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Happy reading,

Constantino Themelis,
Editor-in-Chief, Arché

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DEVELOPING THE BIOCENTRIC INDIVIDUALISM MODEL

JOE FULTON

INTRODUCTION

The moral considerability of non-human life is a central inquiry in moral and environmental philosophy. The core debate concerns whether non-human life possesses intrinsic moral consideration. Three dominant positions have emerged in the literature: Anthropocentrism, Sentientism, and Biocentrism. Anthropocentrism holds that moral consideration resides primarily, if not exclusively, in humans, and any concern for non-human life depends on their relevance to, or service of, human interests (Norton, 1984). That is, if an anthropocentrist grants non-human life moral consideration at all. In contrast, biocentrism extends moral consideration to all living beings, granting them intrinsic value regardless of their utility to humans (Taylor, 1986). Sentientism contends that all sentient beings deserve equal moral consideration (Singer, 1975).

This paper focuses on refining and advancing biocentric individualism. It centres on Varner's (1998) model, which affirms that each individual organism is morally considerable. However, his model faces theoretical and practical challenges in regard to moral decision-making. Therefore, I propose a revised version, using microbial life in

the human intestine as a case study. Specifically, this paper will (I) develop a unique framework for assessing moral considerability, (II) critique the flaws in Varner's hierarchy of interests, and (III) analyse gut microbes to establish a practical basis for moral decision-making.

In doing so, this paper aims to strengthen biocentric individualism, offering a more coherent and justified ethical model.

I. DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR THE MORAL CONSIDERATION OF NON-HUMAN LIFE

Establishing Moral Consideration Through Interests

A critical point of discussion in the literature has been whether respecting and considering interests necessarily entails respecting and morally considering the interest-holder. I posit that it is a logical truth, and consistency, to argue that the interest holder must also be respected.

This mode of thinking can be formalised in the following argumentation:

P1: If an entity exhibits intent or emotion, it has interests (Regan, 1983). This is a tautological claim; interests are, by definition, extensions of intentions and emotions (Midgley, 1983).

P2: If something has an interest, that interest should be respected (Singer, 1975). This does not mean that the interest must always be satisfied, but rather that it cannot be dismissed based solely on the entity that holds it.[1]

P3: If an entity has an interest in avoiding something (e.g., harm), that interest should be respected (Regan, 1983).[2] This formulation mirrors the basis of consent in human moral and legal contexts (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001).

P4: An interest has a source; an interest holder.

P5: If an interest is respected, it follows that the interest-holder must also be respected. Otherwise, the interest would be treated as free-floating rather than tied to a living entity. It would not be an interest at all, since an interest requires a being to have it.[3]

P6: Respecting an interest means acknowledging the entity's ability to have interests, which implies a recognition of their moral considerability (Korsgaard, 2018; Raz, 1988).

C1: Therefore, to respect an interest, the interest-bearer must also be respected, and by extension, morally considerable.

1 One may pose that if the interest in question is in hurting some innocent person, that interest fails to deserve respect, simply because the interest is (intuitively) harmful. This is compatible with my view. Given that the interest is rejected due to the nature of the interest, the view is respected in the sense that one engages with it. To 'respect' the interest is not to accept it; but, to engage with it.

2 Other interests are not the focus of this paper and will not be discussed in depth.

3 This logic of this premise will be defended in the coming pages.

C2: Therefore, entities with interests are worthy of moral consideration.[4]

While the argument presented seeks to establish a foundation for the moral considerability of all entities with interests, it can be argued that both **P2** and **P5** rest on assumptions that are neither universally accepted nor conceptually secure. Arguably, these premises conflate descriptive observations with normative obligations and overlook significant distinctions within moral theory regarding the status and moral weight of interests.

CRITICISM OF P2

One argument may suggest the inference made in P2 is problematic. P2 presupposes that the mere presence of interests generates a moral obligation to respect them. This assumes a normative leap from the existence of interests to their ethical significance without sufficient justification. As Feinberg (1974) argues, while the notion of *having interests* is central to legal and moral theory, not all interests warrant equal, or any, moral consideration. Interests may be trivial, conflicting, or contextually irrelevant.

Moreover, the concept of *respect* in this premise is ambiguous. If *respect* implies full moral recognition, then it demands too much - given that even among humans, not all interests are equally respected, or treated as morally binding (Scanlon, 1998). If, instead, it means merely acknowledging the existence of an interest, then the premise becomes too weak to support the conclusion (C2).

Indeed, simply acknowledging that an entity has interests does not mandate that interests override or even enter the human moral calculus unless they are interpretable within a broader evaluative system (Norton, 1991). Therefore, P2 rests on a contested moral intuition, not a self-evident ethical axiom.

DEFENCE OF P2

This rebuttal overlooks the distinction between ***prima facie*** and *absolute* moral claims. P2 does not assert that all interests demand moral obligation; it contends that the presence of an interest renders moral disregard unjustified without reason - a principle that undergirds much of modern ethical and epistemological theory. As Singer (1975) argued, the capacity to suffer or to flourish (core dimensions of interests) is a morally relevant feature that must enter moral deliberation.

This is consistent with Rawlsian contractualist views, where principles of justice must be justifiable to all those affected by them (Rawls, 1971). In this framework, if an entity has interests - especially in avoiding harm - then their exclusion from moral consideration requires justification.[5] As Korsgaard (2018) contends, the capacity for reflective endorsement, or the capacity to care about what happens to oneself, provides

4 This is an implicit refutation of anthropocentricism.

5 This essay contends that no such justification exists.

a rational basis for including interests in the moral community. To dismiss interests arbitrarily is, therefore, not merely an oversight, it is a failure to act within a morally justifiable structure of reason.

Therefore, P2 holds firm: the presence of interests is sufficient for moral considerability.

CRITICISM OF P5

One may argue that P5 relies on a false entailment: the idea that moral regard for an interest must extend to moral regard for its bearer is akin to a category mistake (Ryle, 1949). It conflates properties of the part (an interest) with properties of the whole (the being who holds it).

Consider AI robots that have programmed *preference* or *avoidance* functions. These systems may be said to have interests in a metaphorical sense, yet we do not accord them moral considerability (as of 2025). As Coeckelbergh (2010) notes in discussions of moral agency in robotics, the attribution of interests or agency-like behaviour does not suffice to ground moral considerability. Considerability must rest not merely on the presence of interests, but on a richer conception of subjectivity, vulnerability, or relational embeddedness.

Environmental philosophy further complicates P5 by emphasising systemic and ecological perspectives. Leopold (1949) advocates moral regard not for individual interest-bearers, but for the integrity and stability of ecosystems, often in ways that override the interests of individual organisms. This holistic view disrupts P5's linear logic from interest to moral respect for the bearer by demonstrating that moral value may be ascribed at supra-individual levels without needing to respect each interest-holder equally.

In short, respecting an interest, particularly in complex moral landscapes, does not logically entail respect for the entity possessing that interest. Rather, moral consideration may be filtered, weighted, or constrained by broader ethical principles, or relational contexts.

DEFENCE OF P5

However, this rebuttal is weak as it abstracts interests from the beings who possess them, treating them as if they could exist, or be respected, independently. This position fails to grasp the ontological dependency of interests: interests are not free-floating values - they are embodied valuations, rooted in the lived experiences or welfare of particular entities (Regan, 1983).

To respect an interest (e.g., a desire to avoid pain) necessarily involves recognising the moral considerability of the entity for whom it matters. Ignoring the interest-bearer, while acknowledging the interest, is absurd; it would be akin to respecting someone's pain but not the subject who suffers it.

This is not only conceptually incoherent, but also violates the foundational logic of moral responsiveness (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001). As argued by Regan (1983), an interest requires a holder, for if an interest was not held, it hardly makes sense to call it an interest at all. An interest implies a subjectiveness. Some person, being, or thing must hold that interest, which relates to how they move and exist in the world. Therefore, to respect an interest entails a respect for the interest-holder. By extension, since interests are worthy of moral consideration, so too are the interest holders. It could not be any other way. As Raz (1988, p. 188-189) argues "*the interest in being respected, is but an element of the interest one has in one's interest. If respecting people is giving proper weight to their interests, then clearly, we respect people by respecting their rights. But this is so precisely because their rights are based on their interests whose claim on us is sufficient to subject us to duties to respect them.*"

The AI rebuttal is also insufficient. AI systems may simulate preferences, but they lack the ability to feel, which is necessary for morally salient interests, at least in this context. As Floridi and Sanders (2004) note, moral agency and moral patienthood depend not on behaviour or function alone, but on being the kind of entity to whom things can matter subjectively. Biological organisms possess interests (P1) and to recognise those interests is necessarily to respect their source.

Finally, while holistic ecological theories like Leopold (1949) offer valuable perspectives, they do not undermine P5. They expand moral regard beyond the individual, but do not deny the moral relevance of individual interests. In fact, many *Land Ethic (1949)* theorists emphasise the compatibility between individual moral considerability and ecosystemic value (Callicott, 1989). P5, therefore, remains intact: moral consideration of an interest cannot be divorced from acknowledgment of the entity that grounds it.

So, while these critiques raise important nuances, they ultimately rest on misinterpretations of the moral logic at work in the original argument, and underappreciate the normative grounding that interests provide within moral theory.

Therefore, the outlined argument justifies moral considerability without recourse to anthropocentric biases. If we accept that interests matter morally in human ethics (as seen in legal and ethical discussions of consent, rights, and obligations), it follows that non-human entities with interests must also be afforded moral consideration (Korsgaard, 2018; Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011).

Therefore, the argumentation developed here justifies why non-human life is worthy of moral consideration. This serves as the foundation for justifying biocentric individualism, as it demonstrates that all life is worthy of moral consideration. I acknowledge that there may be other arguments that may be posed against biocentric individualism that I have not had the space to engage with, but nevertheless, for the sake of the rest of the paper, it will be assumed the conclusions posited above are true. Varner also thinks any life with interests is worthy of moral consideration in his promotion of biocentric

individualism. However, in the following section, I will demonstrate how Varner's formulation departs from what biocentric individualism advocates for.

II: THE FLAWS OF VARNER'S MODEL

Varner's biocentric individualism (1998) builds on Taylor (1986) and Goodpaster (1978), who argue that the capacity to have interests is sufficient for moral considerability. Varner refines this by distinguishing between two types of interests: biological interests, concerning fundamental needs of survival and reproduction, and preference interests, shaped by cognitive complexity and individual desires. In doing so, he removes the requirement of sentience (since interests need not be consciously held) for moral status, thereby aiming to avoid sentientist or anthropocentric bias.

However, Varner introduces a hierarchy that prioritises "ground project" interests (preference interests) over the biological interests of some animals (Varner, Chapter 4). He contends that the moral weight of interests increases with the organism's cognitive sophistication. This implies that the interests of beings with advanced cognition, such as humans, consistently override and trump the moral claims and interests of cognitively simpler organisms like plants or microbes. As Varner argues (p. 79): "Generally speaking, the satisfaction of ground projects is more important than the satisfaction of noncategorical desires... where our [ground project interests] are at stake, we can use animals in various ways."

Varner presents this hierarchy as a solution to avoid impractical moral egalitarianism by guiding decisions in cases of conflicting interests. However, this ranking introduces substantial ethical concerns.

THE PROBLEM WITH VARNER'S HIERARCHY

Varner's hierarchy allows anthropocentrism to creep into biocentric ethics by privileging organisms with higher cognition; beings whose interests closely resemble those of humans. Indeed, when the preference interests of cognitively sophisticated agents conflict with the survival interests of simpler beings, his model lets the former prevail. This is morally problematic.[6]

Suppose a billionaire plans to build a woodland mansion, necessitating tree removal and the subsequent death of thousands of organisms and their habitat. Under Varner, the billionaire's ground-project preference, a cognitively derived desire for a new home, outweighs the survival interests of the entire habitat. Since the billionaire's well-being is more linked to their cognitive capacities, their preference outweighs the survival of those in the habitat. Elevating such a discretionary wish above an ecosystem's continued existence is ethically indefensible.

6 I use the term '*survival interest*' (as opposed to 'biological') from this point forward since I believe it is a more precise term.

Applied consistently, this ranking erodes the very foundation of biocentric ethics that it claims to uphold. One must ask Varner: how many non-human lives must be lost or suffer before the preference of complex beings matters less?

Therefore, this paper, contra Varner, suggests that true biocentrism requires that survival interests take precedence over preference interests.

TOWARD A BETTER HIERARCHY

This paper proposes a hierarchy that prioritises all survival interests. A logical premise to support this is that survival is a prerequisite for all other interests. Preference interests could not exist or be fulfilled without survival interests existing and being satisfied. The reverse, however, does not hold - organisms must survive before developing preferences. This dependency supports the view that survival interests deserve greater moral weight.

This revised hierarchy may appear to echo elements of Taylor's biocentric egalitarianism (1986, ch. 4, p. 135), which holds that "each living thing is given due recognition as an entity possessing inherent worth" and calls for a respectful attitude toward all life. However, Taylor's framework has faced significant criticism, and this paper's model seeks to avoid those same shortcomings.

AVOIDING THE PITFALLS OF TAYLOR'S THEORY

Taylor's biocentric egalitarianism is often criticised for collapsing into moral paralysis: extending equal consideration to every organism, without distinction, leaves agents unable to determine how to act. For instance, Shrader-Frechette (1986) argues that in demanding compensation for every intrusion into non-human life, the system becomes unworkable. Shotunde (2020) adds that such egalitarianism threatens human existence by eliminating meaningful distinctions among conflicting interests, and Varner (1998) likewise notes that equal consideration offers no mechanism for resolving inter-species conflicts.

This paper shares those concerns and adds that if all interests are equal, ordinary acts - like walking, driving, eating – which kill countless organisms - are thus rendered immoral (Shrader-Frechette, 1986; Rolston, 1988), which is counter-intuitive. Even breathing destroys inhaled microbes (Kish & Hotchkiss, 2010; Amato et al., 2019); yet not breathing would kill us and our resident biota, making moral failure inevitable.

The model proposed here avoids that trap by ranking survival interests above preference interests. This structure sustains genuine biocentrism, averts paralysis, and prevents exploiting non-human life. However, there must be some nuance which allows for decisions to occur when there is a conflict of survival interests. This essay suggests that

preference interests should (only) be used as tie-breakers. The forthcoming analysis of intestinal microbiota will illustrate the basis of the theory.

III. MICROBES IN THE INTESTINE

Human intestines are home to trillions of microbes, many of which play a crucial role in digestion and overall health (Qin, et al., 2010). However, some of these organisms consume bodily resources in a way that actively harms the host. In doing so, the survival interest of the microbe can actively threaten the survival interest of the human (Wasielewski & Alcock, 2016). However, refusal to act against the microbes, in order to avoid violating their survival interests, would be illogical; if the microbes had their way, and the human host dies, the microbes that depend on it, would also perish.

THE ROLE OF PREFERENCE INTERESTS IN MEDIATING SURVIVAL CONFLICTS

If survival interests were absolute and inviolable, we would find ourselves unable to justify even basic actions such as eating, seeking shelter, or taking medication, all of which involve the destruction of some form of life. However, the alternative - doing nothing - also compromises survival interests, including our own. Therefore, the inevitability of harm does not justify inaction, but instead demands a framework to adjudicate how to act. This is where one must draw upon their preference interests.

It must be clarified though, that a preference interest cannot take precedence over a survival interest independently, as argued previously. It is only when one is faced with two competing survival interests, that the decision maker's preference interests should be used as a tiebreaker.

For example, if a person is being attacked by an animal, they may be justified in taking action to kill it. Two competing sets of survival interests are at stake, so the individual can act in accordance with their preference interests.[7] However, if a person kills an animal, solely for a preference interest, such as for luxury or sport, this act is not justified, because no survival conflict exists, and survival interests take precedence.[8]

Further, suppose I am locked in a life-or-death struggle with a goblin. I may justifiably kill the goblin since there are two competing survival interests (mine and the goblin's). In doing so, my preference interest in maintaining my well-being acts as a tiebreaker, for me. But, the goblin would also be morally justified in killing me for the

7 Whether that be sacrifice, or defence.

8 It may be contended, then, that this framework entails a moral obligation to adopt veganism. This conclusion, however, requires qualification. Since all survival interests are equal, an individual left with no viable alternative, but to consume animal life for their own survival, would be morally permitted to do so; their survival interest provides sufficient justification. Yet, for those afforded the means to subsist without recourse to animal consumption, it would follow that doing so for reasons of taste, or convenience constitutes an appeal to soft-preference interests. On this framework, such interests cannot override the survival interests of another organism. The practical implication, in many contexts, approaches something close to an obligation.

same reason. The implication of this is that in one situation, there can be two differing outcomes, either of which are equally justifiable. However, I do not think this is a cause for concern, each being is morally justified in killing the other (in this context), since our lives are equal.

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN HARD AND SOFT PREFERENCE INTERESTS

To refine this ethical framework, it is necessary to distinguish between, what this essay terms, hard and soft preference interests:

Hard-Preference Interests are interests that are deeply tied to social and existential well-being.[9] Examples include caring for loved ones and maintaining meaningful relationships. My account is influenced by Varner's conception of ground project interests. These interests, while not strictly survival-based, are crucial to well-being, *sense of self* and "are closely related to [one's] existence and which, to a significant degree, give a meaning to [one's] life... desires that answer the question 'Why is life worth living?'" (Varner, p.89, quoting Williams. *1981, pp. 93 and 1973 pp. 85-86).*

Soft-Preference Interests are preferences that do not meaningfully impact one's well-being. Examples, although non-exhaustive, include aesthetic preferences, minor conveniences, or trivial personal desires.[10]

It should be noted that if something is not morally considerable, they do not have preference interests. However, since having interests is crucial to having moral consideration (section I), any being with these interests is morally considerable.

When two survival interests are in conflict, individuals are justified in acting according to their hard-preference interests.

Imagine a person has the choice to either save their beloved spouse or two snails. Biocentric egalitarianism might suggest that (since all life is equal) the snails should be saved, since this saves more lives[11]. This seems intuitively unsatisfactory. However, under this paper's framework, the person is justified in saving their spouse, because hard-preference interests allow them to make a meaningful moral distinction in the midst of competing survival interests. It can be a hard-preference to save your loved one, since this is essential to your well-being and personhood.

Ultimately, it is the individual's choice what specific action is taken in each of these cases; different individuals may reach different conclusions based on their own ethical and social framework, but nonetheless, the decision must be made in accordance with hard-preference interests.

9 Physical well-being is also worthy of consideration here.

10 Whether or not an 'aesthetic' preference is soft or not, is contentious. An artist may contend with my ruling here. However, in this classification, they do not hold the same value to human life as having a house, a family or being in a community has.

11 This would be an example of the sort of optimisation discussed below.

To base this decision on a soft-preference interest, such as *because it is more convenient to save the spouse*, or you *simply prefer the look of your spouse*, all seems rather unsatisfactory. Appealing to this triviality, undermines the weight of choosing who survives. Soft-preference interests are insufficient tiebreakers and cannot override survival interests in any case. So hard-preference interests can act as tie-breakers in life-or-death scenarios, but soft-preference interests carry no weight at all in such scenarios.[12]

SOFT PREFERENCES ARE INSUFFICIENT TIEBREAKERS

In no case involving the violation of survival interests, can convenience or triviality overrule survival.

Suppose that if I choose to save my spouse over some stranger, simply because I like the look of her more. I would appear to be committing some wrong. Choosing who lives, or does not, based on looks alone can lead to a slippery slope regarding justifications for eugenics and racial, sexual or gendered (and, perhaps, species-ist) prejudice in decision-making. So, soft interests cannot carry any weight when it comes to matters of life and death; it is inappropriate to appeal to them. Instead, one should appeal to optimising survival interests when there are no hard-preference interest tiebreakers, and survival interests are the most significant interests.

Hard-preference interests are more important than optimisation of survival interests though, since such decisions are crucial to the shaping of one's life and are fundamental to the way we live and create value. Although these are not enough to overrule survival interests altogether, when there is any competition, these considerations must be accounted for since they make life meaningful. It is only in the absence of these morally relevant tiebreakers, that optimisation comes into play. So, if the choice is between saving myself from 1000 hungry hyaenas, and I have a hard-preference interest for saving myself, then the fact that there are 1000 hyaenas is simply irrelevant.[13]

One may pose that this allows an anthropocentric bias to sneak into my theory. However, this is not the case. Instead, it demonstrates that the onus of making the decision, is on the decision maker, whether they be human or not. One can choose to save themselves, but also to sacrifice themselves for any non-human life. Indeed, it does

12 A natural question arising here concerns where precisely the line between hard and soft preference interests falls. This boundary is, admittedly, resistant to a fully explicit definition; it is not a bright line so much as a threshold, one that varies across individuals and their particular lives. The operative criterion is whether a given interest crosses what might be called the 'makes life worth living' threshold: if its satisfaction is constitutive of one's sense of self, meaning, or fundamental well-being, it qualifies as a hard-preference interest. If it merely enhances comfort or convenience without bearing on that deeper register, it is soft. The engagement that gives one person's life meaning may be entirely inconsequential to another; the threshold is, therefore, personal to the moral agent. This need not be a cause for concern. What matters is not that the line can be drawn universally in advance, but that it can be recognised and applied with integrity by the agent confronting a genuine moral conflict.

13 If I did have a hard-preference interest to save the 1000, this is also permitted.

not matter that we are humans. This distinction recognises the difference between life and their ability to make decisions, but that is because those differences are real and need to be counted for.

WHY ARE HARD-PREFERENCE INTERESTS MORE SIGNIFICANT TIEBREAKERS THAN OPTIMISATION?

One may argue that optimisation is a better tiebreaker than hard-preference interests, since optimisation allows for consistent and impartial frameworks that evaluate actions based on measurable outcomes across different temporal and spatial scales (Gardiner, 2011). This removes the possibility of any anthropocentric bias, that a hard-preference interest may cause in decision-making. Indeed, one may ask, how many animals must die for it to not be okay for one to choose to save their spouse? To this, a prompt counterquestion is: 'How far should our moral concern extend?' At what temporal or spatial boundary do we cease accounting for the agents involved, without succumbing to moral paralysis? The ethical life is not reducible to aggregate outcomes or impersonal metrics. Hard-preference interests are not merely subjective desires; they are the very structures through which moral agents understand value, obligation, and what is worth preserving in the world (Williams, 1994, p.339-345 in Singer's *Ethics*, makes a similar point in his story of Jim and the Indians). To subordinate such interests to optimisation is to erode the capacity for ethical reasoning itself.

One may counter and argue that in cases of environmental conflict, such as land use, conservation policies, or emission reductions, deference to subjective preferences can lead to gridlock or injustice. As Broome (2012) emphasises, optimisation enables fair adjudication by aggregating competing claims through objective criteria. This is particularly crucial when agents cannot voice their preferences, but nonetheless have morally considerable interests.

However, optimisation frameworks falsely presuppose that the value of actions can be universally ranked through impersonal criteria. Such metrics are not ethically neutral; they are constructed through anthropocentric lenses and often reflect the priorities of dominant cultures and political systems (Plumwood, 2002). In contrast, hard-preference interests are rooted in the lived, first-person standpoint of every moral agent. As Kymlicka and Donaldson (2011) argue in the context of animal rights and relational ethics, responsibilities are not derived solely from maximising outcomes but from specific roles and social ties. A framework that ignores these in favour of abstract optimisation betrays the very beings it claims to protect by discounting how moral responsibility is actually lived and understood. Indeed, environmental movements throughout history have been driven less by abstract optimisation than by strong, value-laden attachments (Naess, 1973; Leopold, 1949).

Hard-preference interests, thus, should be given precedence over optimisation because they constitute the moral framework through which beings evaluate, engage, and take responsibility for the world.

Overall, the introduction of preference interests in this way answers an important question from potential critiques of this view. It details how we give value to human life; it is through the use of hard-preference interests. If our hard-preference interests lead us to think we should value human survival over the survival of others, when there is competition between them, then we are permitted to do so.

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS FRAMEWORK

This approach to biocentric individualism carries several important ethical and practical implications. Fundamentally, individuals should not act in ways that violate survival interests, unless there is a competing survival interest. If there are competing survival interests, then hard-preference interests, but not soft-preference interests, must be the tie-breaker. This means that killing animals or plants for any reason other than survival is morally unjustifiable, if not abhorrent.

Acts such as building homes or eating food are ***prima facie*** justified because, despite violating other survival interests, they satisfy our own survival interests and serve our hard-preference interests. However, actions that exceed survival necessity become morally questionable, as they begin to violate non-human survival interests in favour of soft-preference interests. By prioritising survival interests over preference interests, this framework naturally rejects overconsumption. Excessive resource exploitation is often driven by soft-preference interests, and by deprioritising these, environmental degradation becomes mitigated.[14]

This framework also implies duties of environmental stewardship, as the environment is essential for both human and non-human survival. Unlike anthropocentric perspectives, which exploit the environment for immediate human gain, this approach recognises that protecting ecosystems is necessary for long-term survival.

This perspective may also have implications for broader ethical and political considerations. For example, the state (the political and legal society one lives in) exists as a mechanism to secure human survival (Hobbes, 1991) - but how does it, and how should it, balance human survival interests against those of non-human life? While a full exploration of this topic is beyond the scope of this paper, it raises important questions concerning the role of governance in ethical environmental policy.[15]

This refined biocentric framework offers a different way to navigate ethical dilemmas involving competing survival interests. By prioritising survival interests, over preference

14 I contend that overconsumption implies that preference interests are more important than survival interests, which this paper explicitly denies.

15 See Plumwood (2002) for more.

interests, and distinguishing between hard and soft interests, one can make meaningful moral decisions without succumbing to either moral paralysis or unchecked anthropocentrism.

CONCLUSION

This paper has critically assessed Varner's biocentric individualism, highlighting its limitations and offering a revised model that prioritises survival over preference interests. Although Varner's interest hierarchy advances biocentric ethics, it subtly reintroduces anthropocentric bias by favouring cognitive complexity. In rejecting this, I propose a framework that upholds the moral considerability of all beings capable of interests, avoiding both impractical egalitarianism and unchecked anthropocentrism.

At the core of this model is the claim that survival interests underpin moral considerability, as they are a precondition for all other interests. The analysis of microbial life in the human gut illustrates how one navigates conflicts of interest without leading to moral paralysis. By distinguishing between hard and soft interests, the model enables moral agents to act within a biocentric framework while retaining practical applicability.

Unless it is shown that any organism lacks survival interests, this framework stands as a viable revision of Varner's theory. While it still complicates moral decision-making, complexity alone provides no ground to reject it. Ethical reasoning demands navigating nuance and competing claims, and this model offers a method for doing so without defaulting to anthropocentrism.

Future research should examine the model's implications for environmental policy and conservation, particularly in relation to biodiversity loss and climate change. Further investigation is also needed into its application to non-biological entities with complex structures, such as artificial intelligence and synthetic life. Continued refinement of biocentric ethics will support stronger approaches to recognising the moral standing of non-human life in a connected world.

But, for now, this paper has proposed a new way of approaching biocentric individualism, by prioritising survival interests.

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LIKE A NATURAL WOMAN

WHY WE STILL NEED ECOFEMINISM: WOMEN, NATURE, AND DEATH

EMMA DEAN-STAHL

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS ECOFEMINISM?

The world is in an ongoing state of destructive turmoil. Freedom does not feel like freedom. There is a lack of mutualism in modern society. People are treated as less than people. Women, to give but one example of maltreatment, are systemically degraded. We as a people feel helpless, confused, used, and lonesome. We do not seem to put much care into a sustainable futurity. The brink of an apocalypse seems to creep up daily. And, still, it is not shocking.

Any effort to remedy the aforementioned is shallow and in vain. Mainstream feminism is a cruel joke. Environmentalism does not address the root of, or solutions to, climate change deeply enough. The degradation of the environment and the degradation

of women- both features of hierarchical degradation in general- are necessarily and deeply interconnected. Patriarchal hierarchy, capitalism, objectification, domination, language, and fear are all ticking time bombs. Our society's survival is a living death, and this death is not only justified and encouraged but foundational. We live in a perverted and violating culture that denies love, life, and empathy alike. It is unbelievably overwhelming, and it *should* be shocking.

It is tricky to imagine a world in which we feel societally included, connected, loved, and cared for in an unconditional and lively way. Yet, there is value in doing so. Envisioning the transcendence of harmful systems, which we understand to be a manifestation of the human condition, is key to identifying humanity's greatest flaws. I believe that ecofeminist philosophy, in its ongoing development and complexity, addresses the root of everything we neglect within our culture and identifies a foundational critique of the human/nature relationship.

Ecofeminism is a philosophical movement that combines and simultaneously redefines environmentalism and feminism by dissecting the shared patriarchal exploitation of women and the environment. It explores how both have been systemically objectified, violated, silenced, and raped- literally and metaphorically.[1] Despite the profuse internal and external dissent surrounding ecofeminist philosophy, its foundational argument remains relatively the same: violence toward nature and violence toward women are necessarily interrelated, and this provides insight into the deepest flaws of our society. It is important to remember, as I introduce many overwhelmingly different perspectives on the application and relevance of ecofeminism, and its vision becomes somewhat foggy and distorted, that there is always this basic initiative to return to, which I believe any ecofeminist would be able to recognize, regardless of their internal position. Ultimately, patriarchy victimizes both women and nature by continuously devaluing and killing them to sustain itself, which is the opposite of sustainable.

This philosophy combines unending examples of interconnected ecological and female oppression. We can look at climate change, caused by the overconsumption and depletion of resources through deforestation, unsustainable agriculture, CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations), disruption of ecosystems and loss of biodiversity, mass extinction, as well as the polluting discharge of harmful waste. Connect these with the over-sexualization of women in media, the undervaluation of reproductive labor, violence and harassment, rape, lack of reproductive rights, management of childbearing, marriage, and women's lack of public participation and resources. Both lists continue unendingly. Patriarchy not only justifies, but is fueled by, exploitation and domination. It is cruel. It is unsustainable. It is deadly. It is shocking.

1 Kathryn Miles, "Ecofeminism | Sociology, Environmentalism & Gender Equality | Britannica," 2024, https://www.britannica.com/topic/ecofeminism.

This research paper is an attempt to explore and explain why we still need ecofeminism.

Cultural ecofeminism, in particular, which embraces the biological and spiritual tie between women and nature, has faced many critiques about its essentialist, apolitical, and mystical philosophical approach. I seek to reinterpret and defend cultural ecofeminism by critically examining various scholarly perspectives, most notably that of Mary Daly. In her foundational ecofeminist text, *Gyn/Ecology* (1978), she identifies patriarchy as destructively exploitative and death-obsessed. She contends that the persistent necrophilous culture of patriarchy warrants an ecofeminist philosophy that is necessarily transcendental and spiritual.[2] I strive to defend this claim by addressing the major critiques of Daly's work as well as expanding upon her theory because I believe that a coherent and compromising redefinition is possible. Ecofeminism is still worth a damn, specifically and *especially* in its cultural and post-patriarchal format.

LANGUAGE AS A PATRIARCHAL TOOL

A key tenet of ecofeminism is language's hostile role in the reinforcement of objectification. Language is constructed through an inherently subjective and patriarchal lens; therefore, language itself is inherently anthropocentric (from a human perspective) and androcentric (from a male perspective). In this way, ecofeminism tends to synonymize anthropo-and andro-centrism because 'human' and 'male' are linguistically equatable. This masculine subjectivity denies non-male subjects. Irene Friesen Wolfstone, in her analysis of the justified silencing of the 'other,' as discussed more below, cites the masculinist assumption that "there can be no women subjects. Subjectivity requires language, and language is masculine."[3] This perfectly portrays the convenient externalization of women and nature as objects to justify their exploitation, depletion, and silencing.

The dualistic quality of language, as it separates subject from object, is relevant beyond the dichotomy between human/male and nature/female. The Cartesian worldview that mind and matter, body and soul, nature and culture, are separate entities reinforces this thought process.

There is a constructed and abused notion that we exist separately from that which has not been humanized, which excuses our lack of responsibility to that which is 'othered.' In Tzeporah Berman's words, the Cartesian consequence is " [the absence of] fellow-feeling for her depletion and no responsibility for her conservation or

2 Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (London: The Women's Press, 1978).

3 Irene Wolfstone, "Deconstructing Necrophilia: An Ecofeminist Contribution to Growth," *Canadian Woman Studies* 31, no. 1 (2014), https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA470867981&sid=googleScholar&v=2.1&it=r&linkaccess =abs&issn=07133235&p=AONE&sw=w&userGroupName=nysl_oweb&aty=ip, 11.

replenishment."[4] There is a lack of empathy for that which is dehumanized, distanced, and diminished, and this refusal of relationality is unbelievably destructive. It is also important to acknowledge that, while dualism is significantly constructed through language, so are the very notions that are dualized. How we define what is natural, human, feminine, masculine, etc., is biologically influenced and socially constructed, both of which are significant considerations when dissecting ecofeminist philosophy. To address the major discourse of whether or not women are intrinsically more connected to nature, we first must look at how our understanding of 'woman' and 'nature' has formed.

This is exactly the question that Berman poses in her exploration of ecofeminism and language: "How has the relationship between humans and nature been structured by the dominant paradigm and how are these relationships perpetuated?"[5] Her response asserts that patriarchal ideals are rooted in the use of metaphors, such as 'rape of the land,' and 'virgin forest,' which perpetuate the justified penetration of women and the environment. This also applies to the overpromoted language of 'mother nature' and 'mother earth.' Motherhood is a sacrifice. Mothers are expected to satisfy all of our wants and needs without asking for anything in return. Mothers should love us no matter what and endlessly give in to a parasitic relationship. Ecofeminism seeks a more mutualistic understanding, potentially overturning the 'mother nature' dynamic because natural resources are not limitless, and not exclusively for human use. This feminized-nature narrative perpetuates nature as seductive to man and inviting to violence, glorifying conquest and ownership of passive objects as a means to collect these obtainable, yet increasingly limited, resources (discussed further in Section VIII).[6]

In her linguistic analysis of Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature*, Carol Cantrell also reflects on the projected passivity of women and nature. Listening is often feminized, devalued, and ignored; hence the justified dismissal of the muted 'other.' Cantrell argues, however, that listening is not a passive, but an active role in communication, and it is an equally important aspect of language. In fact, it becomes apparent that our culture's lack of listening is a significant contributor to the ecological and social problems ecofeminism addresses. This selective deafness "places women's silences in the context of nature assumed to be mute," and female voicelessness aids the justification of our harm and dehumanization.[7] Some ecofeminists are concerned with gaining a voice, while others are more concerned with how our position in language does not serve us

4 Tzeporah Berman, "The Rape of Mother Nature? Women in the Language of Environmental Discourse" 11, no. 4 (1994), https://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/index.php/trumpet/article/view/805176.

5 Berman, "The Rape of Mother Nature? Women in the Language of Environmental Discourse," 173.

6 Berman.

7 Carol Cantrell, "Review: Women and Language in Susan Griffin's Woman and Nature: The Roaring inside Her," *Hypatia* 9, no. 3 (1994): 225–38.

because it denies the validity of the female voice, regardless. It is possible that, according to feminist rationale, women can attain personhood through language, tearing ourselves from our non-speaking, non-active positionality. Language is social participation and contribution; however, I question the practice of utilizing a language that will never welcome those whom it victimizes and denies. It is valuable for ecofeminists to consider that one's efforts to include themselves in a conversation amongst non-listening dominators is not only in vain, but simply not the goal of ecofeminism.

I find it necessary to address the faults of language in articulating my own argument as well. Language is admittedly an oversimplification and injustice to the embodied and deep experiential knowledge that ecofeminism recognizes, and, after all, this research utilizes a language of essential dominance- the very language I have just condemned. A powerful ecofeminist approach is to reinterpret and reconstruct language into a new understanding of relationships, interconnectivity, and voice, and I invite you to think skeptically and creatively about how we define and identify these concepts, at times removing them from a historically hierarchical framework. When meaning itself is connotative, it takes conscious effort to identify issues in a post-patriarchal mindset, but this mindset is necessary in order to understand the transcendence of ecofeminist philosophy.

THE ORIGIN OF ECOFEMINISM

To gain a comprehensive understanding of ecofeminist development, we must briefly look into its conception. The term 'ecofeminist' was coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne, a radical French feminist of the late 20th century. d'Eaubonne, in a distinctly militant approach to feminism, advocated women's shared right to exercise violence against men, especially in an effort to dismantle patriarchy. While her work was largely discredited because of this anarchical approach, her book, *Feminism or Death: How the Women's Movement Can Save the Planet* (1974), substantially contributed to the ecofeminist movement by identifying that patriarchal systems target both women and nature as objects of exploitation. She demanded that the "entire Male System [assume] responsibility" for the most urgent threats of human and environmental death, namely overpopulation and overconsumption, by pointing to men's excused "ability to inseminate the earth like women."[8] She then offered a solution through the reclamation of female reproductive rights, calling for a coordinated birth strike in which women would collectively refuse to procreate as a radical method to "obstruct the patriarchal power inscribed in the flesh and in the uterus."[9] Her shockingly contentious opposition to the maternal, often associated with the natural, identifies patriarchal values as the cause of

8 Luca Valera, "Francoise d'Eaubonne and Ecofeminism: Rediscovering the Link between Women and Nature," in *Women and Nature?*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2017), 10–23, https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315167244-2/fran%C3%A7oise-eaubonne-ecofeminism-r ediscovering-link-women-nature-luca-valera.

9 Francoise d'Eubonne, *Feminism or Death* (Verso Books, 1974), xxx. d'Eubonne.

environmental crisis. She initiates a refusal to seek equality and a radical motivation to resist female societal inclusion that would imply participation in the destruction of the planet and the downfall of humanity. The combination of ecology and feminism is thus a necessary formula for sustainability.[10]

Realistically, should all the world's women band together in a revolutionary defiance of procreation? Maybe so. But this raises major red flags about histories of female sterilization, birth control, and management of childbearing in targeted racial and ethnic groups. It is much more valuable to take from this argument not its literal practicability, but rather its broader commentary. d'Eaubonne is essentially arguing that the only way for women to reclaim their own identities, while simultaneously correcting a problem brought about by the hierarchical structure that denies them, is to refuse a female biological process. In other words, the only way to escape the socially-constructed feminine is to deny the biological feminine, and thus, the denial of our personhood is the means by which to assert our personhood. Within the framework of our society, women lose every time; there is no ideal means by which to reclaim our life.

While deriving major thematic roots from d'Eaubonne's philosophy, the theory has certainly grown from its origin. A major point of deviation through the development of ecofeminism, besides its departure from militancy, is its divergence from strict humanism. d'Eaubonne was a humanist: she viewed nature in relation to how it supports human life. Her belief that "feminism is entire humanity in crisis; it is the reinvention of a species" was an advocacy for human salvation, not necessarily a realization of interdependence for the sake of planetary survival, as ecofeminism more commonly promotes today.[11] Though she did reflect on the similar patriarchal consequences for women and nature, she did not explicitly identify a deep connection between the entities themselves, neither historically nor intrinsically.[12] Nonetheless, her work was a significant catalyst for the rise of other ecofeminist voices from increasingly complex perspectives.

DEVELOPMENT, CONTROVERSY, AND CRITIQUE

In the last half-century, ecofeminism has splintered into two major divisions: cultural and radical. While both function to address the issues found in oppressive patriarchal systems and promote respect for organic processes, they diverge in their approach

10 Carolyn Merchant, "Foreword," in *Feminism or Death* (France: Verso Books, 1974), ix–xvi, https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id= huhOEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&dq=francoise+d%27eaubonne+ecofeminism&ots=-CJpMCs7Es&sig=B9M1OyHnrVW0aO7IfdHjZy4YJus#v=onepage&q&f=false.

11 d'Eubonne, *Feminism or Death*, 33.

12 Iris Derzelle, "Françoise d'Eaubonne Ecofeminism," *Books & Ideas*, March 22, 2021, https://booksandideas.net/Francoise-d-Eaubonne-s-Ecofeminism.

to the association between the feminine and the natural. Cultural ecofeminism, on one hand, embraces an intimate relationship between women and nature on an intrinsic, spiritual level.[13] 'Woman' represents the bridge between man and nature, and she is simultaneously human and inhuman. Women have the power to heal the Cartesian divide through the realization of interdependence and the reclamation of life.[14] This healing, according to cultural ecofeminists, lies in societal restructuring and self-identification beyond patriarchy. Carolyn Merchant notably claims that the "male society that took over running the planet did so in terms of competition, aggression, and sexual hierarchy," and this culture of domination is permitted and justified by our separatism from nature.[15] Cultural ecofeminism seeks to reclaim that connection both by rejecting institutional hierarchy and embracing the feminized nature narrative. Radical ecofeminism, on the other hand, stresses the historical and political implications of degradation and is strongly influenced by the mainstream feminist critiques below. It is a throwback to the original goal of feminist theory, to achieve humanness for women in society, and seeks to sever the association between women and nature as opposed to embracing it.[16]

Cultural ecofeminism, specifically, faces many critiques from mainstream feminists, the foremost of which is more easily quashed than others. Firstly, many scholars are concerned with the advocacy of misandrist, or man-hating, ideals. Mary Daly, the author of *Gyn/Ecology*, is a prime example of this concern. The professor left Boston College after refusing to allow male students into her advanced women's studies class, thus excluding men from the feminist conversation. If we imagine a post-patriarchal future, likely one that is matriarchal (woman-centered), it can be misinterpreted that men would be dismissed and oppressed as women are now, which causes a loss of support. However, it must be recognized that ecofeminism seeks to completely dismantle a hierarchical, dualist society, not to punish and subdue men.[17] Merchant defends this case by suggesting that a society beyond patriarchy "would not mean power in the hands of women, but no power at all."[18] The erasure of existing social order and dominance would ideally create equality through mutualism, not simply reverse the roles of patriarchy. The ecofeminist imagination of futurity is thus clearly not misandrist. It is not hatred towards the male, but hatred towards the patriarchal- a necessary distinction.

13 Miles, "Ecofeminism | Sociology, Environmentalism & Gender Equality | Britannica."

14 Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

15 Carolyn Merchant, "Foreword," in *Feminism or Death* (France: Verso Books, 1974), ix–xvi, https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=huhOEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&dq=francoise+d%27eaubon ne+ecofeminism&ots=-CJpMCs7Es&sig=B9M1OyHnrVW0aO7IfdHjZy4YJus#v=onepage&q&f=false, x.

16 Miles, "Ecofeminism | Sociology, Environmentalism & Gender Equality | Britannica."

17 Jeanne Goutal and Laury-Anne Cholez, "Fighting the Patriarchy to Save the Planet," August 17, 2021, https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/fighting-the-patriarchy-to-save-the-planet/.

18 Merchant, "Foreword," xi.

Secondly, many feminists argue that ecofeminist philosophy is not politically applicable and rather unproductive. If the foundational feminist initiative is to fight for the recognition of women's humanity, then by including nature in the story of female oppression, we lose political ground to the nonhuman, which is ineffective and contradictory.[19] If women are cast aside as part of nature rather than humanity, this would completely oppose feminist motivation.

Additionally, if we place the 'rights' and well-being of nature alongside the rights and well-being of women or any other minority, it acts as an abomination to the assertion of human rights that are at the forefront of any activist movement. Janet Biehl, a prominent contributor to the critique of ecofeminism, argues that cultural ecofeminism is ridiculously spiritualist and mystical, not providing practical initiatives to correct societal inequalities. Women's rejection of their own humanity is quite literally the opposite of the foundational feminist struggle, and it seems counterproductive to reject the assertion of human rights altogether.[20] Even Ariel Salleh, a principal ecofeminist scholar, argues that ecofeminism should be more than a theoretical concept, and women should deny their historical dehumanization. She is in accordance with Simone de Beauvoir's underlying feminist goal to structurally integrate women into democratic institutions, and seeks to apply the denunciation of feminized nature to feminist and environmentalist activism to invoke systemic change.[21] This critique will be adequately addressed in the remainder of this research, but, to offer a brief rebuttal, I believe that the critics and mainstream feminists are misled. (Cultural) ecofeminism should not be political in that its primary application should not be a contribution to social activism. The ecofeminist goal differs from the mainstream feminist goal and thus does not seek to achieve female social and political integration. Biehl and her allies are correct: ecofeminism is mystical, apolitical, and somewhat inapplicable. Though this can further be proven as a strength, not a weakness.

The third critique of cultural ecofeminism is definitively the most prominent and controversial: its essentialist complications. Essentialism is the principle that women are biologically and essentially connected to nature. Cultural ecofeminism stresses the importance of reconnecting with the natural world from which we have rejected and differentiated. A deeper analysis will provide insight into why essentialism becomes problematic:

One argument is that cultural ecofeminism reinstates gender roles and is actually strongly anti-feminist. If we task women with healing and caring for the earth, domestic responsibility is simply reassigned. Women become housekeepers for our planet and assume the responsibility of reproductive labor that has only ever been imposed,

19 Ariel Salleh, "An Ecofeminist Bioethic and What Post-Humanism Really Means," *New Left Review* 217 (1996): 138–47.

20 Goutal and Cholez, "Fighting the Patriarchy to Save the Planet."

21 Ariel Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx, and the Postmodern* (London: Zed Books, 1997).

devalued, and abused. To say that women will cure the earth might as well be to enforce them to upkeep the home and clean up the mess for all its inhabitants.[22] The feminine affinity with nature suddenly becomes a reinforcement of domesticity. Simone de Beauvoir even "urged women to transcend their links to nature so as to overcome their status as the other, second, sex" because the acceptance of a status alongside nature is simultaneously the acceptance of women as the inferior 'other.'[23]

Similarly, identifying with nature is counterproductive and arguably inaccurate from a Kantian perspective. Susan Feldman, an environmental philosophy professor, argues that the ecofeminist argument simply doesn't hold up. The environment cannot be dominated in the same way that women are dominated because the immorality of oppression comes from the violation of human free will. The subordination of nature is thus justified because it lacks conscious activity and autonomy. Women, and any other subordinated group, deserve to achieve human existence, and if women are tied to nature, it further illegitimizes their autonomy and humanity. In other words, accepting a non-human status is the moral justification for being oppressed.[24]

It is also valuable to look at the controversial essentialist sex/gender argument. It is regressive to "biologize the personality traits that patricentric society assigns to women" because that would be to accept limiting gender constructs by neglecting the differentiation between sex (biological characteristics) and gender (social roles).[25] Furthermore, it is restrictive to argue that women and nature have an innate bond because this excludes any male or non-cis woman from the connection with nature that is arguably necessary to heal the planet. For example, trans women, particularly, are often masculinized as unnatural and inhuman, but they ought to fit into the ecofeminist conversation just as well. Ideal feminine traits are difficult to identify and identify with, and gender typing is quite problematic in a theory that seeks female and human liberation. The biological is always influenced by the socially constructed and vice versa; gender is not a stable category, so it becomes difficult to claim that women are intrinsically more 'natural.'[26]

The essentialist language surrounding fertility and birth can also become problematic. To claim that women and nature's capacity for the creation and nurturing of life ties them together equates women to biological processes that many women can not or do not experience. This would be to define women by their capacity for reproduction,

22 Valera, "Francoise d'Eaubonne and Ecofeminism: Rediscovering the Link between Women and Nature."

23 Marcia Morgan, "An Existential Ecofeminism and a Renewed Critical Theory of Nature: An Imagined Dialogue between Simone de Beauvoir and Jurgan Habermas," 2017, https://doi.org/10.20396.

24 Susan Feldman, "Some Problems with Ecofeminism," *Dickinson College*, 1999, https://www.bu.edu/wcp/MainEnvi.htm.

25 Janet Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* (South End Press, 1991), https://www.academia.edu/2587961/Rethinking_Ecofeminist_Politics.

26 Anne Archambault, "A Critique of Ecofeminism," *Canadian Woman Studies* 13, no. 3 (1993): 19–22.

which has been exploited and abused through the politicization of reproductive rights. Moreover, men also share biological processes that are necessary to reproduce, and the denial of every being's role in life-giving is the denial of the interdependence that ecofeminism relies upon. We must not glorify or elevate women's fertility or over-identify with the female perspective because this would be hypocritical in using a language of dominance and subjectivity to our advantage. After all, women's perspective is only *a* perspective; every social group and individual suffers from patriarchy, including men.[27]

It is clear that ecofeminist philosophy contains numerous gaps and contradictions that threaten its legitimacy. However, by addressing these critiques, it is possible to reinterpret and defend ecofeminism. I wish to build a bridge between cultural and radical divisions, both through the prior recognition of the historical implications of objectification and through the exploration of a deep connection with nature that can act as an imagination of a healed futurity. While the nature v nurture argument is an everlastingly unanswerable conversation, and while I do specifically focus on women and nature's experiences, as it is impossible to adequately address every form of oppression that coexists, what follows is an attempted reanalysis of the progressing and controversial ecofeminist argument. Alas.

GYN/ECOLOGY: A SUMMARIZATION

Mary Daly is a radical feminist theologian who explored how male-dominated systems have shaped women's and nature's bodies. In her text, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978), she invites a spiritual ecofeminist revolution by analyzing divinity and patriarchy alike. To do so, she begins by reflecting on the female experience of nothingness.

Women are empty receptacles; women are othered; women are cut off from being. A woman's presence is nothingness, and this nothingness acts as a forced acceptance of objectification and a death of female humanity. Women are not only raped and brutalized literally, but also spiritually and existentially. Raped souls create ghosts, and ghostliness denies personhood.

Various historical examples of the indicated female condition, referred to as 'gynocide', are provided. The Indian practice of suttee, for example, was a historical Hindu ritual in which a widow would immolate herself upon her husband's funeral pyre. Reflecting on the convergence of religious and patriarchal atrocities, Daly presents suttee as a lucid instance of female devaluation and erasure; women are annihilated both physically and spiritually, stripped of autonomy and self-worth. She then points to Chinese footbinding as a manifestation of the romanticized mutilation of women and the crippling of their freedom. The restriction of physical movement is a symbol of sociopolitical confinement. African genital mutilation is but another example of patriarchal

27 Archambault.

violence through the control of female sexuality and the mutilation of the female body. Perhaps the most familiar gynocidal practice is European witch burning, or 'woman hunting,' legitimized through the church and state. In each of these examples, women are not only hated and abused but culturally convinced to participate in and perpetuate their own oppression. Through what Daly identifies as the "Sado-Ritual Syndrome," or Goddess murder, there are no cultural bounds for the patriarchal sanctification of female torture.[28]

The question then becomes *why* women are the "dreaded anomie", fatefully denigrated as outlined above.[29] Daly proposes that the imposition and exploitation of femininity are rooted in a projection of impotence and fear. Socially constructed femininity is the resented male/human weakness and therefore actually does not reflect women at all. As cited in the SCUM Manifesto, "[man] hates his passivity, so he projects it onto women, defines the male as active, then sets out to prove he is a man."[30] Our disgust with the incapacity of human nature creates the female (and general minority) scapegoat. Women are degraded as a manifestation of the weakness misnamed femininity.

The irony of patriarchy is that women are simultaneously degraded and drained in a parasitic process. Embedded in patriarchy is the practice of male parasitism: men require access to women because access is power; power is held by men through ownership; ownership is achieved through boundary violation and dehumanization. Women are used both as receptacles of projected inadequacy and as guzzled sources of energy. The patriarchal tendency coined "fetal identification syndrome" involves men's identification with fetuses through the desire to extract nutrients and control the metaphorical 'womb' while excreting waste back to the exact source that provides them with life.[31] Sounds familiar, no? Society treats the environment in the same way, and this is where Daly builds the ecofeminist argument.

Civilization functions through a patriarchal structure stuck in a binary deadlock, and the greatest example of the implications of this Cartesian worldview is in the case of the internal institution versus the external essence, i.e., man versus nature. It is quite automatic to gender this separation, and Daly does exactly that; men are deeply dependent on the structure of society to define their role and are thus the internal subject, while women have an inner identity that does not rely on external structure and are thus the external object. Society benefits those whose identities come from capitalizing on other resources, and because men experience an internalized insufficiency for their lack of ability to create and foster life, their impulse is to suck it dry, reconfigure it, and demolish it. This reality directly causes the exploitation of women and the environment.

28 Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism, 72*.

29 Daly, 30.

30 Daly, 226.

31 Daly, 43.

Man's creation through destruction creates a power dynamic that drives hierarchical structures to benefit men exclusively, and the inflicted dualism in which man creates barriers, simply to violate them, justifies doing so. In other words, man erects artificial boundaries between himself and his 'natural' opponent (women and nature, for example). He then constructs a society in which he is capable of and justified in violating those boundaries to gain control of the resources he has positioned himself above. These resources are then reconstructed to feed both capitalism and the ego of the creator, forming a human god complex through the glorification of the man-made. To use Daly's words, "patriarchy has stolen our cosmos and returned it in the form of *Cosmopolitan* Magazine and cosmetics."[32] The noxious control and reconstruction of natural resources, without regard for the consequences of exploiting them, is the imperative trouble with our culture.

This coping with inadequacy smoothly applies to theology as well. To illustrate, Daly contrasts the worship of God with the worship of God*dess*. God is a symbol of the constructed, patriarchal, dominating life force, while Goddess is a symbol of the natural, life-loving, mutualistic life force. Monolithic religion promotes the deception that reality is closed to us, and life's function is fully above human understanding, but completely within the Father's. It is not necessary to agree or disagree with human faith to admit that not only does worship of a God deny embodied knowledge and internal meaning, which are strongly feminized, it also replaces the gravity of existing life sources with the aloofness of a distant, surpassing, masculine one- yet another example of dualist ideology. This further justifies masculine dominance and social order in which man attempts to mirror the power of god by dominating preexisting vital forces. The "hallucinatory male womb," upheld by monolithic religion, is an outright rejection of the wild yet concrete existence of "women, born of women, [who] do not invent a false need to be reborn from, of all things, men."[33]

We now understand the notion that patriarchy is a jumble of twisted and catastrophic projections, but how does this reflect human destructive nature as a whole? To Daly, patriarchy is a state of war. Not only in the form of human militancy, but also as an "unceasing war on life itself."[34] Arguably, Daly's most significant contribution to the ecofeminist argument is that "patriarchy is itself the prevailing religion of the entire planet, and its essential message is necrophilia... not in the sense of love for actual corpses, but of love for those victimized into a state of living death."[35] Patriarchal society is foundationally death-obsessed, and the 'dirty joke' is that, as we have condemned the planet to it, our culture is killing itself. Death is inevitable

32 Daly, 10.
33 Daly, 253.
34 Daly, 223.
35 Daly, 30.

and cyclical, but the denial of the natural life cycle has caused it to be artificial and administered.

Vampiristic culture has sucked the life out of women and the planet, leaving a ruined house and dead bodies. The ingrained eroticization of domination is deadly, and the world is becoming a communal casket.[36] (discussed further in Section VII)

Daly's model of 'The Feminist Voyage' is a proposed remedial response to the aforementioned societal defects. It is a divine internal process by which women connect deeply inside themselves to discover an interwoven female identity and imagine a non-patriarchal society. The radical becoming of women requires an exorcism of internalized projections of feminine death as we embrace the internal wild Background to escape the external "male-centered, monodimensional foreground."[37] Patriarchy is the demon that must be expelled from our bodies. The feminist refusal "to be receptacles for semantic semen" comes from self-actualization and transcendence, not false inclusion in a human society that does not enduringly serve human beings, especially not women.[38] Ultimately, Daly's ecofeminism is the realization of complex interrelationships by depolluting our minds, souls, and bodies.

CONFRONTING ESSENTIALISM

As I previously mentioned, *Gyn/Ecology* has been a shining target of mainstream feminists in light of its many controversial stances. Audre Lorde, a leading intersectional feminist, wrote a letter directly to Mary Daly addressing the issues in her work. Lorde criticizes Daly's lack of inclusive forms of oppression and Eurocentric approach, as white feminists often universalize their experience without acknowledging their own status of privilege.[39] This can also be said of Daly's condemnation of robotitude alongside her belief that trans individuals are mechanical manifestations of female substitution. She erroneously claims that "transsexualism [endorses]... feminine nonwomen conceived by male mothers [who]... invade the female world with substitutes."[40] This selective denial of personhood is rather hypocritical, considering her condemnation of the dehumanization of women and her position against binary construction.

Similarly, she neglects the presence of feminine energy beyond cis women, which completely undermines her philosophy of interwoven existence. This directly connects to the essentialist critique mentioned above, in which women and only women have intrinsic feminine energy that enables them to connect to the wild, natural Background

36 Zayn Kassam, "Necrophilia and Voyaging: Some Curious Connections," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 28, no. 2 (2012): 104–9.

37 Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism,* 8.

38 Daly, 202.

39 Audre Lorde, "An Open Letter to Mary Daly," History is a Weapon, 1979, https://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/lordeopenlettertomarydaly.html.

40 Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* 39, 50.

of reality. Overall, Daly's exclusivity of her own philosophy in writing for a primarily white, female audience greatly limits the support for her theory.

Where Daly and other essentialists go wrong is in the equation of feminine energy with the biological female. The harnessing of feminine energy, which is the primary cultural ecofeminist intention, can be more broadly understood as the valuing and channeling of interdependent relationality, harmony, and mutualism. This energy is more obviously, though not exclusively, retrieved by women through a feminist voyage because 1) women have little incentive to actively participate in patriarchy and suffer harshly from the consequences of its values, and 2) women have been historically placed on the border between man and nature.

Women do have the potential to heal the divide between culture and nature, but strictly gendering this rehabilitative duty is contradictory and unproductive. A theory that relies upon interconnectivity and cooperation to sustain life must be all-embracing. Feminine energy must be universally attainable, at least to some degree, to maximize its healing capacity, regardless of women's admittedly easier access to it.

There is much to be taken from Daly's philosophy if we interpret it more liberally and contemporarily. By rejecting her ignorance of intersectionality, outright transphobic commentary, and essentialization of feminine energy, the transcendent voyage can be applied beyond a woman's exclusive, self-identifying journey to a secret salvation. The application of her feminist project *must* be inclusive because the dismantling of an oppressive system seeks to liberate all who are oppressed, and patriarchy is universally oppressive.[41] Ecofeminism can be a revolution beyond romanticized female selfhood- a collective, spiritual one.

HUMAN DESTRUCTIVENESS AND PATRIARCHAL NECROPHILIA

Cultural ecofeminism can further be defended by analyzing the connection that Daly draws between patriarchy and necrophilia, in which she applies Erich Fromm's psychology of necrophilous individuals to an entire patriarchal system.

Fromm's *Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973) examines human destructive tendencies and the institutional perpetuation of violence, as well as expressions of necrophilia and sadism. Sexual perversions frequently found in men, such as algolagnia (the desire to inflict pain), are supported by society because fraternal "liberty requires that men have the right to satisfy their sadistic and masochistic desires."[42] The biological life-serving sexual impulse is thus perverted into a life-strangling one. Fromm later points to Freudian theory, which claims that "the striving for life and the striving for

41 Clare Monagle, "Mary Daly's Gyn/Ecology: Mysticism, Difference, Feminist History," *Journal of WOmen in Culture and Society* 44, no. 2 (2019): 333–53, https://doi.org/10.1086.

42 Erich Fromm, *Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (New York: Henry Holt, 1973), 281.

destruction were the two most fundamental forces within man."[43] There is an intense desire to control and master living beings in a sadistic blend of Eros (the life instinct) and the death instinct. The attempt to replace impotence (both helplessness and inability to achieve an erection) with omnipotence feeds the patriarchal god-complex that Daly discussed. When we equate this destructive human condition with the patriarchal condition, the plague of individuals becomes the plague of society. In a sadistic culture, femininity becomes inherently masochistic as we are forced to accept our own death.

Further, Fromm explores the malignant aggression of necrophilia. Necrophilia can be described as the desire to have sexual contact with a female corpse, to handle and dismember corpses, or, more loosely, to destroy and tear apart living structures. It is the passion to transform that which is alive into something unalive; the enemy is life itself. In a culture that promotes lifelessness, patriarchy only sustains itself by inflicting the mortality man fears so heavily. Living things are objectified and deadened because life is unpredictable and thus terrifying; sadism is projected powerlessness. We are not gods, and fear becomes our practice. Thus, our fear of death, necrophobia, becomes our obsession with death, necrophilia, and they are virtually synonymous. Man denies the "self-replenishing function of all living substances" and is "incapable of relating himself by love and productivity" through the remote existence of given institutions.[44] In this way, the Cartesian worldview is a form of necrophilia through the fragmentation, or dismemberment, of living things, its goal being "to control the mind by transcending the body in order to achieve immortality and divinity in death."[45]

Destruction has been conveniently refined in the name of progress, "transforming the world into a stinking and poisonous place (and this is *not* symbolic). He pollutes the air, the water, the soil, the animals- and himself... willing to sacrifice all life."[46] Fromm proposes that this exercised biophobia can be transformed into biophilia through the dismantling of oppressive systems: "The power through which one group exploits and keeps down another tends to generate sadism in the controlling group... hence sadism will disappear only when exploitative control of any class, sex, or minority group has been done away with."[47] Oppressive structure does not value futurity; culture is ruled by historically established institutions, laws, property, traditions, and possessions. In this way, "the dead rule the living."[48]

Ernest Becker further explores this phenomenon in *The Denial of Death* (1973). He claims that the denial of death shapes society, and human behavior is driven by the fear of mortality. Living "with a body subject to the natural laws of limitation and

43 Fromm, 331.

44 Fromm, 294.

45 Wolfstone, "Deconstructing Necrophilia: An Ecofeminist Contribution to Growth," 11.

46 Fromm, *Anatomy of Human Destructiveness,* 350.

47 Fromm, 297.

48 Fromm, 339.

death" forces us to "live in terror of meaninglessness, compelled repeatedly to perform acts of brutality in order to survive."[49] Life is antagonizing to those who fear it, and man experiences a pathetic urge to kill the living, as well as to be free from the natural cycle of mortality. Patriarchy is a coping mechanism for existential anxiety, specifically man's feeling of incapacity for control over life, for which he resents women and nature. Political and religious institutions act as systems of immortality that make man feel permanent and righteous. The major problem with the urge to rebel against nature's life cycle is that we long for a connection that can only be found by accepting our own death. It is this connection that ecofeminism seeks to reestablish.

The denial of death, partnered with the denial of life, catapults us toward mass extinction and climate change. By accepting the inevitability of life and death, and by placing trust in internal and eternal meaning, there is no longer a need for separation between the cultural and the natural that results in environmental torment. Freya Matthews, in her ecofeminist interpretation of deep ecology, agrees with this phenomenon. Deep ecology is an environmental philosophy that seeks to radically revise humanity's relationship with nature by recognizing the universal value of life forms beyond human utility. Because death-obsessed culture denies metaphysical interconnectedness and individual impermanency, Matthews proposes that "ironically, it is by accepting and honoring the forces of destruction that we are freed from the impulse to destroy."[50] If the interests of man and nature are synced in a holistic understanding of coexistence, the life cycle is no longer the patronizing enemy, and "balance [can] be found between the cherishing of life and the honoring of death."[51] Decentralizing human interests is key to achieving sustainability.

THE RECLAMATION OF LIFE: A FINAL REINTERPRETATION OF CULTURAL ECOFEMINISM

In Andree Collard's *Rape of the Wild* (1989), a text that Mary Daly and I agree summarizes the ecofeminist movement quite profoundly, the connection between life and death offers a balanced and convincing argument for transcendental (Cultural) ecofeminism. It depicts feminist ecology as the recovery of our vitality; a call of the wild to swap our loyalties from nation to nature.[52]

From an anthropological perspective, hierarchical violence has long been ingrained in humanity. Annihilation in the name of progress and civilization, both of people and the environment, has been justified through the glorification of 'the hunt.' Humans

49 Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: The Free Press, 1973), 47.

50 Freya Matthews, "Relating to Nature: Deep Ecology or Ecofeminism?" 11 (1994), https://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/index.php/trumpet/article/view/803, 165.

51 Matthews, 166.

52 Mary Daly, "Foreword," in *Rape of the Wild: Man's Violence against Animals and the Earth* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

and land are "objectified, hunted, invaded, colonized, owned, consumed, and forced to yield," allowing "the oppressor the illusion of control, of power, of being alive."[53] Culture necessitates that the death of all is necessary for the life of some, creating a life-value system for those who seek to administer mortality. Destruction is enabled by insatiable, apathetic penetration and systemic control, achieved through separatism that leaves humanity "alienated, fragmented, and possessed... rootless as a plant grown in sterile soil- and often just as dead."[54]

As man has discarded and devalued women and nature, he has failed to surpass the natural capacity to create life or to satisfy himself; his actions are self-harming. To Susan Griffin, "In separating nature from culture, the man who believes this delusion has split his own needs and desires from his 'intelligence' and from all meaning. Thus, his own desires return to him as meaningless, as cruel and senseless violations... he has created a monstrous image to contain his own self-loathing."[55] In other words, the rejection of the natural, including within ourselves, is the rejection of the possibility of mutual life satisfaction.

Collard imagines a sustainable post-patriarchy that is not interested in the path toward solitary human progress, but rather an ecological one. While mainstream feminism "encourages women to want incorporation into a man's world on an 'equality' basis, meaning that woman absorbs his ideologies, myths, histories, etc,"[56] it is evident that the structural integration of women will not suffice. Daly says herself that "[*Gyn/Ecology*] can be heard as a Requiem for that women's movement which is male-designed, male-orchestrated, male-legitimated, male-assimilated."[57] Cultural ecofeminism does not seek any such integration because fraternity is an illusory freedom, and women, by hypothetically accepting patriarchal inclusion, would only continue to be accomplices in the domination of nature and any other replacing receptacle of oppression. Freedom comes from harmony with, not sovereignty over, another, and the ecofeminist vision of futurity would eliminate the logic of domination altogether.[58] Therefore, cultural ecofeminism is indeed apolitical, apocalyptic, and arguably anarchical; it does not seek to negotiate within the system it denounces. Societal restructuring is necessary because the world is dying, and distinguishing our goals from those of nature is killing us alongside everything else. One of the great ironies of human progression is that by assuming

53 Andree Collard and Joyce Contrucci, *Rape of the Wild: Man's Violence against Animals and the Earth* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 1.

54 Collard and Contrucci, 28.

55 Lori Gruen, "Review: Rape of the Wild," *Ecological Feminism* 6, no. 1 (1991): 198–206, 202.

56 Collard and Contrucci, *Rape of the Wild: Man's Violence against Animals and the Earth*, 8.

57 Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism,* 5.

58 Valera, "Francoise d'Eaubonne and Ecofeminism: Rediscovering the Link between Women and Nature."

the position of the hunter, man has essentially foreshadowed his own death; the only way to overcome this is to work toward a mutual best interest.[59]

CONCLUSION: IMAGINING A POST-PATRIARCHAL FUTURITY

Necrophilous patriarchal culture is a commitment to and a glorification of a slow and painful suicide, of which ecofeminists want no part.[60] It is not the recognition of humanity, but the recognition of life that is significant in this philosophy because human rights mean nothing if we exist in such a system of inevitably harmful stratification.[61] By integrating all of the provided philosophies of feminism, ecology, human destructive tendency, and necrophilia through an anthropological, psychological, and futuristic lens, a coherent interpretation of ecofeminism can be established.

Ecofeminism seeks to achieve sustainability by rejecting unsustainable practices. The reclamation of life is only possible through the transcendence of systems that promote, perpetuate, capitalize, and depend on death. Ecofeminism appears to me to be the prevailing productive philosophy for the salvation, not only of our species, but of our planet, *because* it is necessarily anarchical and transcendental. Cultural ecofeminism, specifically, functions to imagine an admittedly impractical, though not impossible, futurity rather than to invoke systemic change. If humans are collectively able to access and balance masculine and feminine energies, not necessarily in male and female forms, post-patriarchy is possible. Further research can explore ways in which ecofeminist philosophy can inspire contemporary change in feminist and environmentalist initiatives. Imagining the possibility of a mutualistic and matriarchal world is largely mystical and revolutionary. Though if we choose to be shocked and unnerved by the systems in which we exist, this imagination appears to be the only truly sustainable existence.

59 Edan Amos, "Hunter" (Binghamton: Binghamton University, March 5, 2025).

60 Amos.

61 Salleh, "An Ecofeminist Bioethic and What Post-Humanism Really Means."

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REDEFINING MORAL INTERNALISM: AKRASIA AND AMORALISM IN ADAM SMITH

SUSANA MONTES HERRERA

Moral internalism holds that there is a necessary connection between moral judgment and motivation to act, which makes it a central position for understanding how moral judgments influence action. Nevertheless, this view faces difficulties in explaining phenomena such as *akrasia* —deliberate actions that run contrary to one's better judgment— and amoralism —the absence of motivation despite the recognition of a moral judgment. Traditional responses prove insufficient, whether by denying that the amoralist forms genuine moral judgments or by conditioning motivation on the agent's rationality or psychological character, since these phenomena can occur even in the absence of cognitive or psychological failures. Considering these limitations, this paper proposes a reading of Adam Smith as an author compatible with moral internalism, capable of accounting for *akrasia* and amoralism without reducing them to cognitive or psychological failures. Bearing this in mind, the paper is structured as follows. First, it offers a general characterization of moral internalism and of the standard strategies by which this position addresses the problems of *akrasia* and amoralism. Second, it presents a succinct

characterization of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and explores the possibility of an internalist interpretation of this conception, delving into the connection between moral judgment and motivation, the necessary character of that connection, and the role of *de re* desires as opposed to *de dicto* desires. Finally, it examines the extent to which *akrasia* and amoralism can be accommodated within Smithian theory and how, on the basis of an analysis of these phenomena, it is possible to articulate a form of moral internalism capable of accounting for their complexity without denying them.

MORAL INTERNALISM

Moral internalism, in its most general formulation, holds that moral motivation is internal to moral judgment; that is, there is a necessary connection between an agent's judgment and her motivation to act accordingly. In the words of Strandberg and Björklund: "A sentence of the type 'I am morally required to f' expresses a judgment such that, if a person judges that she is morally required to f, then she is motivated to f. It follows that it would be incorrect to ascribe such a judgment to a person unless she is motivated to f."[1] This conception is attractive because it offers a simple and elegant explanation of many of our everyday moral intuitions and expectations. When we issue a normative judgment —for example, that something is good for us, that we have reasons to act in a certain way, or that a particular action is the most rational— we typically feel moved to act accordingly, not out of an abstract desire to "do what is right for its own sake," but rather out of a particular desire linked to the action itself. Internalism readily explains this phenomenon by assuming that there is a necessary connection between judgment and motivation: in making a moral judgment we already experience a desire or motivation to act accordingly, and it is not necessary to appeal to abstract desires —such as a desire to do whatever is right— in order to explain why we act as we do. Moreover, this thesis appears to accord with two common intuitions. First, as Strandberg and Björklund argue, if an agent claims that it would be morally wrong to perform a certain action—such as eating meat—we expect her to refrain from doing so, and we tend to interpret the lack of corresponding motivation as a sign of insincerity in her judgment.[2] Second, we also expect that, if someone changes her moral judgment, she will to some extent change her behavior. However, although the internalist thesis seems to fit and account for many of phenomena and intuitions we have, it nonetheless faces difficulties when attempting to explain phenomena such as amoralism, understood as those cases in which an agent holds beliefs or judgments about morality but is not motivated by them.[3] And account *akrasia* as well, which can be described as a "free (and

1 Caj Strandberg & Fredrik Björklund, "Is moral internalism supported by folk intuitions?", Philosophical Psychology 26, №3 (2013), 320.

2 Strandberg & Björklund, "Is moral internalism supported by folk intuitions?" 319-335.

3 David O. Brinks, Moral motivation. Ethics, 108 № 1 (1997)., 4–32.

therefore uncompelled) sane, intentional action that, as the nondepressed agent consciously recognizes at the time of action, is contrary to his better judgment, a judgment based on practical reasoning."[4]

Unconditional Moral internalism faces an explanatory tension considering the evidence that an agent may recognize what is right without feeling motivated to act accordingly. To preserve the internalist thesis, many unconditional internalists maintain that akratic agents and amoralists do not form genuine moral judgments.[5] Hare proposes the strategy of *inverted commas*, according to which amoralists and akratic agents do not issue moral judgments in full sense but instead employ moral language in an indirect or distanced way.[6] Thus, when asserting "this is fair," the agent does not prescriptively commit to that judgment but rather expresses something like "this is what my community considers 'fair'" without accepting the corresponding prescription. However, this explanation appears insufficient. Roskies has pointed out that patients who develop sociopathy constitute a counterexample to unconditional internalism, since they issue genuine moral judgments —not in the sense of *inverted commas*—and yet lack the corresponding motivation.[7] Along similar lines, authors such as Nichols have highlighted comparable cases in patients with various psychopathologies [8], and Kumar has argued that unconditional internalism unduly restricts available interpretations for understanding the mental states of these subjects. [9,10] In addition, strategies such as Hare's seemed to dissolve the very possibility of *akrasia*, as far as they redefine moral judgment in such a way that acting against it implies, by definition, that it was never genuinely accepted. This consequence appears to be in tension with our ordinary understanding of moral experience, according to which agents can recognize.

To respond in a more nuanced way to the challenges posed by amoralism and *akrasia*, some authors have proposed versions of conditional internalism. According to this

4 Alfred Mele, "Backsliding: Understanding weakness of will "in *The Oxford Handbook of Moral Psychology*, ed. Manuel Vargas & Jhon M. Doris (Oxford University Press, 2022),33.

5 Samuel Asarnow & David E. Taylor, "Judgment Internalism" in *The Oxford Handbook of Moral Psychology*, ed. Manuel Vargas & Jhon M. Doris (Oxford University Press, 2022),152

6 Richard M. Hare, The language of morals. (Oxford University Press, 1952)

7 Adina Roskies, "Are ethical judgment intrinsically motivational? Lessons from 'acquired sociopathy'". Philosophical Psychology 16, № 1 (2003), 51-66

8 Shaun Nicols, Sentimental Rules (Oxford University Press, 2002)

9 Victor Kumar, "Psychopathy and internalism," Canadian Journal of Philosophy 46 № 3 (2016), 318-450.

10 It is important to note that the architecture of Smith's theory, as well as the analysis proposed in this paper, does not explicitly incorporate cases of profound psychological or neurological differences. As discussed in the contemporary literature—for example, Adina Roskies (2003) on acquired sociopathy or Shaun Nichols (2002) on various psychopathologies—these conditions pose significant challenges to moral internalism by presenting agents who make moral judgments without being motivated by them. Nevertheless, since Smith does not consider these variations in his work, this study is limited to an exegetical reconstruction of his theory, addressing akrasia and amoralism as phenomena that occur in agents who, despite possessing a functional affective structure, undergo processes of moral desensitization or distortion.

formulation, the internal connection between moral judgment and motivation depends on the satisfaction of a certain condition C. Thus, if a person judges that she is morally required to φ, then she will be motivated, at least to some extent, to do so, provided that this condition is satisfied. Michael Smith formulates this idea as follows: "If an agent judges that it is right for her to φ in circumstances C, then either she is motivated to φ in C or she is practically irrational".[11] There are different versions of conditional internalism depending on how condition C is interpreted. Although various alternatives have been proposed, the most widespread interpretations prove problematic. In particular, maintaining that an agent who judges that X is morally right, will be motivated to act in accordance with that judgment provided that she is practically rational, or that she functions in a psychologically normal way seems to be in tension with many of our moral intuitions. This conception leaves aside cases in which a person does not act in accordance with what she recognizes as right without this necessarily implying a psychological anomaly or a deficit of rationality. Moreover, many authors consider counterintuitive to classify the ordinary akratic agent as irrational or psychologically abnormal, since, as Mele notes, the akratic agent recognizes that she acts against what she judges to be right. Some paradigmatic cases of *akrasia* illustrate this point: for example, the case in which an individual, normally more moderate than most with respect to alcohol consumption, freely succumbs to temptation on a particular occasion, acting against what he himself considers right in that situation.[12] In such cases, it seems more appropriate to understand the agent not as someone incapable of reasoning, but as someone who is weak-willed. In addition, following Strandberg & Björklund[13] and Leben & Wilckens[14], empirical evidence suggests that, in fact, people neither think nor act in the way that conditional internalism assumes they do.

Beyond these approaches, some of the more recent proposals seem to offer more robust tools for delving into phenomena such as *akrasia* and amoralism. Proposals such as the hybrid model maintain that moral judgment has an intrinsically motivational character, although its practical efficacy depends on an affective or desiderative background. This approach, developed by authors such as Mark Schroeder[15] and partly anticipated by Michael Smith's desiderative model of reasons[16], holds that moral judgments are neither mere beliefs floating in a vacuum nor mere expressions of subjective preference, but rather mixed mental states that combine a representational component —the belief that a certain action is right— and a conative or practical component, understood as an

11 Michael Smith, The moral problem (Blackwell, 1994), 61

12 Mele, "Backsliding: Understanding weakness of will ", 350.

13 Strandberg & Björklund, "Is moral internalism supported by folk intuitions?" 326.

14 Derek Leben & Kristine Wilckens, "Pushing the Intuitions behind Moral Internalism," Philosophical psychology 28 № 4 (2015), 510-528.

15 Mark Schroeder, "Hybrid Expressivism: Virtues and Vices," Ethics 119 (2009), 257-309

16 Smith, The moral problem

emotional disposition to act accordingly. As Schroeder explains, "moral judgments are not just beliefs [...] moral sentences express both kinds of states of mind".[17] This dual structure allows one to preserve the constitutive link between judgment and motivation —since judgment incorporates a desire-like attitude— without assuming, as strong internalism does, that such motivation is always effective or irresistible. The hybrid model thus acknowledges that the motivational force of judgment can weaken when the desiderative component is affected by phenomena such as apathy, habituation, self-deception, or moral corruption. Precisely for this reason, this approach is particularly well suited to account for cases of *akrasia* and amoralism, showing that, in many contexts, it is not the absence of moral understanding that explains inaction or deviation, but rather the progressive deterioration of the affective states that sustain motivation. Within this landscape, Adam Smith's moral theory can be read as a particularly rich antecedent to this kind of position. Without explicitly formulating a hybrid theory in contemporary terms, Smith offers a framework in which moral judgment emerges from sympathy and from emotional agreement with the impartial spectator, thereby incorporating a motivational dimension from the outset. At the same time, he recognizes that this motivation can be weakened or distorted through gradual processes linked to education, habit, temperament, and the social environment.

MORAL INTERNALISM IN ADAM SMITH

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith advances a sentimentalist conception of morality, according to which moral evaluations, whether judgments about the character, actions, or intentions of others, are not the result of purely cognitive reasoning, but rather the manifestation of certain moral feelings or emotions. Within this framework, moral judgments both concerning the appropriate and inappropriate and those assessing merit and demerit—do not arise from the rational application of universal maxims, but from the degree of sympathy that a spectator is able to experience toward an agent's conduct when adopting a neutral standpoint. For Smith, sympathy is a natural inclination that leads us to place ourselves in the position of others and to imagine how we would feel if we were in their circumstances. As he himself notes, "The compassion of the spectator must arise altogether from the consideration of what he himself would feel if he was reduced to the same unhappy situation, and, what perhaps is impossible, was at the same time able to regard it with his present reason and judgment."[18] Thus, when a spectator has internalized the position of the impartial spectator —through constant interaction with impartial and neutral agents— she is able to imagine what an impartial spectator would experience if placed in the agent's circumstances and to contrast this with the emotions she is able to perceive in the agent through their conduct, expression, and words. The fit or

17 Schroeder, "Hybrid Expressivism: Virtues and Vices," 258

18 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments (Metalibri, 2005), 7

misalignment between these two sets of emotions gives rise to the sense of the appropriate/inappropriate and the sense of merit/demerit. We say that a passion is appropriate "when the original passions of the person principally concerned are in perfect concord with the sympathetic emotions of the spectator" [19], and we judge it inappropriate when the opposite occurs. In a more complex manner, we consider an action to be meritorious when we feel "a direct sympathy with the sentiments of the agent, and an indirect sympathy with the gratitude of those who receive the benefit of his actions." [20]

Having clarified the nature of moral judgments in Adam Smith, it is pertinent to ask whether The Theory of Moral Sentiments can be understood in internalist terms. At this point, it is important to note that Smith never explicitly claims that his account is internalist, nor does he affirm the existence —in the contemporary metaethical sense— of a necessary connection between judgment and motivation. Consequently, an internalist reading of his theory must be understood as the result of an exercise in exegesis and interpretation, aimed at reconstructing, based on various passages and the general spirit of the text, a possible reading of this kind. Moral internalism —both in its most general formulation and in many of its reformulations— appears to be committed to several theses. First, it maintains that there is a connection between moral judgment and action, in the sense that moral judgments are typically accompanied by a motivation to act in accordance with them. Second, for a position to properly count as moral internalism, this connection between judgment and motivation must be conceived as necessary, at least under certain parameters or normal conditions. Finally, it is required that this connection not be explained by appeal to a *de dicto* desire —namely, a general desire to do whatever falls under the description "the right thing to do"—, but rather by a *de re* desire, understood as the immediate inclination to perform a particular action that the agent simultaneously recognizes as the right action. With this in mind, the aim of what follows will be to assess whether, and in which sense, Smith's theory can be reconstructed as a form of moral internalism, by examining separately the presence of (i) a connection between judgment and motivation, (ii) the necessary character of this connection under normal conditions, and (iii) the type of motivational state involved.

Although Smith does not systematize a treatise on motivation, his work establishes an intrinsic connection between moral judgment and action through the original desire to be approved of and to be worthy of approval. He emphasizes that, as social beings, "nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a fellow feeling with all the emotions of our own breast; nor are we ever so much shocked as by the appearance of the contrary".[21] This inclination toward emotional concordance leads agents to examine their own conduct by imagining how others would react to it: would they approve of

19 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 11

20 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 66

21 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 9

it? Would they regard it as meritorious? The calmness and detachment that the agent typically attributes to the spectator prompts her to reassess her motives, restrain her passions, and regulate her conduct, so that her behavior may appear appropriate in the eyes of a neutral third party. As Smith illustrates, "[The agent] passionately desires a more complete sympathy [...] but he can only hope to obtain this by lowering his passion to that pitch, in which the spectators can go along with him. He must flatten, if I may be allowed to say so, the sharpness of its natural tone, to reduce it to harmony and concord with the emotions of those who are about him."[22]

But motivation does not rest solely with the agent who acts. Moral judgment also transforms the position of the observer since the exercise of sympathy never leaves her indifferent. As Smith emphasizes, passions such as joy and grief, when they are "strongly expressed in the look and gestures of any one, at once affect the spectator with some degree of a like painful or agreeable emotion"[23].Beyond this immediate affective response, and in a more general sense, when issuing a moral judgment the spectator does not merely apprehend a purely representational content, but also experiences certain reactive emotions —such as indignation or anger— that express her moral evaluation of the agent's affects and actions and, in turn, dispose her toward particular forms of practical response. Leaving aside this affective modification, moral judgments also awaken in the spectator a disposition to support, accompany, or alleviate the suffering of others[24], or an inclination to punish, restrain, and seek vengeance[25] when they are deemed appropriate. As Smith notes, the human being "rejoices whenever he observes that they adopt his own passions, because he is then assured of that assistance; and grieves whenever he observes the contrary, because he is then assured of their opposition".[26] In this way, when the spectator approves of another is affects, she tends to support, assist, or accompany them; and when she disapproves of them, she often withdraws her favor or even actively opposes them. Analogously, when we sympathize with an agent's intentions and regard the beneficiary's gratitude as justified, we tend to approve of "the returns which he is disposed to make for the good offices conferred upon him"[27]and to endorse them.

But moral judgment not only prompts immediate reactions —such as assistance or punishment— but also generates more enduring commitments with respect to action. As agents are repeatedly exposed to the gaze of neutral and disinterested observers, they gradually internalize an idealized standpoint that enables them to judge and regulate their own actions as if they were being observed by "an imaginary neutral party with no stake in the matter but with a vivid imagination of the emotions of others, and [to]

22 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 17
23 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 6
24 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 43
25 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 62
26 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 9
27 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 61

come to feel, ourselves, what the spectator would feel in the recipient's circumstances".[28] Both the spectator and the agent can thus recognize when an action conforms to the exact propriety that would be dictated by a neutral third party. This recognition gives rise to a distinctive form of motivation: the aspiration not merely to receive praise, but to be genuinely praiseworthy —that is, to "act so as that the impartial spectator may enter into the principles of his conduct, which is what of all things he has the greatest desire to do"[29]— even in the absence of actual approval. In this way, neither the agent nor the spectator is satisfied with mere external approval; rather, both aspire to deserve it, and they regulate their conduct based on this aspiration.

Although Smith never explicitly states what grounds the connection between moral judgment and motivation, the fact that his conception of morality clearly adopts a sentimentalist form seems to offer some clues in this regard. In general terms, moral sentimentalism, as a metaethical position, allows one to account for the motivational character of moral judgment as far as it recognizes that such judgment is grounded, at least in part, in dispositional states such as emotions and desires. However, this position faces a recurrent difficulty: if moral judgments are explained primarily in terms of affective states, how can their normative character and their claim to objectivity be preserved? In Smith, this obstacle does not seem to hold, since his conception problematizes the distinction between representational states —facts that describe reality as it is— and motivational states —facts that aim to transform it—.[30] Smith suggests that moral judgment can fulfill both functions at once. When I evaluate an agent's conduct as appropriate, I do so because I feel that, in those same circumstances, an impartial spectator would experience the same emotion and would react in an equivalent way; I also believe that the agent's response is fitting considering her circumstances. Moral judgment thus acquires, in Smith, intersubjective normative content: it does not express a merely personal desire, but rather a form of shared knowledge, while at the same time retaining the potential to motivate me to show solidarity or to act in the same way.

Now, Smith recognizes that not all passions possess direct motivational force. He distinguishes between passions such as hunger, which necessarily move us to act, and passions such as love or hatred, which do not always generate immediate action.[31] [32] This raises a central question: what is it that gives certain emotions —and moral sentiments

28 Rachel Cohon "Moral sentiments in Hume and Adam Smith "in *The Oxford Handbook of Moral Psychology*, ed. Manuel Vargas & Jhon M. Doris (Nueva York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 96

29 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 75

30 Asarnow & Taylor, "Judgment Internalism," 141

31 Cohon "Moral sentiments in Hume and Adam Smith, 85

32 "The love and esteem which grow upon acquaintance and habitual approbation, necessarily lead us to be pleased with the good fortune of the man who is the object of such agreeable emotions, and consequently, to be willing to lend a hand to promote it. Our love, however, is fully satisfied, though his good fortune should be brought about without our assistance" (Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 59)

in particular— their motivational force? Although Smith does not offer a systematic answer, his theory allows us to sketch a plausible explanation. It does not seem that the key lies in the possibility of sympathizing with emotion. In fact, many passions —such as hunger— cannot be objects of sympathy in the strict sense, and yet they necessarily motivate us to act. In general terms, emotions can be understood as natural dispositions to respond in specific ways to the environment. *While* love inclines us to *actions* toward well-being, though not necessarily in every case, hunger *compels* us to act *as* a natural inclination. If we consider the dispositional character of the passions —and the fact that not all of them are effectively translated into an inclination to act— it becomes pertinent to ask: what justifies interpreting moral sentiments as states analogous to passions such as hunger, rather than to passions such as love? In several passages of his work, Smith suggests that moral judgments possess an intrinsic motivational character. In particular, he maintains that the inner man is not a merely contemplative instance but rather exercises genuine operative force over conduct. As Smith emphasizes, in such cases "it is a stronger power, a more forcible motive, which exerts itself upon such occasions. It is reason, principle, conscience, the inhabitant of the breast, the man within, the great judge and arbiter of our conduct".[33] The connection between moral judgment and motivation is therefore neither contingent nor external, but constitutive of the judgment itself. To recognize that an impartial spectator would approve an action—and that, consequently, it is appropriate—is not merely to apprehend a representational content, but to find oneself intrinsically moved to act in accordance with it. Indeed, when we judge that an emotion or an action is appropriate, we do so because we recognize that an impartial spectator, upon placing herself in the agent's position, would also experience that emotion or approve that conduct.[34] The feeling of concordance that emerges from this exercise does not merely provide a normative evaluation, but generates a practical inclination to approve, support, and accompany what is judged to be appropriate. In this way, moral sentiments operate more like passions that demand a response —analogous to hunger— than like affects whose translation into action is merely occasional, such as love.

Smith emphasizes that the motivational character of judgment does not depend exclusively on external or circumstantial factors —although it may be influenced by them. According to him, nature endowed human beings with "an original desire to please, and an original aversion to offend his brethren"[35] as well as with the aspiration to "being what ought to be approved of; or of being what he himself approves of in other men".[36] This impulse to embody what is morally valuable shows that moral motivation

33 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 120

34 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 11-12

35 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 105

36 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 105

is inscribed in our affective constitution and is not merely a product of social calculation. If, when judging an action as appropriate, our motivation to act in accordance with it depended exclusively on the desire to be approved by others, then the motivational character of morality would be entirely circumstantial. In contexts in which we know we are being observed, moral judgment could move us to act correctly to obtain recognition. However, in the absence of a spectator who evaluates our conduct, such judgment would lose its motivational force, and we might feel inclined to act against the law or duty without experiencing any conflict. By contrast, Smith emphasizes that when we evaluate a behavior as appropriate, what motivates us to adopt it is not merely the desire to be approved, but the deeper desire to be worthy of approval. No matter how much others may evaluate an agent's behavior as appropriate, "If we are conscious that we do not deserve to be so favorably thought of, and that if the truth were known, we should be regarded with very different sentiments, our satisfaction is far from being complete".[37] Now, what exactly consists of acting moved by the desire to be worthy of approval? Is this a desire *de dicto*, or rather a desire *de re*?

At first glance, it might seem that in Smith the connection between moral judgment and motivation is explained in terms of a *desire de dicto*: we act in accordance with our moral judgments because we harbor a general desire to "to do the right thing," to "do everything that is worthy of approval". On this reading, moral judgments would not possess intrinsic motivational force but would motivate us only as far as we recognize that they fall under the description "the right thing to do".[38] Smith does not deny the existence of this kind of motivation and tells us that we sometimes encounter individuals for whom "The motive of his actions may be no other than a reverence for the established rule of duty, a serious and earnest desire of acting, in every respect, according to the law of gratitude"[39],and he even admits that "there are some situations where it is better to be motivated by a standing desire to do the right thing than by a direct desire to perform the act in question"[40], for example, when our immediate passions are manifestly malevolent or antisocial. However, Smith problematizes this form of motivation by regarding it as morally insufficient. As he notes in an illustrative passage: "A husband is dissatisfied with the most obedient wife, when he imagines her conduct is animated by no other principle besides her regard to what the relation she stands in requires".[41] To act moved by a general desire to do "the right thing" reveals, for Smith, a certain moral shortcoming, since the agent who acts in this way is not naturally inclined to act rightly

37 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 103

38 Alfred Archer, "De Dicto" Moral Desires and The Moral Sentiments: Adam Smith on the Role Of "De Dicto" Moral Desires in the Virtuous Agent," *History of Philosophy Quarterly 33*46 № 4, 239.

39 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 143

40 Alfred Archer, "De Dicto" Moral Desires and The Moral Sentiments: Adam Smith on the Role Of "De Dicto" Moral Desires in the Virtuous Agent, 332

41 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 153

by virtue of a spontaneous affective tendency —one that arises from emotional concordance between the impartial spectator and the agent— but rather acts on the basis of a prudential or external reason, which is always liable to fluctuation. In this sense, it is more plausible to think that the connection between moral judgments and motivation is explained in terms of a *desire de re*: in issuing a judgment, we experience a natural and immediate inclination to support, assist, and act in accordance with what an impartial spectator would prescribe. It is precisely this natural inclination to preserve harmony between the impartial spectator and the agent that constitutes the desire to be worthy of approval: to have a desire to be worthy of approval is to have a natural inclination to maintain such harmony.

Although human beings often experience a natural inclination to align their behavior with their moral judgments —an inclination grounded in the original desire not only to be approved of, but to be praiseworthy— Smith acknowledges that this inclination is frequently frustrated. Moral failure, Smith emphasizes, is not the result of ignorance or lack of knowledge alone. On the contrary, in many cases we are aware of the standards that the impartial spectator would prescribe, yet the "eagerness of passion" distorts our judgment at the moment of action. Attitudes such as vanity, ambition, or self-love may lead us to act in dissonance with that standpoint. As Smith observes, "We frequently hear the young and the licentious ridiculing the most sacred rules of morality, and professing, sometimes from the corruption, but more frequently from the vanity of their hearts, the most abominable maxims of conduct".[42] Thus, it is not uncommon for agents to recognize what is right and nevertheless end up acting contrary to it. Smith illustrates this conflict in a particularly vivid way when he describes the agent who "hesitates and trembles" before a rule that he himself has acknowledged as binding, yet which his immediate desires urge him to violate. It is in these kinds of scenarios that his theory leaves room for phenomena such as *akrasia* and amoralism, understood as processes that prevent the realization of the motivational force embodied in moral judgment: the former, brought about by the avidity of the passions; the latter, by the progressive distancing from the figure of the impartial spectator.

THE *AKRASIA* IN SMITH

Smith seems to suggest that we sometimes act akratically, understood as those cases in which an agent (a) knows what is right, (b) believes that this is the correct course of action, and yet (c) intentionally acts against that judgment. A paradigmatic example is that of the resentful man: although he has established for himself an "inviolable rule" of abstaining from violence, when faced with provocation he is overcome by fury. Smith masterfully describes how this agent "hesitates and trembles," being secretly aware that he is violating the standards he resolved never to transgress yet feeling compelled by the

42 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 80

vehemence of his desires. Similarly, this type of conflict appears to manifest itself in examples such as that of ambitious politicians who "In many governments the candidates for the highest stations are above the law; and, if they can attain the object of their ambition, they have no fear of being called to account for the means by which they acquired it. [...] They more frequently miscarry than succeed; and commonly gain nothing but the disgraceful punishment which is due to their crimes".[43] Although guilt and embarrassment are not constitutive of *akrasia*, in both cases they serve as evidence that the "man within the breast" maintains a firm conviction about what is right and wrong and recognizes that he has acted, consciously and avoidably, against his better judgment.

Smith maintains that *akrasia* arises because of the influence of violent passions that distort and obscure the agent's moral judgment. It is not necessary for the impartial spectator to be distant for the agent to act against its dictates: the akratic agent may continue to recognize its authority and even experience a certain degree of motivation in accordance with it, yet the intensity of the momentary emotion weakens its practical influence and narrows the perspective from which the agent judges her action. As Smith notes, "the fury of his own temper may be such, that had this been the first time in which he considered such an action, he would undoubtedly have determined it to be quite just and proper, and what every impartial spectator would approve of".[44] *Akrasia* thus presents itself as a conflict between the momentary force of passions and the more stable voice of the impartial spectator. Under the influence of passionate avidity, the agent is drawn out of her impartial position and returned to her own point of view, "[...] where everything appears magnified and misrepresented by self-love".[45] Driven to act in opposition to the impartial spectator, the agent often ends up acting in a blameworthy and morally censurable manner.

Smith maintains that both bodily passions and passions of the imagination constitute fertile ground for *akrasia*. In the case of bodily passions—such as intense hunger or extreme fatigue—Smith emphasizes that, although these are natural impulses and often difficult to resist, it is improper to express them vehemently, since "the company, not being in the same disposition, cannot be expected to sympathize with them." [46] Thus, our inability to act in accordance with the man within the breast and to confine these passions within the limits of grace, propriety, delicacy, and modesty leads us to act akratically: inappropriately, excessively, and vulgarly. More precisely, akrasia manifests itself in the passions of the imagination, which, as Smith observes, "take their origin from a peculiar turn or habit it has acquired"[47]. In particular, tendencies such as our

43 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 56-57

44 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 142

45 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 138

46 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 22

47 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 26

inclination to judge by outcomes rather than intentions[48], to admire the rich and powerful, and to judge ourselves indulgently lead us to act against the impartial spectator. Dispositions connected to antisocial passions are especially prone to *akrasia*: although affects such as anger or resentment may serve a protective function, Smith warns that "[...] there is still something disagreeable in the passions themselves, which makes the appearance of them in other men the natural object of our aversion"[49]. Thus, even when their effects seem justifiable, we often deviate from the impartial spectator through excess or insufficient censure. A similar phenomenon occurs with social passions, such as kindness or friendship, which are "never regarded with aversion" [50], yet their very appeal can generate partiality, leading us to approve or tolerate what the impartial spectator would condemn. Now, although Smith acknowledges that akrasia may originate in bodily and imaginative passions, he maintains that it more frequently arises from the selfish passions[51]. These passions, such as grief or joy regarding one's own lot, focus moral attention on self-interest without directly engaging benevolence or resentment toward others, leading the individual to experience a disproportionate aversion to his own pain in comparison with that of others. In this way, the "eagerness of passion" makes things appear "magnified and misrepresented by self-love," resulting in a weakening of the authority of the impartial spectator, who, under the force of passion, is left astonished and confounded. Thus, even when the agent recognizes the rule that ought to guide his conduct, his will succumbs to the vehemence of desire, and he ends up acting akratically. Closely related to this, selfish passions also incline us to envy the prosperity of others, thereby distancing us from the judgment of the impartial spectator, who cannot approve of disturbing another's happiness merely for one's own advantage.

On numerous occasions, the passions incline the agent to set aside the perspective of the impartial spectator and to act akratically, following impulses that contradict his best judgment. At first glance, this might appear to constitute an objection to moral internalism, since it suggests that the motivation to be worthy of approval —and thus the necessary connection between judgment and action— is not always preserved. However, Smith provides the resources to respond to this objection, for he suggests that the motivational character of judgment does not disappear it remains as a stable disposition, even though it may be temporarily inhibited by the tensions between the partial spectator and the impartial spectator. As he warns: "When we are about to act, the eagerness of passion will seldom allow us to consider what we are doing, with the candour of an indifferent person".[52] This, however, does not mean that moral judgments

48 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 95

49 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 30

50 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 35

51 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 138

52 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 138

lack motivational force. When, through an imaginative process, we recognize that our own behavior or that of others accords with what an impartial spectator would approve, we experience an emotional concordance that naturally disposes us to act accordingly: to sustain that behavior or to support those who display it. That inclination, which is the product of the emotional concordance between the spectator and the agent, is not eliminated, even though its potential to be translated into action may be drastically weakened by the intensity of the passions. When violent passions dominate us, they displace the impartial spectator and relegate him to the background, reducing his capacity to translate his motivational force into action. Just as two waves that collide may momentarily neutralize one another, without it therefore being appropriate to claim that the first lacked force at the moment of impact, the motivation of the impartial spectator persists: its impulse remains latent, even if it is temporarily eclipsed by the intensity of other passions. As Smith emphasizes, "The propriety of our moral sentiments is never so apt to be corrupted, as when the indulgent and partial spectator is at hand, while the indifferent and impartial one is at a great distance".[53] Once the action has been conducted and the passion that motivated it has subsided, the agent typically recovers the voice of the impartial spectator, but this recognition arrives too late: it generates a powerless regret, incapable of preventing future faults. Since thinking ill of ourselves is painful, we prefer to avoid such self-criticism. Thus, guilt does not dissolve but is transformed into self-deception: "Rather than see our own behaviour under so disagreeable an aspect, we too often, foolishly and weakly, endeavour to exasperate anew those unjust passions which had formerly misled us".[54] Instead of examining our conduct with sincerity, we seek refuge in the euphoria of passion and perpetuate the dominance of a partialized inner spectator. Nonetheless, even in this scenario, moral motivation does not simply disappear. What occurs instead is that the progressive distancing between the agent and the impartial spectator alters the very possibility of sympathizing with him and, with it, of experiencing the affective inclination to act in accordance with his judgments.

AMORALISM IN ADAM SMITH

Smith does not focus exclusively on the phenomenon of *akrasia*. He acknowledges that moral error does not arise solely from ignorance or weakness of will, but that there are individuals who, even while knowing how to distinguish right from wrong, do not seem to experience any inclination to act in accordance with their moral judgments. Smith appears to recognize the possibility of amoralism when describing the figure of the frivolous man. Indeed, he notes that we frequently encounter "the most frivolous and superficial of mankind only who can be much delighted with that praise which they

53 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 136

54 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 139

themselves know to be altogether unmerited".[55] As a result of certain natural dispositions, education, or habit, these individuals have hardened their hearts and weakened their capacity to place themselves in the position of the impartial spectator, to such an extent that their inclination to act in accordance with the voice of the impartial spectator is so diminished that it becomes inoperative. Thus, although the agent may be able to discern right from wrong based on general rules that condense the judgments of the appropriate and the inappropriate upheld by his community, he nevertheless seems to lack all moral motivation. As Smith himself notes, "The man who has received great benefits from another person, may, by the natural coldness of his temper, feel but a very small degree of the sentiment of gratitude".[56] For the frivolous man, the motivation to follow moral guidelines ceases to be intrinsic and becomes merely prudential. The frivolous man appears to have abandoned the perspective of the impartial spectator and, with it, the desire to be genuinely worthy of approval, placing himself instead under the jurisdiction of "the man without," who is guided exclusively by the desire for actual praise and the aversion to actual blame[57]. His adherence to moral rules is therefore purely instrumental and persists only as far as it is advantageous to him. He recognizes that following the path of morality allows him to obtain the approval of his fellow human beings, but he does not hesitate to resort to deception or lying when these means secure the same recognition. In sum, the "frivolous man" in Smith satisfies several conditions: (a) he knows what is right and wrong according to the perspective of the impartial spectator; (b) he does not feel inclined to act in accordance with it; and (c) he therefore follows moral norms only for prudential reasons.

Before examining the causes of amoralism, it is necessary to clarify in what sense it can be said that the amoral agent knows what is right and what is wrong. Given that the frivolous man appears to have set aside the perspective of the impartial spectator —which is essential for issuing vivid and motivating moral judgments— it is worth asking in what sense we can still claim that he possesses moral knowledge. Regardless of whether the frivolous agent retains the capacity imaginatively to reproduce the standpoint of the impartial spectator and to assess the extent to which his action conforms to it, we can say that he knows what is right and wrong through general rules. According to Smith, when we observe that all actions of a certain kind, or performed under certain circumstances, are approved or disapproved, we tend to formulate general rules that capture such repeated judgments.[58] These rules condense shared moral experience and allow the agent to establish relatively stable parameters that guide conduct by identifying which kinds of actions are systematically associated with social disapproval, thus

55 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 107

56 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 143

57 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 115

58 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 140-141

helping him to recognize that "all such actions are to be avoided, as tending to render us odious, contemptible, or punishable, the objects of all those sentiments for which we have the greatest dread and aversion".[59] Now, the moral parameters that enable agents to know what is right and wrong and to guide their behavior do not present themselves as external norms alien to the subject in the manner of Hare. Smith makes clear that "The general maxims of morality are formed, like all other general maxims, from experience and induction".[60] Even when an agent is unable imaginatively to reproduce the perspective of the impartial spectator, the natural mechanism of sympathy allows him to recognize —based on experience and social observation— how others would react to certain forms of conduct. In this sense, even an agent who has set aside the perspective of the impartial spectator or has lost the capacity imaginatively to reproduce it can, in principle, grasp the basic distinctions between right and wrong through the mediation of general rules.

For Smith, amoralism should not be understood as the result of irrationality or psychological abnormality, but rather as the outcome of a gradual process of corruption of moral sentiments, shaped both by natural dispositions and by the influence of education, custom, and the social environment. Although Smith does not develop a systematic theory of the causes of amoralism, he acknowledges that temperament largely determines an individual's capacity to experience affects such as gratitude or compassion[61], and that certain natural tendencies —such as our inclination to judge our own behavior with indulgence or our propensity to assess moral character more by outcomes than by intentions— as well as social inclinations —such as the repression of antisocial passions, the excessive promotion of social passions, and the tendency to admire and almost idolize the rich and powerful while despising, or at least neglecting, the poor and those of humble condition— can lead agents to act contrary to the figure of the impartial spectator they have come to internalize, as well as to the general rules that this figure suggests. The agent experiences, when guided by the figure of the impartial spectator, a certain degree of motivation to act in accordance with its judgments, and yet at times "his own passions are very apt to mislead him; sometimes to drive him and sometimes to seduce him to violate all the rules which he himself, in all his sober and cool hours, approves of".[62] These isolated moments of *akrasia* initially present themselves as exceptional cases; however, although at first the impartial spectator remains close and is merely obstructed by the intensity of the passions, Smith suggests that the repetition of action gradually distances the agent from that inner voice. In the case of the "profligate criminals" Smith observes that the repetition of crime and familiarity

59 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 140

60 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 292

61 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 143

62 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 215

with punishment eventually nullify the sense of guilt and remorse, since they "have always been accustomed to look upon the gibbet as a lot very likely to fall to them".[63] This process of moral desensitization has its roots in what Smith calls self-deception: when acting against the judgment of the impartial spectator, the agent avoids the humiliating vision of his own conduct. Rather than submitting himself to self-criticism, he seeks to relieve his inner unease by "exasperate anew those unjust passions" that led him astray, thereby managing to silence the internal voice of censure. Over time, this punctual distortion becomes habitual: on its basis, and by analogy, the agent begins to justify other practices, until, more generally, the partial spectator comes to replace the impartial spectator within a distorted moral framework. The agent continues to know and understand, at a deep level, what is right and what is wrong, since the mechanism of sympathy continues to operate within him. However, the impartial spectator seems to have been relegated to such a distant position that it ceases to be fully operative. In this way, custom, by nourishing self-deception, not only enables action contrary to what one knows to be right but ultimately erodes that knowledge itself: what initially took the form of a lived awareness of wrongdoing —arising from sympathy and intimately tied to motivation— gradually becomes a merely cognitive form of knowledge, devoid of motivational force. This is how amoralism takes shape.

Beyond this, Smith seems to leave open another path for characterizing and thinking about a form of amoralism that goes beyond the phenomenon of coldness. In a certain sense, his account suggests that a particular kind of education can foster amoralism by making it difficult for agents, at least momentarily, to feel intrinsically motivated to act in accordance with the impartial spectator. For Smith, the figure of the impartial spectator does not arise spontaneously nor present itself as a given instance in advance; rather, it is the result of an imaginative and social process. The agent begins by projecting how concrete, external individuals, detached from her situation, would react to her actions and motivations; through the repetition of this exercise, she ultimately internalizes this perspective, thereby shaping the *man within the breast* who regulates her conduct[64]. The gaze of the impartial spectator is therefore a historical and affective product that varies according to the moral, cultural, and educational conditions of each nation.[65] However, in certain contexts, an agent's moral environment may prevent her from fully developing and internalizing the figure of the impartial spectator. Consider, for instance, a closed community —let us call it A— in which all members maintain bonds of closeness and mutual esteem so tight that no genuinely neutral spectators exist. In such a scenario, agents would be unable to form a genuinely impartial *man within the breast*: even if they attempted to imagine how an external observer would react to their actions, every

63 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 108

64 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 17

65 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 188-189

perspective would inevitably be permeated by the group's shared partiality. If the members of this closed community (A) were to be inserted into a broader and more diverse social framework (B), they would face a critical mismatch between their capacity for judgment and their motivation. Although Smith emphasizes that society B would function as "the mirror which he before wanted" through which agents could perceive the propriety or impropriety of their conduct from the standpoint of a more impartial spectator and begin to assimilate that position, this perspective is not incorporated into the *man within the breast* of A's members either immediately or voluntarily. The man within the breast is not transformed through a purely voluntary or intellectual act, but rather through a slow and arduous process of habituation, in which the agent "thus enters into the great school of self-command, it studies to be more and more master of itself, and begins to exercise over its own feelings a discipline which the practice of the longest life is very seldom sufficient to bring to complete perfection".[66] Insofar as the transformation of the man within the breast is a gradual and progressive process, whereas the understanding of the general rules of framework B occurs much more immediately, the members of community A appear as amoralists from the perspective of framework B. They are not only capable of recognizing which behaviors are appropriate or inappropriate within community B, but, through an exercise of sympathetic imagination, they can also understand why this is so, as far as they grasp how impartial and disinterested individuals would react to certain attitudes and behaviors. Nevertheless, due to their previously acquired moral configuration —and the predominance of a still partial *man within the breast*— the individuals of A retain, at least initially, a certain insensitivity toward this new perspective. Although they manage to understand the moral judgments proper to framework B, they do not yet feel motivated by them: their adherence is cognitive rather than affective. They may act in accordance with the rules of the broader social framework for prudential reasons, including the desire to obtain effective approval within their new community, yet they remain, in the eyes of B, essentially amoralists.

Beyond whether we restrict ourselves to considering coldness as the sole form of amoralism —attributing the lack of moral motivation to vanity and to a hardening of the heart that relegates the voice of the impartial spectator— or whether we admit the existence of other forms of amoralism in which the agent does not entirely lack normative motivation but, due to an affective distance between her moral sensibility and that of the community she inhabits, fails to experience an intrinsic motivation to act in accordance with its rules and thus appears, in that sense, as an amoralist within that framework, we must acknowledge that we are faced with a theoretical difficulty. Amoralism seems to stand in tension with the internalist thesis according to which, even if in certain cases it does not translate into action, the motivational character of moral judgments is preserved. The possibility that an agent may understand what is right and yet

66 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 127

experience no apparent inclination to act accordingly seems, at first glance, to contradict moral internalism. How can this phenomenon be accounted for without abandoning that theoretical commitment? Smith offers an answer by distinguishing two sources of moral knowledge: sympathy and general rules. An agent may recognize the moral character of an action through a particular exercise of sympathy, by imagining how an impartial spectator would react to her own circumstances and to those of others. The feeling of concordance or discordance that emerges from this process not only provides representational content but also constitutes an affective disposition that naturally tends to translate into action. However, the progressive distancing from the figure of the impartial spectator can obstruct this route. In the case of the frivolous man, as Smith suggests, self-deception operates as a "mysterious veil" that gradually relegates the impartial spectator to an increasingly remote place within consciousness. This distance weakens sympathy, since our sensibility diminishes as a function of remoteness: for the "natural eye of the mind" the objects of self-interest appear magnified by proximity, while the interests of others or the abstract judgments of the spectator are perceived as small and insignificant. As self-deception distances the spectator, the agent progressively loses the capacity to place herself in his position. Consequently, emotional concordance becomes diffuse, and "the man within the breast" ends up being "astonished and confounded by the vehemence and clamour of the man without"[67] losing its operative force in the face of the immediacy of selfish passions. Something analogous occurs when an agent whose inner spectator remains partialized is confronted with norms that are significantly more impartial than those to which she is accustomed. This dynamic explains why, in the transition between social frameworks, a specific mismatch arises between cognitive understanding and affective motivation. Although the agent may understand why certain actions are blameworthy within a broader normative framework, this understanding, by itself, is not sufficient for the norm to become "agreeable or disagreeable to the mind for its own sake".[68] Since her inner spectator has been shaped by the affective proximity of her community of origin, she lacks the habit necessary to fully sympathize with the impartiality of the unfamiliar environment. As a result, when engaging in the sympathetic exercise, the agent does not experience a genuine concordance between her own feelings and those of this ideal spectator and therefore fails to develop an intrinsic motivation to act in accordance with its dictates. As far as the route to knowledge of right and wrong through a sympathetic exercise is blocked due to the distancing of the impartial spectator, agents gain access to moral judgments primarily through general rules. These rules, although not presented as external —since they arise from the same original mechanism, sympathy— are reduced, when considered in themselves, to predominantly cognitive contents. They lack an intrinsic motivational character and can guide action only

67 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 115

68 Smith, The Theory of the Moral Sentiments, 292

for prudential reasons, such as the desire for effective approval or the fear of reproach.

In conclusion, the analysis of akrasia and amoralism introduces a decisive nuance into our understanding of moral internalism. From Smith's perspective, it becomes clear that while the motivational character of moral judgment is intrinsic and remains constant as a disposition —as far as it is rooted in our affective constitution and the desire to be worthy of approval— its practical efficacy is nonetheless sensitive to circumstances. At bottom, Smith conceives of the moral subject as a dynamic space, traversed by diverse and sometimes opposing affective currents. Within this scenario, the partial and the impartial spectator stand in constant tension, which in certain cases leads to the practical silencing of the latter. Yet this silence does not amount to its elimination. This point is crucial: the failure to act in accordance with a moral judgment does not, by itself, refute its motivational character. Although the impartial spectator exerts a genuine motivating force, it may be overridden by the intensity of competing passions. This affective dynamic also explains why not all moral judgments motivate in the same way. Smith emphasizes that the necessary connection between moral judgment and motivation is preserved only when the judgment arises from the appropriate causal history. Moral judgments that emerge from an effective exercise of sympathy —that is, when the agent adopts the standpoint of the impartial spectator— possess a direct and operative motivational force. By contrast, when this exercise is eroded, the agent may come to know what is right and wrong through general rules which, although they retain representational content, lack intrinsic motivational force. In this way, the circumstances that give rise to moral judgment also determine their capacity to motivate action. This approach allows for a coherent integration of the phenomena of *akrasia* and amoralism, showing how affective dispositions (social practices) and natural inclinations interact to explain why, in some cases, moral judgment translates into action and, in others, remains without practical effect.

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