Seminar "Reading Prinz's *The Emotional Construction of Morals*"
Session 4 (13:00-15:00, May 9, 2008)
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In session 4, we read the first half of the third chapter: "Sensibility Saved" from 3.1 to 3.2.2. First, I will give a summary. Then, I will present the topics we discussed.

Prinz formalizes the sensibility theory in 3.1 and defends it from a number of objections in 3.2. Here, I will give a summary of 3.1, and two objections: the Expressivist and the Color Objections.

Prinz begins with these two tentative definitions:

> (S1) *Metaphysical Thesis*: An action has the property of being morally right (wrong) just in case it causes feelings of approbation (disapprobation) in normal observers under certain conditions.
> (S2) *Epistemic Thesis*: The disposition to feel the emotions mentioned in S1 is a possession condition on the normal concept RIGHT (WRONG) (p. 87; italics in the original).

He tries to sophisticate the theses. He mainly discusses the metaphysical thesis in 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 and examines the epistemic thesis in 3.1.3 and 3.1.4.

In 3.1.1, Prinz claims that the sensibility theory can explain the facts that moral facts exist in the world and they are prescriptive. According to the sensibility theory, moral properties are secondary qualities which have powers to cause emotions in us. Furthermore emotions have motivational force. Hence we can say moral properties are motivating.

In 3.1.2, Prinz tries to refine (S1). He contends that disapprobation and approbation mean spectrums of emotions as he mentioned in chapter 1. For example, he says that disapprobation associated with morally wrong properties is a spectrum of emotions mentioned in the table 2.1 (p. 79). Furthermore Prinz scrutinizes "normal observers" and "certain conditions" in (S1). They are contentious ideas in the literature of philosophy. Prinz tries to eliminate them in 3.1.2. Although Prinz does not give full reasons, his subjectivism states what kind of people are normal observers depends on the person who makes a judgment. You also can substitute sentiments for feelings caused under certain conditions. This is because sentiments dealt in chapter 2 are dispositions to feel emotions. Thus, the revised thesis is as follows: "(S1) An action has the property of being morally wrong (right) just in case there is an observer who has a sentiment of disapprobation (approbation) toward it" (p. 92).

In 3.1.3 and 3.1.4, Prinz scrutinizes moral concepts. In 3.1.3, he argues that moral concepts are mental representations, and they are an assembly of perceptual features rather than they have a Fodorian language-like format. In other words, moral concepts are like "conceptions" in British Empiricism. The reason Prinz takes this view is that moral properties are constructed by emotions and emotions are perceptual states. Hence the revised thesis is as follows: "(S2'-W) The standard concept WRONG is a detector for the property of wrongness that comprises a sentiment that disposes its possessor to experience emotions in the disapprobation range" (p. 94).

On page 96, Prinz gives a model of moral judgment. First, we have to perceive an action and to categorize it (e.g. pickpocketing). Second, a rule is retrieved to activate our sentiment. Subsequently, an emotion (e.g. anger) is caused by the sentiment in our long-term memory. Finally, a moral judgment is made (e.g. pickpocketing is wrong). Prinz deals with the possibility of an erroneous judgment, following this model. Prinz regards moral judgments which are not caused this way as erroneous (e.g. in the case emotions are elicited by hypnosis)

On page 101, Prinz claims moral concepts have two kinds of content, and thus they can be evaluating and classifying. One of its contents is that of the sentiment. For example, when you judge something is wrong, wrongness represents the property of being the object of disapprobation. Another content is the content of the emotion elicited from a sentiment: a concern, e.g. a violation of a rule pertaining to the natural order. Hence the first content is evaluating, and the second is

classifying.

In 3.2, Prinz defends the sensibility theory from ten objections. I will present two of them here. The first objection is the expressivist objection. Expressivism is similar to the sensibility theory in the sense that both claim moral judgments express sentiments. But they differ in ontology: expressivism denies the existence of moral properties, while the sensibility theory endorses it. Expressivists criticize the semantics of the sensibility theory. They maintain the prevailing semantics is designed for natural kinds. Thus the sensibility theorists must adopt ad hoc semantics, because they deal with response-dependant properties. Prinz responds to this criticism, arguing that we can track them by adopting a Dretskian theory of reference.

The second objection is the color objection. In his paper, "Errors and the Phenomenology of Value", Simon Blackburn casts doubt on the claim that moral properties are secondary qualities.[1] The reason is that there are many disanalogies between colors and moral properties. In the session, we discussed this objection and Prinz's reply to it.

Blackburn raises six disanalogies, but I would like to focus on two of them. The first disanalogy I would like to discuss is the supervenience of moral properties on natural properties. Blackburn claims we can empirically investigate the relationship between colors and their physical basis. But we cannot do so in the case of moral properties, because the relationship between moral properties and their physical basis is rather a conceptual one. Hence, we cannot imagine the world in which recreational killing is not wrong.

Prinz responds that we might be able to imagine the world in which recreational killing is not wrong after exposure to various cultures. The exposure makes us realize that moral properties supervene not on the external world alone, but also on us. Although Prinz's view of color is not so clear, he claims that the situation seems similar to moral properties. A color apparently supervenes on a perceived object, but it actually supervenes both on an object and on our visual systems. Thus, colors and moral properties are not so different.

The second disanalogy I want to explain is that evaluative predicates (e.g. "good") are attributive, while color predicates are not. An attributive predicate is category-specific. For example, " 'x is good' implicitly means 'x is a good for such-and-such category' " (p. 111). Prinz claims color predicates are attributive as moral predicates. He claims "red hair" means "red hair is red for the category of hair-color". But we think this is highly counter-intuitive. If so, what predicates are not attributive? It seems that we can say the Five-Starred Red Flag is redder than tomato soup. Color predicates are not category-specific, hence not attributive.

In closing, I want to pose a question. Prinz proposes a model of moral judgments in this chapter. He also claims that we can understand what kinds of moral judgments turn out to be incorrect in virtue of the model. But Prinz admits that there are non-standard moral concepts. Thus, there must be other ways to make moral judgments. Then, how can Prinz distinguish between erroneous moral judgments and moral judgments comprising non-standard moral concepts?

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1   [1] Blackburn, S. Errors and the Phenomenology of Value. In *Morality and Objectivity*, edited by T. Honderich. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985.