Naturalizing Sentimentalism for Environmental Ethics

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Jesse Prinz and Shaun Nichols have argued that within metaethics, sentimentalism is the theory that best accords with empirical facts about human moral psychology. Recent findings in experimental moral psychology, they argue, indicate that emotions are psychologically central to our moral concepts. One way of testing the empirical adequacy of sentimentalism is by looking at research on environmental values. A classic problem in environmental ethics is providing an account of the intrinsic value of nonhuman entities, which is often thought to be inconsistent with sentimentalism. However, no supporters of sentimentalist accounts of environmental values have evaluated the empirical adequacy of their claims. The relevant evidence falls under two broad categories: (1) responses to nature itself and (2) moral evaluations of environmental behaviors. The evidence indicates that both valuing and disvaluing nature are ultimately grounded in emotions.

I. INTRODUCTION

Jesse Prinz\(^1\) and Shaun Nichols\(^2\) have argued that within metaethics, sentimentalism is the theory that best accords with empirical facts about human moral psychology. Recent findings in experimental moral psychology, they argue, indicate that emotions are psychologically central to our moral concepts. Their support for sentimentalism is part of a broader movement to “naturalize” the domain of ethics, or to account for ethical facts in a way that coheres with facts about the natural world. Naturalizing metaethics helps to adjudicate between competing ethical claims while also making ethical values less mysterious. Testing the empirical adequacy of sentimentalism in this way is thought to be essential to building a comprehensive metaethical theory.

In this paper, my aim is to naturalize sentimentalism for environmental ethics. Research on environmental values provides illuminating test cases for the empirical adequacy of sentimentalism. One key challenge comes from the concept of intrinsic

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value. A classic problem in environmental ethics is providing an account of the intrinsic value of nonhuman entities, which is often thought to be inconsistent with sentimentalism. Within environmental ethics, the classic sentimentalist account comes from J. Baird Callicott, and more recently, Katie McShane has argued for a revival of sentimentalist theories for environmental values. Both Callicott and McShane argue that sentimentalism is compatible with the intrinsic value of nature, but do not evaluate the relevant empirical evidence for this claim, nor for the emotional basis of environmental values more generally.

I argue that the empirical evidence does indeed support the centrality of emotions in environmental values. I classify the relevant evidence according to two broad categories: (1) responses to nature itself, and (2) moral evaluations of environmental behaviors. With regard to (1), I review evidence indicating that awe, wonder, and fascination cause positive valuing of nature, and that aversion to nature is driven by fear and disgust. The evidence relevant to (2) can be broken down into evaluations of one’s own environmental behaviors (self-regarding emotions) and the environmental behaviors of others (other-regarding emotions). I argue that guilt drives moral disapproval of one’s own environmental actions, while evaluations of others are determined by the so-called CAD emotions: contempt, anger, and disgust. In short, the evidence suggests that both valuing and disvaluing of nature are ultimately grounded in sentiments.

I proceed as follows: before discussing the relevant empirical evidence, in section two I provide a basic outline of sentimentalism, and discuss how classic debates over intrinsic value within environmental ethics have led many to resist sentimentalism for environmental values. Sections three and four then present the evidence in favor of sentimentalism, as discussed above. In section five I consider possible objections to my account. In particular, I defend sentimentalist theories of value in environmental ethics against recent criticisms raised by neosentimentalists. Neosentimentalists argue that the merit of, or justification for, moral emotions is central to our moral concepts (e.g., as found in Justin D’Arms and Daniel Jacobson, “Sentiment and Value,” and in an environmental context in the work of Katie McShane). I argue, in opposition, that merit is not central to our moral psychologies, and that it causes problems for the psychological plausibility of neosentimentalism.

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6 McShane, “Why Environmental Ethics Shouldn’t Give Up on Intrinsic Value”; and “Neosentimentalism and Environmental Ethics.”
II. SENTIMENTALISM AND INTRINSIC VALUE

(2.1) BRIEF OVERVIEW OF SENTIMENTALISM

As outlined in Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, and Peter Railton’s classic essay,\(^7\) sentimentalism can be classified as a variety of sensibility theory, in the tradition pioneered by John McDowell,\(^8\) David Wiggins,\(^9\) Allan Gibbard,\(^10\) and Simon Blackburn.\(^11\) Sensibility theories are labeled as such because, on these accounts, morality is understood on analogy to other senses. This analogy is usually explicated in terms of secondary qualities: the properties of moral entities are response-dependent—they are contingent in an important way on human perceivers—but those properties are no less really out there in the world than are sights, sounds, smells and a variety of other objects of sensation. Just as color is thought to be a real property of objects, moral entities are thought to have real properties as well.

The sentimentalist accounts of Nichols\(^12\) and Prinz\(^13\) draw from these earlier sensibility theories but place special emphasis on sentimentalism’s descriptive accuracy. For instance, brain-imaging studies have indicated strong emotion processing during moral judgments,\(^14\) and other experiments have demonstrated that priming emotions can alter moral judgments.\(^15\) These and many other studies provide empirical support for sentimentalism.

In The Emotional Construction of Morals, Prinz argues that the empirical evidence supports a particularly strong relationship between emotions and moral concepts. He argues that emotions are both necessary and sufficient for perceiving moral properties in the world and for making moral judgments. Consider his use of Richard Shweder et al.\(^16\) and Paul Rozin et al.’s\(^17\) CAD theories of moral emotions. CAD

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\(^{12}\) Nichols, *Sentimental Rules*; and Nichols, “Naturalizing Sentimentalism.”

\(^{13}\) Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals*; and Prinz, “Measuring Morality.”


\(^{17}\) Paul Rozin, Laura Lowery, Sumio Imada, and Jonathan Haidt, “The CAD Triad Hypothesis: A
here stands for “Community-Autonomy-Divinity” and corresponds (coincidentally) to emotional responses with the same acronym, “Contempt-Anger-Disgust.” Very briefly, this account holds that moral contempt is elicited by harms committed against the community, including violations of social hierarchies; moral anger functions as a response to harm done to individuals, primarily to oneself; and moral disgust is elicited when people feel as if they have somehow been contaminated by the deeds of others or by violations against the natural order of things. Judging something to be morally wrong, on Prinz’s account, consists in feeling a certain emotion in response to violations of the corresponding category of moral transgression. The CAD emotions are discussed in more detail in section (4.2).

(2.2) RESPONSE-DEPENDENCE AND INTRINSIC VALUE

The idea that moral values are response-dependent has met some resistance from environmental ethicists. A classic problem in environmental ethics is providing an account of the intrinsic value of nonhuman entities. There are different conceptions of what this problem amounts to. I focus on two claims about intrinsic value that seem to raise obstacles for a sentimentalist account of environmental values. One way intrinsic value is often understood is as a claim about non-relational, objective value. For illustration, consider G. E. Moore’s famous “Last Man” or independence test for intrinsic value. Moore states that “saying a thing is intrinsically good . . . means it would be a good thing that the thing in question should exist, even if it existed quite alone, without any further accompaniments or effects whatever.” Something possessing intrinsic value, according to Moore, has that value regardless of any other relationships it might possess to other things. So if a certain tree has intrinsic value, it doesn’t matter if that tree is amidst a large flourishing forest or is the last living entity on the planet. It also, importantly, has that value regardless of the existence of human perceivers. If human beings were to go extinct, the tree—if it truly possessed intrinsic value—would continue to have intrinsic value. This conception of intrinsic value is incompatible with sentimentality because it claims that the value of at least some entities in nature is response-independent. Sentimentalism, however, holds that all value is dependent on the emotional responses of human perceivers.

A second conception of intrinsic value that might seem to conflict with sentimentalism is non-instrumental value. An entity with instrumental value has that intrinsic value.
value in virtue of being a means to certain ends. An entity with non-instrumental value, by contrast, is valuable regardless of how it might serve any further ends. To truly value the environment, then, it could be argued that one must value it non-instrumentally. But sentimentalism requires that nonhuman entities serve at least one further end in order to be valued—namely, evoking certain emotions in human perceivers.

I think sentimentalism is neither incompatible with these two conceptions of intrinsic value nor a challenge to proper valuing of nonhuman entities. First, let’s consider the independence test. Using this test against sentimentalism would seem to conflate an objection concerning the source of one’s values with an objection to the content of one’s values. It is consistent with sentimentalism for people to value the existence of things in times and places that they will never inhabit, and wish that those things continue existing when they are gone. This is furthermore compatible with the claim that the source of this valuing is one’s sentiments. For the sentimentalist, it is enough if currently existing sentiments dictate that the destruction of nature is a loss in value. It is thus still possible for nonhuman entities to have value on sentimentalist grounds, even if human beings were to go extinct in the future, for instance. Future extinction has no impact on the content of current sentiments.

Non-instrumental value also need not conflict with proper valuing of the environment. In fact, many ethicists have argued that attributing non-instrumental value to an entity may come about precisely because of how that entity is used. As I discuss below, many people come to value wild nature because of past experiences in nature, and many of those experiences would be classified as instrumental uses (e.g., through tourism, camping, and hiking). We come to value aspects of nature partly for their own sake but also, as Christine Korsgaard has described it, “under the condition of their instrumentality.” This is consistent with the idea that an intrinsically valuable entity should not be used inappropriately. Pristine nature is often attributed intrinsic value because it is untouched by humans. But intrinsic value is also attributed to non-pristine aspects of nature precisely because they are enjoyed or experienced in some way.

In summary, sentimentalism is not only consistent with the idea that different aspects of the environment have intrinsic value but in fact seems important for explaining why people continually find value in nature. Traditional conceptions of intrinsic value as non-relational and non-instrumental ignore how our relationships and experiences often lead to strong valuing of nature. In the next section, I argue for the centrality of emotions in creating these values. After discussing the

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23 Korsgaard, “Two Distinctions in Goodness,” p. 185.
relevant empirical research, I consider potential objections to my arguments here about intrinsic value.

III. RESPONSES TO THE ENVIRONMENT

In this section I review evidence for the emotional basis of both affinity and aversion to nature, and the moral values that arise out of these emotional responses.

(3.1) PROENVIRONMENTAL SENTIMENTS

Perhaps the most discussed emotional response to the environment is biophilia, first popularized by E. O. Wilson24 and developed by various authors in Stephen Kellert and E. O. Wilson’s The Biophilia Hypothesis.25 Biophilia has been proposed as supporting our proenvironmental attitudes and perhaps being a source of progress in environmental ethics.26 Thus, even though biophilia has never been included in any official taxonomy of emotions, it is worthwhile to think about it as such.

Biophilia can most plausibly be defined as a proclivity for living things. More specifically, it can be defined as an affinity for features that indicate animacy. Animate entities are typically identified as self-propelled and goal-oriented.27 These features, of course, are shared by many non-living entities as well, but the biophilia hypothesis holds that affinity for non-living animate things is derivative of an evolved function of affinity for living things. Some entities in nature are highly animate (e.g., animals) and some are relatively less animate (e.g., plants), but all of them elicit a biophilic response. For instance, plants do not move about like animals, but over a relatively short time span we can observe that they are growing and spreading without direct external assistance.

An additional feature of biophilia is the claim that living entities produce a pleasurable affective response in human beings. For instance, there’s evidence that feeling connected to nature is correlated with positive affect28 and with a wide variety of measures of happiness and well-being (particularly long-term resilience in the face of stress).29 One proposed explanation for these effects is that we feel at ease

when surrounded by features of nature that provided benefits for our evolutionary ancestors. Appleton famously proposed that contemporary humans imitate their ancestors in seeking out natural environments that include the properties of *prospect* (enabling greater vision) and *refuge* (being hidden from view).\(^{30}\) Savannahs, for instance, possess these features, and there is evidence to suggest that people prefer being in and viewing savannah landscapes.\(^{31}\)

There are some problems with using biophilia as a source for a sentimentalistic ethic, however. First, it doesn’t appear to be a discrete emotion. Discrete emotions, such as disgust, anger, and happiness, have characteristic behavioral expressions and physiological signals. Biophilia doesn’t seem to have any of these. The most frequently described physiological response is a combination of positive affect and relaxation, which is common to many other emotions, and the typical behavioral expression is to approach and be attentive to nature, something also achieved by many other emotions. Second, it’s not clear that being attuned to living things would produce an appetitive or protective moral response. After all, nature is full of threats. It would seem more likely, if one is attuned to nature, to be biophobic.\(^{32}\) So instead of biophilia, I suggest that sentimentalists look to other emotions that better account for affinity to nature and proenvironmental moral behaviors.

Awe and wonder, which researchers generally treat as a single emotion, are prominent emotional responses that tend to produce proenvironmental attitudes. They have also been tied to positively valuing nature.\(^{33}\) Dacher Keltner and Stephen Haidt\(^{34}\) suggest that two key features of prototypical awe-eliciting events include perceiving things as being greater than oneself (what they call “vastness”) and the inability to assimilate the experience into preexisting concepts and experiences (what they call “accommodation”). Some examples they offer of environmental events that fit this description include experiencing a tornado and viewing a grand vista.

A study by Michelle Shiota, Dacher Keltner, and Amanda Mossman\(^{35}\) supports this connection between awe and nature. When people were asked to describe past awe-inducing experiences, the most frequently mentioned events were experiences

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\(^{32}\) As Yannick Joye and Andreas De Block point out, biophilia would also seem to dictate that we destroy any aspect of nature that we find scary or threatening (which might include any non-savannah habitat!). See Yannick Joye and Andreas De Block, “Nature and I Are Two’: A Critical Examination of the Biophilia Hypothesis,” *Environmental Values* 20 (2011): 189–215.


in nature. As an ostensibly separate question, the researchers also asked participants what they wished they could do after the experiment was over. Compared to people in a different condition who described happy experiences, those in the awe condition overwhelmingly desired activities in nature (such as going to a park). So not only did nature elicit the emotion of awe but thinking about awe made people want to be in nature.

Another important proenvironmental emotion is fascination. Consider a study by Agnes van den Berg and Marlien ter Heijne, in which people were asked to describe fearful encounters with nature. Surprisingly, of the twenty-seven incidents reported, eleven included both the negative emotion of fear and the positive emotion of fascination, while five actually didn’t mention fear at all (e.g., incidents such as escaping a fast-flowing river or being lost in the woods). This study suggests that threatening aspects of nature don’t necessarily produce fear, or at least not just fear. Though awe was not measured in this experiment, one possible explanation for a combined feeling of fear and fascination is that fearful encounters also include perceptions of vastness (as described above). This connection could further explain why some people continue to have an affinity for nature despite its various dangers.

One final type of emotional response that produces proenvironmental attitudes is a positive aesthetic response. Biophilia theorists have placed heavy emphasis on aesthetic responses to nature. However, aesthetics is arguably more closely linked to ethics than is biophilia because of its connection to protective sentiments. Just as we protect beautiful artworks, one might think we should protect beautiful landscapes. The best-known emotionally based account of aesthetic appreciation of nature is Noël Carroll’s arousal theory. Having a certain emotionally arousing experience, on this account, is what leads us to judge aspects of nature as being beautiful, for example.

One illuminating experiment related to aesthetic responses to nature comes from the experiment described above from Shiota, Keltner, and Mossman. In one of their studies, people were asked to think about a time they were in what they would consider beautiful nature. They were then asked to rate what emotions they were feeling. Contentment, awe, rapture, and love were the highest ranked emotions (in that order). Notice that awe is mentioned again in connection not just to nature but specifically to beautiful nature. This ties together a number of different nature experiences. Fearful nature, beautiful nature, and nature in general all seem to elicit awe or awe-related emotions (such as fascination).

(3.2) **Antienvironmental Sentiments**

Biophobia, considered as the opposite of biophilia, is an aversion to living things. It has been argued that our evolved response to nature should be more aversive than appetitive, given the many threats presented by nature throughout human evolutionary history.\(^{39}\) However, as with biophilia, the problem with biophobia is that aversion to living things can be accounted for by a number of more specific, discrete emotions. My discussion here focuses primarily on fear and disgust.

Recent theorizing about disgust has proposed two different types of disgust responses to nonhumans.\(^{40}\) The first, known as core disgust, protects against bodily contamination.\(^{41}\) A wide range of animals trigger core disgust, but the most common elicitors are rodents (e.g., rats) and slimy invertebrates (e.g., slugs and maggots).\(^{42}\) This type of disgust is likely to cause avoidance of nature because of the sorts of things one finds there.

The second type of disgust response is less to animals as such and more to the animality of human beings. Disgust researchers have found that being reminded of one’s animal nature elicits disgust in human beings.\(^{43}\) This is generally known as animal reminder disgust. Though the explanation for this phenomenon is much contested, one common result of being confronted with the connection between animalness and humanness is increasing thoughts of one’s own mortality. This has led some to propose that thoughts of mortality present a psychological threat that is alleviated by keeping one’s humanness separate from one’s animalness.\(^{44}\) Animal reminder disgust is like core disgust in that it predicts avoidance of nature because of what one finds there, but there is also some evidence to indicate that simply being exposed to nature elicits mortality salience. For instance, people report increased thoughts of death when in “wild” nature than when in “managed” nature or in a

\(^{39}\) Joye and De Block, “Nature and I are Two: A Critical Examination of the Biophilia Hypothesis.”


\(^{43}\) Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley, “Disgust.”

city. Thus, nature itself would seem to be capable of eliciting animal reminder disgust, even in the absence of animals.

Both types of disgust predict aversion to the environment with further implications for moral values. With respect to core disgust, there is now a rich empirical literature on the connection between physical contamination and moral disgust. Core disgust indicates that we will be less likely to attribute moral value to aspects of nature we find physically disgusting.

There is also a great deal of research showing that animal reminder disgust leads people to disvalue nature. Tim Kasser and Kennon Sheldon, for instance, found that prompting people with thoughts of death led them to act more greedily with respect to the environment. Participants were asked to imagine that they were in charge of a timber company bidding for the right to harvest from a large forest. They were also told that a high bid would be financially beneficial for them but that doing so would entail the eventual depletion and loss of the forest. Those who were prompted with thoughts of death submitted significantly higher bids than the control group (twelve to thirteen acres larger, on average), despite having been told that submitting a high bid would be detrimental to the environment. That is, prompting people with thoughts of death led them to take actions that would eventually result in severe destruction of nature. This would seem to provide good evidence for the role of disgust in disvaluing nature.

Disgust toward nature also tends to operate in close conjunction with fear, another important antienvironmental sentiment. Both types of disgust mentioned here are positively correlated with fear of animals. People can experience fear in direct response to things in nature as well toward contaminating, disgusting aspects of nature. This makes sense, as both disgust and fear motivate avoidance and withdrawal.

For example, animal phobias are thought to be driven by both fear and disgust. Animal phobias are the most common type of clinical diagnosis for specific phobias (compared to, for instance, fear of heights and flying), with an estimated lifetime prevalence of 3.3 percent among the general population. Phobias involve excessive fear and anxiety, far beyond what is called for by an object or situation, but

they are also indicators of general tendencies. For instance, a study of over 8,000 people in the U.S. found that 22.2 percent reported fear of animals, 5.7 percent of whom had fear strong enough to be considered phobic.\(^5\) It’s likely that this fear would transfer to nature phobia as well, since being in nature would make contact with animals more likely.

A final anti-environmental sentiment is a negative aesthetic response. Ned Hettinger,\(^5\) for instance, suggests that predation is aesthetically ugly, and could turn people away from nature.\(^5\) The consequences of ugliness likely depend on the specific features possessed by the ugly entity. Predation, for instance, is likely to elicit fear and disgust, which predict aversion and withdrawal from nature.

In short, the evidence suggests that valuing of nature itself—both positive and negative—is ultimately grounded in sentiments. However, these are not the only emotions serving pro- and anti-environmental behaviors. For example, biophilia doesn’t dictat that we should blame or punish those who harm the environment. Nor does awe or aesthetic responses to nature. These sentiments might constitute our positive evaluation of the environment, which might be necessary for further moral attitudes, but they do not capture many other aspects of our moral psychology. In the next section I fill this gap by focusing on more prototypical moral sentiments—those that are self- and other-regarding.

### IV. Attitudes toward Environmental Behaviors

#### (4.1) Self-Evaluating Sentiments

Arguably the two most prominent self-evaluating moral emotions are shame and guilt. There is an important functional difference between them. Guilt generally consists of blaming oneself for a transgression, which motivates reparative action, while shame tends to lead to externalizing blame, which motivates withdrawal, refusing reparative action, and feeling anger toward others.\(^5\) Both emotions are important for environmental ethics, but I focus on guilt because of its closer connection to pro-environmental behaviors.

The literature on guilt and moral behavior is enormous. With respect to the

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environment, the basic phenomenon involves blaming oneself for harm done to the environment. It could be more or less direct (e.g., littering as opposed to failing to resist environmentally harmful legislation or policies) and more or less intense in terms of the severity of harm caused (e.g., driving a gas-guzzling vehicle as opposed to dumping harmful chemicals in a river). In all of the relevant cases, feeling guilt about the transgression is predicted to motivate reparative behavior toward the environment.

These aspects of guilt are indeed born out by various experiments specifically pertaining to environmental harms. Mark Ferguson and Nyla Branscombe,54 for instance, found that Americans felt more guilt about global warming when they were told that the U.S. was more responsible than other countries for contributing to greenhouse gas emissions. When people reported feeling guilt, they were subsequently more willing to reduce their personal greenhouse gas emissions. Nicole Harth, Colin Leach, and Thomas Kessler found similar results in Germany.55 They gave Germans newspaper articles that described Germany’s contribution to global warming as being either harmful or helpful. Those who were led to believe that Germany was responsible for negatively impacting the climate primarily felt either guilt or anger. Those who felt guilt reported greater intentions to repair any damage done to the climate. Those who felt anger expressed a desire to punish anyone who harmed the climate (an aspect of anger discussed below).56

Guilt’s reparative qualities make it crucial for a sentimentalist environmental ethic. An important aspect of guilt is how it relates to the positive emotional responses to the environment outlined above. Prima facie, it would seem that one would need to value the environment positively in order to feel guilty about harming the environment. For example, we might think it puzzling if someone who claims to feel indifferent toward nature also claims to be disturbed by global warming, deforestation, loss of habitat, and massive species extinction. However, I think this intuition should be resisted. One major feature of moral sentiments is that they respond to rules.57 For instance, we can understand if we have broken a moral rule such as “Don’t harm nature!” without actually endorsing that rule. We can recognize when a transgression has been made. I might not be in awe of the

56 Interestingly, those who were led to believe that Germany had made a positive contribution primarily reported feeling pride. This further correlated with a greater desire for Germany to continue leading the way on climate change. However, when given a choice between types of policies they would support, those who felt pride tended to support policies that would only benefit Germans. This suggests that pride increases ingroup favorability (a phenomenon also found in Ferguson and Branscombe, “Collective Guilt”). Pride is not part of my discussion here, but is clearly important for a sentimentalist environmental ethic.
57 See Nichols, *Sentimental Rules.*
local forest or value its aesthetic qualities, but I can feel guilty for, say, harvesting its timber, and subsequently attempt to repair any attendant destruction. Even if I personally don’t value nature, I can recognize that others do and respond appropriately when I can expect others to disapprove of my actions.

(4.2) Other- Evaluating Sentiments

The last, and arguably most important, category of proenvironmental sentiments includes those used to evaluate the behavior of others. Though there are positive emotions that could be included here (such as pride), I focus primarily on emotions central to condemnation and moral disapprobation. Following Prinz, I focus primarily on the CAD emotions: contempt, anger, and disgust. All of these emotions have a close connection to blaming and punishing others. As with guilt and shame, someone need not positively value the environment in order to judge that someone has transgressed against the environment. We can blame or punish others for their harmful actions toward the environment, relatively independent from our own environmental values, thus making CAD important for environmental ethics.

A straightforward demonstration of the role of CAD emotions in environmental valuation comes from an experiment conducted by Gisela Böhm. She presented people with a variety of environmental risks and then asked what emotions they thought they would feel if those events came to realization (things such as the cutting of rain forest, chemical dumps, and volcanic eruptions). The most common emotions when others appeared responsible for the incidents were disgust, contempt, outrage, anger, and disappointment—just as CAD theorists would expect.

As discussed above, CAD emotions respond to transgressions against the community, individual agents (primarily oneself), and the natural order of things. This classification is interesting because it’s not clear which category encompasses the most salient transgressions against nature. For instance, if undisturbed nature is seen as part of the natural order (which seems to be a common view), then causing harm to nature will elicit moral disgust. However, certain pieces of undisturbed nature might also be valued by a particular community, in which case causing harm would also elicit contempt and anger. Consider Paul Rozin and Shaon Wolf’s study on conceptions of sacred land in Israel. They found that those who scored high on sensitivity to contagion (a measure of disgust) were more attached to certain areas in Israel and less willing to sell away that land. In this case, the land is valued by a specific community of people. The study demonstrates that disgust governs its

58 Prinz, Emotional Constructional of Morals.
60 They also found that guilt and shame were common when people suspected they could have done something to intervene.
protection, but because of its values for a specific community of people, it is also likely to be governed by contempt and anger as well. This fits well with Böhm’s results and indicates that the CAD emotions form the core of moral disapprobation.\textsuperscript{62}

Though much more could be said about contempt and disgust, I conclude my discussion of other-evaluating emotions with a brief note on anger. Anger is primarily known as a punishing emotion, functioning to identify who is to blame for a transgression and to motivate quick and effective punishment.\textsuperscript{63} However, anger is also classified as an approach-motivational emotion.\textsuperscript{64} As such, being angry about moral transgressions can also lead to constructive behaviors. For instance, in one experiment outside of the environmental context, people who were angry about a political conflict were more likely to propose solutions to ameliorate the conflict.\textsuperscript{65} Mical Tagar et al. polled opinions among Israelis about Israeli-Palestinian tensions one week before an important peace summit in the region. They found that anger was positively correlated with risk-taking solutions, hopefulness for a potential resolution, and proposal of non-aggressive solutions. So while my discussion here has focused primarily on CAD as contributing to moral disapprobation and punishment, anger is capable of producing solutions to moral disagreements as well.

V. OBJECTIONS FROM NEOSENTIMENTALISM

With the empirical evidence in favor of sentimentalism on the table, I now consider some prominent objections. I focus in particular on criticisms from neosentimentalists. My main line of reply to neosentimentalists is that they make inaccurate claims about human moral psychology.

The difference between sentimentalism and neosentimentalism can be illustrated with an example. The sense modality for morals is generally thought to be a form of affect. If we observe a group of teenagers torturing a cat (as in Gilbert Harman’s famous example\textsuperscript{66}), sentimentalists hold that the wrongness of that act results from the particular affective response it evokes, while neosentimentalists hold that the act’s wrongness results from the affective response it merits. We are justified in feeling a sentiment of disapprobation toward cat torture, and that is why cat torture

is wrong. As D’Arms and Jacobson say, “to make an evaluative judgment is not to have but to endorse a sentiment.”

Among environmental ethicists, the most prominent neosentimentalist account has been proposed by McShane. Two different features she identifies serve to criticize sentimentalism, as I have described it. The first is why anyone should take the emotional dispositions of others to have any normative force, why they make claims on anyone but those who already share their emotional repertoire. This can be seen through the analogy between morality and secondary qualities. As McShane and Lori Gruen point out, perceiving secondary properties, such as color, is generally a matter of figuring out what normal perceivers perceive under normal circumstances. If everyone agrees that grass looks green, then grass is green. McShane and Gruen’s charge is that sentimentalism relies on a similar process for moral perception. For example, if everyone agrees that wild nature is nasty and should be avoided, then wild nature is nasty and should be avoided. But this only tells us what others believe about wild nature, not what wild nature is really, or why moral agents should take any particular perspective on wild nature.

As McShane expresses this worry, “Perhaps I like to go along with the crowd; perhaps I do not. Perhaps it is good to respect the valuings of others; perhaps it is better to challenge them. From the mere fact that X is normally valued, I cannot draw any conclusions about what attitude I ought to take toward X.” On this first feature, the value accounted for by sentimentalism appears relatively thin.

The second feature McShane identifies is the revisability of the value provided by emotions. Consider Prinz’s sentimentalism for a moment. As discussed above, Prinz holds that emotions are both necessary and sufficient for perceiving moral properties in the world and for making moral judgments—no merit is required. While Prinz draws attention to the way emotions dictate what we value, an observation neosentimentalists rely on is that we all experience moments where we disagree with our emotional responses. More importantly, this disagreement at least occasionally results in a change in our emotional responses, and with them our moral judgments. In this way moral inquiry seems to be characterized by its open-endedness (in the spirit of G. E. Moore), where whatever I currently am disposed to think is right or wrong is, in principle, revisable. As McShane says, “the truth (or aptness) of the claim ‘X is valuable’ still leaves it an open question whether X is to be promoted/endorsed/protected/etc.”

The features of morality identified by McShane, and neosentimentalists more

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69 McShane, “Neosentimentalism and Environmental Ethics.”
72 Ibid.
generally, suggest that the values espoused by ordinary sentimentalism are too thin and are ultimately revisable. My response to these objections is that they are not supported by human moral psychology. Consider Jonathan Haidt’s “moral dumbfounding” experiments, which Prinz and other sentimentalists have used to support their theories. In these experiments, people were given vignettes describing acts that tended to elicit disgust and subsequent moral disapprobation but did not involve any harm. For example, one vignette described a case where a family eats its dead dog; another described eating a dead chicken one has just had sex with. Participants in these experiments tended to say that these actions were morally wrong, but, when pressed by the researchers, they were incapable of cogently explaining why they were wrong—they were dumbfounded. The explanation Haidt offers is that moral judgments are driven by emotionally based intuitions, while other more reflective processes factor in later and at the margins of our moral judgments. These results are relevant to the revisability of moral emotions, which is fundamental to neosentimentalism. Haidt’s research indicates that the revisability of moral judgments does not entail actual revision; reflection often leaves the content unchanged. That is, even if it is possible for us to appraise our emotional and moral responses, it does not mean we actually do so with any regularity, or that, when we do, any revision actually ensues.

Moreover, Haidt contends that reflecting on one’s emotions sometimes only reinforces their power and influence. Reflection commonly is used to justify our initial reactions, rather than work to revise them. As Haidt explains the results of his dumbfounding experiments, “The refutation of . . . arguments does not cause people to change their minds; it only forces them to work harder to find replacement arguments.” So even at the margins of our moral lives, reason often fails to actually lead to revision in moral beliefs and emotions. At the very least, even if it is not the case that reflection enhances an emotion’s influence, it is unlikely that reflection is capable of smoothly revising that emotion into something else.

Haidt’s research, and research from psychology more generally, indicates that neosentimentalism does not cohere with what we know about human psychology. The merit criterion provided by neosentimentalism holds that moral values require people to seek justification for their emotional responses and revise their sentiments accordingly. I have suggested that this is not a prominent feature of our moral psychologies.

One final criticism, related to those from neosentimentalists, comes from Patrick Clipsham, who claims that “empirical evidence from the natural and social sciences does not make a substantial contribution to philosophical debates about the

psychological nature of moral judgment.” In support of this thesis, he examines Nichols’ arguments against neosentimentalism and Prinz’s arguments for moral relativism (which are strongly grounded in his sentimentalism). So Clipsham’s claims might be taken as objections to my account here as well. However, he does not actually go on to argue that Nichols’ or Prinz’s empirical research contributes nothing, but that their research does not settle questions about neosentimentalism or relativism. Neither Nichols or Prinz claim to have settled these issues, however, and neither do I. Clipsham himself notes that Nichols and Prinz are committed to methodological naturalism, which holds that these issues are open to confirmation or disconfirmation by future empirical research. Similarly, I am only claiming that current evidence strongly supports sentimentalism with respect to environmental values. So Clipsham’s objections do not detract from my account.

VI. CONCLUSION

I have argued that environmental values are largely based in emotions. Naturalized accounts of sentimentalism have provided reasons to think that emotions are psychologically central to our moral concepts. My survey of the relevant evidence suggests that this is true for moral concepts applied to the environment as well.

Aside from providing general support for sentimentalism, the naturalized account I have presented here benefits ethical theorizing specifically about the environment in two ways. First, my account resolves perceived concerns over the compatibility of sentimentalism and the intrinsic value of nature. As argued in section two, environmental ethicists have been reluctant to accept sentimentalism because it depends on the existence of human perceivers. However, sentimentalism is not only consistent with intrinsic value but is important for explaining why people attribute intrinsic value to various nonhuman entities.

Second, much of the research I have discussed could be used to improve normative prescriptions with respect to the environment. Though they endorse different strains of sentimentalism, Prinz77 and McShane78 both argue that sentimentalism can help diagnose common obstacles for improving moral behavior. This has not been the focus of my discussion here, of course, but the basic idea in application to environmental behaviors is simple: improved diagnosis of the emotional basis for proenvironmental behaviors (e.g., feeling guilt about one’s littering or failing to reduce one’s carbon emissions) will lead to improved suggestions for producing action. Further development of a sentimentalist ethic for the environment would thus be greatly assisted by further exploration of the normative implications of empirical research from moral psychology.

77 Prinz, Emotional Construction of Morals.
78 McShane, “Neosentimentalism and Environmental Ethics.”