguably holds that moral evaluations are descriptive, property-ascribing, truth-evaluable judgments, some of which are true.¹ There are moral properties and facts, and moral error and disagreement are not only possible but do occur. In Hume's view, moral qualities are "a relation, which nature has placed between the form [of an object] and the sentiment."² Moral qualities, as such, are sentiment-dependent properties ascribed to objects.³ Hume holds the following general characterization of the moral domain to be true: an object X belongs to the moral domain if and only if observation or contemplation of the typical effects of X elicits particular feelings—viz., feelings of approbation or (as the case may be) disapprobation toward X—within those who satisfy certain conditions, namely, the "general rules" of the "moral view."⁴

¹ I defend this reading of Hume in [reference omitted]. This interpretation is disputed however. For instance, several Humean scholars have offered an emotive, or expressivist, interpretation of Hume's theory of moral judgment: I. Hedenius (1937), J.N. Findlay (1944), his student A.N. Prior (1949), D.D. Raphael (1947), P.H. Nowell-Smith (1954) who cites Raphael, P. Edwards (1955) who cites both Raphael and Prior, R.B. Brandt (1959), M.J. Scott-Taggart (1961), A. Flew (1963), A.J. Ayer (1980), S. Blackburn (1984, 1993), A. MacIntyre (1988), H. Price (1988), F. Snare (1991), J. Bricke (1996) and G. Harman (1996). J.L. Mackie (1980) also initially suggests an emotive reading of Hume, but ultimately settles for what he calls the "objectification theory", which is a descriptivist interpretation of Hume but also a kind of error theory; i.e., according to Mackie, Hume holds that all moral judgments, literally construed, are false.

² *Of the Standard of Taste* [henceforth SOT], paragraph 10.

³ I defend this reading in [reference omitted]. As far as I am aware, C.D. Broad's (1944) discussion of Hume is the first to suggest a response-dependent account. J. L. Mackie (1980) was the first scholar to explicitly defend this sort of account as Hume's, though he claims that Hume also denies that such properties exist. D. F. Norton (1982) argues that, in Hume's view, such response-dependent moral properties do exist. See also Norton (1984), A. E. Pitson (1982 and particularly 1989), and N. Sturgeon (2001, 2008). G. Sayre-McCord (1994, 1996) also seems to concur with this reading of Hume. Curiously, Nicholas Capaldi (1989) explicitly says that, in Hume's view, moral distinctions are secondary-qualities; yet he also repeatedly states that moral judgments refer to moral sentiments, which is incompatible with a secondary-quality account. Others too read Hume as holding that moral judgments refer to sentiments rather than response-dependent properties. See for instance: C. L. Stevenson (1937), R. Firth (1952), Geoffrey Hunter (1962), Philippa Foot (1963), Pall Ardal (1966), Jonathan Harrison (1976), Barry Stroud (1978), Stephen Darwall (1983), R. Fogelin (1985), C. Brown (1988), Annette Baier (1991), Elizabeth Radcliffe (1994), Christine Korsgaard (1996), Kate Abramson (1999), and John Rawls (2000); both John McDowell (1978 and 1985) and David Wiggins (1987) also seem to suggest this sort of reading as Hume's actual view, although they argue that a secondary-quality account is a more defensible account of moral properties.

⁴ I argue for a particular account of the "general rules" that comprise Hume's "moral view" in my doctoral dissertation [reference omitted].

Hume's moral ontology is promising for reasons that cannot be fully explored in this paper, but I shall quickly mention a couple. First, there is mounting scientific evidence in support of Hume's claim that particular feelings—viz., those feelings engendered by “sympathy”—are “the foundation of morals” and the “chief source” of our capacity to apprehend moral distinctions.⁵ Second, Hume's account is also compatible with the general presumption that our moral evaluations are descriptive, property-ascribing, truth-evaluable judgments, some of which are true.

However, Hume's account is not without its complications. One obstacle is that Hume does not explain how any moral evaluative term or expression—e.g., ‘...is morally good’ or ‘...is a virtue’—makes reference to such sentiment-dependent moral properties. I suggest that this is due to the fact that Hume, influenced by many of his predecessors and contemporaries, was primarily concerned with giving an account of moral experience and moral psychology rather than an account of moral language.⁶ Hume is much more concerned with describing the role that the sentiments play within our moral practice than describing the precise connection those sentiments have with our moral evaluative language. For instance, he states that “if, in short, the *sentiments* are similar which arise from these endowments and the social virtues; is there any reason for being so extremely scrupulous about a *word*, or disputing whether they be entitled to the denomination of virtues?”⁷ So, as I read Hume, he does *not* attempt to give the literal semantic content of moral evaluative expressions. He neither tells us whether there is any difference in meaning between such expressions, nor does he fully specify their truth conditions.

In the end, then, Hume leaves us with the task of identifying the best analysis of moral evaluative terms and expressions that is consistent with his moral ontology. This, in a nutshell, is the aim of this paper. This task, and hence this paper, is both *interpretive*

⁵ I review some of the evidence in my doctoral dissertation [reference omitted]. For a snapshot of evidence in social psychology and cognitive neuroscience that moral cognition rests upon our emotions, in particular, our empathetic feelings, see J. Greene (2003), Greene *et al* (2004), Moll *et al* (2005), and Decety and Lamm (2006). For evidence in the field of primatology, see for instance Frans de Waal (1996, 2006).

⁶ Evidence that Hume was neither concerned with the literal semantic content of such terms as ‘virtue’ and ‘vice’, nor with precisely how people use such terms, can be found in Hume's work. For example, Hume writes: “It is fortunate, amidst all this seeming perplexity, that the question [concerning how one should define or use ‘virtue’ and ‘vice’], being merely verbal, cannot possibly be of any importance. A moral, philosophical discourse need not enter into all these caprices of language, which are so variable in different dialects, and in different ages of the same dialect” (*An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* [henceforth EPM], appendix IV, paragraph 2).

⁷ EPM, appendix IV, paragraph 6, Hume's emphasis.

and *reconstructive*. Determining whether a particular semantic analysis is consistent with Hume's moral ontology is, in part, an interpretive exercise since it is a matter of interpretation how we should understand Hume's moral ontology. But the task is also reconstructive because, as I read Hume, he does not offer *any* semantic analysis. Moreover, we will be appealing to contemporary standards to assess the analysis.

As far as I am aware, all of those who have offered semantic analysis of moral evaluative terms and expressions consistent with (what is arguably) Hume's feeling-dependent conception of moral properties have taken what I call the *traditional approach*. The traditional approach assumes that evaluative terms such as 'good' refer to or describe the relevant moral property.⁸ Given Hume's moral ontology, this approach holds that value terms such as 'good' refer to or describe a feeling-dependent property. For instance, C. D. Broad writes: "Now for Hume the statement 'x is good' *means* the same as the statement 'x is such that the contemplation of it would call forth an emotion of approval towards it in all or most men'."⁹ David Wiggins claims that, according to a sensible Humean account, "x is good if and only if x is the sort of thing that calls forth or makes appropriate a certain sentiment of approbation." Wiggins generalizes this claim stating: "...for each value predicate φ , there is an attitude or response of subjects... such that an object has the property φ stands for if and only if the object is fitted by its characteristics to bring down that extant attitude or response upon it and bring it down precisely because it has those characteristics."¹⁰

This paper sketches out an alternative semantic analysis of moral evaluative expressions that rejects the traditional approach and yet is generally compatible with, and in fact remarkably complementary to, Hume's account. This novel approach is preferable to the traditional approach for various reasons, at least a couple of which are addressed in this work. First, the approach offers a univocal analysis of moral and evaluative terms. Second, it offers a straightforward solution to the following puzzle.

⁸ Within the analytic tradition, this approach has its roots in G. E. Moore's seminal work *Principia Ethica* (1903). Moore's famous "Open Question argument" assumes from the start that 'good' must refer to a moral property. Moore, along with most others in roughly the first half of the 20th century, believed his argument showed that 'good' resisted any "definition", or analytic reduction. Moore took his argument to demonstrate that 'good' is "indefinable" and must therefore refer to a "simple," "non-natural" property.

⁹ Broad (1944: 84-5, his emphasis).

¹⁰ Wiggins (1997: 206).

As discussed, Hume holds that moral properties are determined by appeal to one of only two kinds of moral sentiment, namely, *approval* or *disapproval*. Based on this account, moral expressions presumably refer to one of only two kinds of moral property, to wit: the property of being *moral* and the property of being *immoral*. Hence the following moral expressions all appear to somehow refer to the same moral property: ‘...is morally good’, ‘...is morally virtuous’, ‘...is morally right’, and ‘...morally ought to...’. Yet presumably none of these expressions are semantically equivalent since the evaluative terms ‘good’, ‘virtuous’, ‘right’, and ‘ought’ do not appear to be synonymous. But given Hume’s feeling-dependent account of moral properties, how can Hume or a Humean explain this apparent lack of synonymy between these terms and expressions?¹¹

While a plausible solution from those who take the traditional approach might not be immediately obvious, as we shall see the alternative approach to be proposed offers a straightforward answer to this puzzle. To explain its answer, we shall first focus on an analysis of a particular value term and then we will expand the analysis in order to provide a more general account of value and value terms. With this in mind, let’s begin by considering the value term ‘good’.

Following Peter Geach’s lead, I suggest that ‘good’ is best analyzed as an attributive adjective rather than a predicative adjective.¹² Attributives are not independently predicative; they do not denote a property. Instead they modify (either explicitly or implicitly) a predicative term *F* that is independently predicative. Geach demonstrates this by observing that if ‘good’ were independently predicative, then the expression ‘x is a good *F*’ would be logically equivalent to ‘x is good and x is an *F*’ but it is not, just as ‘x is a big flea’ is not equivalent to ‘x is big and x is a flea’. On this view, to predicate ‘is good’ of some object *x* is in effect to say of *x* that it is good for or as an *F*, or simply a good *F*, where *F* denotes a comparison class of which *x* is a member (e.g., the class of the kind of thing *x* is, such as a book, pet, sunset, etc.).¹³

¹¹ This is also a problem for other interpretations of Hume. Supposing for instance that the evaluative terms just listed refer to, or merely *emote*, or *express*, the feeling of moral approval, then these terms would presumably be interchangeable across cases without any change in meaning; but it seems clear that they are not. Justin D’Arms and Daniel Jacobson (2000: 725) also note this problem, but they do not consider any solution to it. See also Michael Smith (1994).

¹² Peter Geach (1956: 33-42).

¹³ Geach emphasizes the latter (viz., a good *F*), whereas Samuel Wheeler III seems to emphasize the former (viz., good for or as an *F*); see Wheeler (1972: 310-34).

Similar to ‘good’ and *mutatis mutandis* all other attributives, the attributive predicate expression ‘is big’ *simpliciter* is analyzed as the complex predicate ‘is a big *F*’. This complex predicate applies to an object *x* iff *x* is an *F*, and *x* is larger in size than most other members of the comparison class *F*. However, while it is fairly clear that the attributive adjective ‘big’ is applicable along some scale of size and, for instance, ‘tall’ along some relevant standard of height, it may not be immediately obvious what the relevant standard of evaluation is to which ‘good’ is applicable.

Unfortunately Geach does not provide an analysis of the term ‘good’ of the type given above for ‘big’, but he does hint at the term’s connection with “wants” and “desires”. John Mackie is more explicit, stating: “to be called good a thing must be such as to have some satisfying relation to something like interests,” and “‘good’, I think, always imports some reference to something like interests or wants.”¹⁴ Along these lines, I suggest that ‘good’ always imports reference to *ends*, *aims*, or *goals*. The proffered attributive analysis of ‘good’ can therefore be stated roughly as follows.

‘*X* is a good *F*’ means: *x* is an *F*, and *x* is such as to fulfill (or further) contextually relevant ends pertaining to *F*s to a higher degree than most other *F*s.

So, for example, *x* is a good Merlot iff *x* is a Merlot, and *x* such as to fulfill contextually relevant ends pertaining to Merlots (e.g., taste, bouquet, color, etc.) to a higher degree than most other Merlots.

We can now generalize this account by maintaining that *all* value terms (e.g., ‘good’, ‘virtuous’, ‘right’, and ‘ought’) import reference to ends. In other words, according to the proffered analysis, *values* are relational properties that obtain between a given object (or objects) and a given set of ends.¹⁵ In sum, an object has positive or (as the case may be) negative value insofar as it fulfills or (as the case may be) foils a given set of ends.

¹⁴ J. L. Mackie (1977: 62, 58).

¹⁵ This general theory of value traces all the way back to Socrates who, in Xenophon’s *Memoirs*, Book III, chapter 8, states: “Everything else that we use is considered to be fine and good in accordance with the same standard—namely, the end for which it is serviceable” (*Conversations of Socrates*, translated by H. Tredennick and R. Waterfield, 1990). Besides Socrates, Geach, and Mackie, the notion that value is a relation between objects and ends (or something similar such as interests, needs, or wants) can be found in George Santayana (1913); D. W. Prall (1921); R. B. Perry (1926); Paul Ziff (1960); and more recently Stephen Finlay (2004, 2005).

In some contexts of utterance, particularly moral contexts, the relevant ends pertain to such kinds of class of objects as *acts*, *character traits*, and *states of affairs*. However, because a variety of different kinds of ends—e.g., moral, prudential, political, and legal ends—can be associated with these classes of objects, a problem arises: it is unclear how to give an analysis of a statement containing an attributive that modifies a predicate *F* in which there are many different and varied kinds of ends associated with *F*s. *Prima facie*, a definitive analysis appears to be all but impossible in such instances because it is unclear what is the relevant set of ends.¹⁶

Geach holds that such claims are “too empty” to be given an analysis, but I disagree. I suggest that the relevant set of ends is typically indicated either explicitly by the utterance or implicitly by the context of utterance. So, in moral contexts, there will be reference to *moral ends*.¹⁷ For instance, reference to moral ends is indicated explicitly—e.g., by using the expression ‘morally good’—or implicitly via conversational implicature—i.e., the context of utterance indicates that the relevant ends are moral ends.¹⁸ Similarly, in non-moral conversational contexts, the context can indicate reference to a particular kind of *non-moral end*.¹⁹ For instance, the conversational context might implicitly indicate that the relevant ends are (non-moral) *prudential ends*, or it might do so explicitly—e.g., by using the expression ‘prudentially good (*F*)’. This applies *mutatis mutandis* to other non-moral ends (e.g., rational ends, legal ends, etc).

Thus, according to the proffered analysis, the predicate ‘...is a morally good *F*’ or simply ‘...is good’ (when used in a moral context of utterance) applies to an object *x* iff *x* is such as to fulfill the moral ends pertaining to *F*s to a higher degree than most other *F*s of which *x* is a member. So, for example, a particular act is a morally good act iff that act is such as to fulfill the relevant moral ends—viz., those pertaining to the set of acts that comprise the comparison class—to a higher degree than most other acts of that set.²⁰

¹⁶ Scott Soames (2002: 151) also observes this same basic difficulty. Soames points to a similar problem of analysis where attributives modify predicates in which, apart from special stage-setting, it is unclear what the contextually relevant ends would be, such as, for example, *particles of dust* or *balls of lint*. I will not address this problem since it doesn’t pertain to the present discussion of value terms used in moral contexts.

¹⁷ See also Finlay (2004, 2005), but he offers a different and I think problematic conception of *moral ends*.

¹⁸ H. P. Grice (1989) developed the notion of *conversational implicature* and revealed its importance.

¹⁹ But it might not. In such cases, clarification will be needed before an analysis can be given.

²⁰ It is noteworthy that the comparison class can be more or less narrow in scope. For example, it might be limited to those acts available to an agent within a given set of circumstances, such as the circumstances in which an agent finds herself.

There are, however, a couple of *prima facie* problems with the proffered approach. First, it is far from clear how the proposed analysis is compatible with Hume's moral ontology since, as stated, feelings of approval and disapproval do not appear in its analysis of evaluative terms such as 'good'. Second, while the appeal to conversational context helps to narrow our conception of what counts as the relevant set of ends, this solution is only helpful in the moral case if we have an account of what constitutes a *moral end*. As of yet we have no such account.

It is precisely at this point that Hume's sentiment-dependent account of moral qualities enters the analysis. According to Hume's moral ontology, an end *e* belongs to the moral domain if and only if observation or contemplation of the typical effects of *e* being fulfilled or (as the case may be) foiled by an object elicits particular feelings toward that object—viz., feelings of approbation or (as the case may be) disapprobation—within the observer under certain conditions. Thus, just as Hume claims, moral distinctions depend upon human sentiment. With certain conditions in place, our attitudinal responses *determine* moral properties,²¹ including those moral qualities ascribed to ends and thereby to value-states, along with the object(s) to which such value—viz., *moral value*—is ascribed. Our feelings therefore play a crucial role in apprehending moral qualities, just as Hume claims.

Significantly, observe that according to the proposed analysis there is a distinction between *moral properties* and *value properties*, even though moral properties are also interrelated with values. Moral properties are sentiment-dependent qualities. They are, in effect, relational properties that hold between *sentiments* and *ends*.²² Values, on the other hand, are not dependent upon our sentiments. Rather, they are relational properties that hold between *ends* and *objects*. In the characteristic way described above, moral

²¹ Hume writes: "Now it has been observ'd, that our own sensations determine the vice and virtue of any quality, as well as those sensations, which it may excite in others" (*A Treatise of Human Nature* [henceforth T] 597). Hume is also explicit that our feelings are indicative of moral distinctions only when certain conditions are satisfied. For instance, he writes: "'Tis only when a character is considered in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling, or sentiment, as denominates it morally good and evil" (T 472). And elsewhere Hume insists that observers must also have "perfect serenity of mind, a recollection of thought, [and pay] due attention to the object" (SOT, paragraph 10).

²² It might be suggested that this is a significant departure from Hume's view, but in the discussion that follows I argue that it is not. Hume holds that morals are "a relation, which nature has placed between the form [of an object] and the sentiment" (SOT, paragraph 10). The relevant form of the object is that which accounts for the fact that the object fulfills or foils various ends to which we then sympathetically respond.

properties and value properties conjoin to produce *moral value*. Moral evaluative thought/judgment is therefore about/refers to both of these properties.

This approach to providing semantic analysis of moral evaluative language that is generally compatible with Hume's moral ontology has some significant advantages over the traditional approach. For instance, it provides a univocal analysis of evaluative terms such as 'good', 'right', 'ought', and 'virtuous'. In other words, these terms do not vary in meaning across moral and non-moral conversational contexts. Instead, it is the relevant objects and ends that vary across contexts.

The approach also offers a straightforward solution to the problem regarding the lack of synonymy among moral evaluative expressions such as '...is morally good', '...is morally right', '...morally ought to...', and '...is morally virtuous'. According to the proposed analysis, none of these moral evaluative expressions are semantically equivalent precisely because the evaluative terms 'good', 'right', 'ought', and 'virtuous' are not synonymous. Each of these evaluative terms has a different descriptive meaning. Roughly, *x is good* means: *x* is such as to fulfill contextually relevant ends to a higher degree than most other *Fs*; *x is right* means: *x* is such as to fulfill contextually relevant ends to a higher degree than all other *Fs*; *agent A ought to x* means: it is more probable that agent A would fulfill contextually relevant ends by doing (or being, or having) *x* than all other *Fs*;²³ and *x is virtuous* means: *x* is a trait that is such as to typically fulfill contextually relevant ends.

All of these analyses entail that none of the above expressions *per se* refer to moral properties. Rather, it is the addition of the adverb 'morally', which modifies the evaluative terms, that explains why such evaluative expressions refer to ends that belong to the moral domain. In those instances in which the adverb is not explicitly included in the moral utterance, the conversational context (typically) indicates that those evaluative expressions refer to *moral ends* and hence *moral value*, rather than *non-moral ends* and *non-moral value*.

Thus far I have given an analysis of moral evaluative expressions that is *generally compatible* with Hume's moral ontology (at least as I understand it). In concluding, I defend the stronger claim that this analysis is quite *complementary* to Hume's account.

²³ S. Finlay "Oughts and Ends" (unpublished manuscript) offers a similar analysis of 'ought'.

As discussed, Hume argues that when standard conditions are satisfied our attitudes of approval and disapproval determine the moral domain. However, Hume also argues that our reasoning “paves the way” for these sentiments. He writes:

The final sentence, it is probable... that which renders morality an active principle and constitutes virtue and happiness, and vice our misery: it is probable, I say, that this final sentence depends on some internal sense of feeling, which nature has made universal in the whole species. For what else can have an influence of this nature? But in order to pave the way for such a sentiment, and give proper discernment of its object, it is often necessary, we find, that much reasoning should precede, that nice distinctions be made, just conclusions drawn, distant comparisons formed, complicated relations examined, and general facts fixed and ascertained. (EPM, section I, paragraph 9)

In Hume’s view, the sort of reasoning that we deploy when making our moral judgments is causal reasoning, in particular reasoning about the causal tendencies of objects to fulfill or foil ends. Consider the following passage: “One principal foundation of moral praise being supposed to lie in the usefulness of any quality or action, it is evident that reason must enter for a considerable share in all decisions of this kind; since nothing but that faculty can instruct us in the tendency of qualities and actions...” (EPM, Appendix I, paragraph 2). The tendency of which Hume speaks just is the tendency of objects (e.g., traits and actions) to fulfill or foil a given end or set of ends. After all: “Usefulness is only a tendency to a certain end” (EPM, Appendix I, part II, paragraph 2). More precisely, it is a tendency to bring about an end that is agreeable either to the possessor of the object that has the tendency, or to those who “have commerce” with her.

Hume holds that our moral sentiments, via the psychological process of sympathy, are responsive to our evaluations of these tendencies of objects.²⁴ For instance, he writes: “Wherever an object has a tendency to produce pleasure in the possessor, ...it is sure to please the spectator, by a delicate sympathy with the possessor” (T 576-7). Thus, concludes Hume, “we must allow, that the reflecting on the tendency of characters and mental qualities, is sufficient to give us the sentiments of approbation and blame” (T 577). Given Hume’s moral ontology, it follows that the “distinction between what is useful, and what is pernicious...is the same in all its parts, with the moral distinction” (EPM, Section VI, part I, paragraph 5).²⁵

²⁴ See, for instance, T 316-24 and T 574-91. I explain in detail how sympathy generates moral sentiments from these evaluations in my doctoral dissertation [reference omitted].

²⁵ As I read Hume, we are to judge whether an object is truly useful or pernicious from the “moral view.”

In other words, if an object is such as to fulfill or foil certain ends, then it is both *useful* and *moral* or (as the case may be) *pernicious* and *immoral*. These will be ends that, upon consideration of their being fulfilled or foiled, elicit attitudes of approval or (as the case may be) disapproval within those who satisfy standard conditions. Since these attitudes determine the moral domain, it is a short step to the conclusion that such ends belong to the moral domain, i.e., that they are *moral ends*. In short, that which is truly *useful* or *pernicious* on Hume's view is simply an object—e.g., an act, trait, or agent—that tends to fulfill or (respectively) foil *moral ends*.

The proffered semantic analysis of moral evaluative expressions is clearly quite complementary with this reading of Hume. For instance, the analysis of value terms such as 'good' as attributive adjectives that necessarily modify a comparison class reflects the importance that Hume assigns to comparison. "By comparison alone", says Hume, "we fix the epithets of praise or blame, and learn how to assign the due degree of each" (SOT, paragraph 22). At the same time, the proposed analysis also makes explicit the connection between our *reasoned evaluations* of objects (in terms of their fulfilling or foiling particular ends) and our *sentiments*, both of which play a crucial role in Hume's account of moral judgment/thought. For instance, Hume writes: "In moral decisions, all the circumstances and relations must be previously known; and the mind, from the contemplation of the whole, feels some new impression of affection or disgust, esteem or contempt, approbation or blame" (EPM, Appendix I, paragraph 10). Following Hume, the analysis offers an explanation of the apparent essential connection between *human conduct* and *moral judgment/thought* by appealing to particular conative attitudes (and standard conditions). But it also improves upon Hume's account by providing a straightforward descriptive analysis of the content of moral thought/judgment that is consistent with that account.²⁶

²⁶ In my doctoral dissertation [reference omitted], I use this semantic analysis to help construct solutions to various traditional metaethical disputes such as those concerning factuality, moral objectivity, and normativity. This analysis of the content of our moral thoughts/judgments is also remarkably congenial with recent discoveries in neuroscience. For instance, distinct areas of the brain that engender various emotions are active during moral cognition. Distinct areas of the brain associated with assessing an event in light of both short and long-term ends and goals are also active during moral cognition. Although distinct, these brain regions are integrated in moral cognition. Consequently, if either of these areas malfunctions, then this directly impacts our ability to make moral distinctions, as well as our moral motivation, both of which are evidenced in our tendency to exhibit, or fail to exhibit, pro-social behavior. (See, for instance, Moll *et al* [2006].)

It is also noteworthy that this account not only agrees with Hume's contention that the primary objects of moral evaluation are not *acts* but *intentions*, in particular the *agent's intentions to bring about particular ends* (T 348); the account also readily explains why this is the case. *End-directed* acts are the only kind of acts that are objects of our moral evaluation, and in order for an act to be directed toward fulfilling or facilitating a particular end, the agent must *intend* to bring about that end by performing the act. Hence the primary objects of our moral assessments are the agent's *intentions to facilitate the actualization of a particular end or set of ends*. As Hume points out (T 348-9), we tend to look past any accidental consequences of the act and hold the agent morally responsible primarily because of her *intentions to bring about a particular end*. Hume correctly observes that a notable exception to this rule is our moral evaluations of an agent's character traits (T 348-9). But even in this case, the agent's repeated intentional aiming at a particular end is what establishes the habit in the first place. And this fact explains why the agent is morally responsible for many of her dispositions to act in certain ways even in those cases in which the acts themselves, which are performed out of habit, are not performed intentionally.

In sum, we have not only identified an alternative approach to analyzing moral evaluative terms and expressions that is generally compatible with Hume's moral ontology; we have arguably identified the analysis that best fits Hume's account and putative semantic facts, such as the lack of synonymy between various evaluative terms and expressions. To recapitulate, I've claimed that Hume does not offer *any* semantic account of moral evaluative language; so I am certainly not suggesting that the proffered analysis is Hume's. The analysis is undoubtedly reconstructive. For instance, Hume does not distinguish between moral terms and value terms; nor does he draw the proffered distinction between *moral properties* and *values*.²⁷ However, as we've seen, Hume does hold that there is an intimate relationship between our evaluations of the tendency of objects to fulfill or foil particular ends on the one hand and our moral sentiments on the other. The above analysis is clearly in keeping with that view.

²⁷ Interestingly, at one point Hume does equate a "desir'd good" with a "design'd end" (T 416-7)).

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