CHAPTER 14

Emotion as Value

Taste a strawberry, then a lemon. You can list the differences: sugar, acid, smell. Now suppose you felt nothing at all. Could you still say which tastes better? Strip feeling away and every other difference survives. The difference that vanishes is the one between better and worse.

Chapter 14 argues that evaluative difference is its own kind, and emotion is what makes it. Take colour. Light exists with no eyes anywhere, but a colour happens only when a visual system answers it. It is real once made, and dependent on the responder always.

The chapter then turns this on the philosopher who holds that value obtains whatever anyone feels. Its sharpest tool is a finding about his defining clause: it says nothing at all.

What feeling adds

The word “response” fuses three things. A thermostat reacts to warmth and registers nothing. A system can register a contrast and adjust, with nothing it is like to detect. Or a registration can be oriented, felt as a pull toward or away. Chapter 13 calls that valence, and only the third layer constitutes value.

Orientation is the mark of the evaluative. Red differs from blue, and neither is toward or away.

What a value would have to be

Any value has to favour something, and a wrongness that counted against nothing would be no wrongness. So the realist’s fact must carry a direction. What can one be made of?

A direction shows up in two ways. Seen from outside it is structure: a vector, describable in the third person. Felt from inside it is a pull undergone. So his favouring is structural, felt, or a third thing he must name.

The first option is inert, a pattern that obliges nobody. The second concedes the chapter’s case, since a direction existing only as undergone is made by a response.

A split that holds by logic alone shows there is no fourth place to stand. Any contrast a system registers either carries across to other systems or it does not. One that carries across is structure. One that does not is valence, once orientation is in it. A rule from Chapter 7 closes the third option.

Why does response-independence seem obvious? A mind built out of directional responses cannot represent a value with no direction in it, by the mechanism of Chapter 8. So the intuition arrives whether or not the realist is right. Such a mind would also find the chapter’s own split compelling whether

or not it were sound. The diagnosis explains both convictions and settles neither.

A clause that says nothing

The realist's defining clause is that value obtains independently of every response. The chapter argues that it says nothing.

A content earns its standing in one of three ways, and the split above permits no fourth. It can mark a difference between the worlds where it holds and those where it fails. It can mark a felt difference. Or it can be built from registered parts. The clause fails on each. The favouring is inert by his own concession, so those worlds match in every vector. A felt difference is a response, which the clause rules out. The third route the three options closed.

One rule, from Chapter 7, separates saying nothing from describing the impossible. Every label attaches to a contrast some mind has taken hold of. Words defined by other words pass the content along. So a circle of words has to get out somewhere into a registered contrast. The chapter calls this the anchoring requirement.

"Heat" has two ways out of its circle: felt warmth, and physics. Felt "hot" has the first way out only. Now subtract every response from the universe. "Heat where nothing feels" keeps its second anchor and stays true. "Something hot while nothing anywhere feels anything" loses its anchoring entire.

Run that test on "value". Every response-free explanation puts another member of the family in its place: good, what counts in favour, what there is reason to want. G. E. Moore, who held that goodness is indefinable, took that circle for a primitive like "yellow". But you can point at a lemon. Point at a rescue or a cruelty, and everything at the end of your finger comes apart into situational facts and a felt pull. The value-vocabulary has one way out, and the way out is feeling.

So the clause leaves no residue to be false about. The chapter calls this the vacancy result, and says it relocates the quarrel: no assertion is there to deny.

Full-blooded realism bundles four commitments: evaluative claims can be true or false, some are true, their truth is independent of the observer, and independent of every mind whatsoever. The chapter secures the first three. Only the fourth drops out, and it is the one that says nothing.

Here is the chapter's surprise. Response-constitution contains every commitment of realism that has content in it. So the account is misdescribed as an anti-realism making concessions to realist intuitions. It is realism with the vacant clause removed.

Where the moral fact sits

Goodness takes three forms. Two are made by feeling, sorted by what the feeling answers. Aesthetic goodness answers what another modality has made.

Empathic goodness is emotion answering emotion. The third, orthotic goodness, is conformity to a standard, which a spell-checker can assess with no feeling. That contrast confirms the chapter's claim, which would be trivial if all goodness needed feeling. Morality is empathic evaluation of chosen behaviour, which Chapter 16 takes up.

The response that makes conduct good or bad is, first of all, the affected party's own. Her suffering is her modality registering what is done to her as bad, and that holds whatever any onlooker feels. Your horror reads the fact and does not make it.

Where nothing is felt at the time, a second anchor applies. A friend despises you for forty years behind your back, and you die content. The moral fact is then fixed by your own registration corrected for accuracy and completeness, which returns the verdict of betrayal. How complete counts as complete is left open.

The anchor also returns an empty answer sometimes. Take a promise broken after the person is dead. If she registered nothing about it while alive, and no living person is touched, the account judges the promise-breaker and finds no wronged party. That intuition the chapter predicts and declines.

The objections the chapter answers

The rationalist objects that reason alone can know torture to be wrong, by testing a principle against a case. The reply renames the achievement: checking conduct against a rule is matching a standard, and matching generates no pull. His report that he feels no pull while he judges is then granted whole. The chapter explains his judgement as a verdict that got its direction at anchoring and carries it while the feeling rests.

A response counts as fitting when it gets its object right, and grounding that in responses looks circular. The chapter says this bites hardest at the outlier whose empathy runs in reverse, so that another's suffering draws him. The answer is that the moral fact is her response and not his. Then comes the concession. His verdict can be called mistaken, while his will lies out of reach, where every theory leaves it.

What the chapter claims

The positive account is graded *constructed*, two rungs below the top: emotion is the modality whose response constitutes evaluative difference. Morality as empathic evaluation is *constructed* too, and so is the placing of moral badness in the affected party. The containment of realism carries that same grade.

The negative results are graded *established*, the rung below the book's top mark of *self-vindicating*. That grade means the result follows validly from premises the book defends, and not that those premises are past dispute. The three-way split about direction carries a condition: orientation must be read as made by response, with compositional premises from Chapters 2 and 7. The

vacancy result rests on the three routes, the residue test, and one commitment the chapter states instead of deriving, that a content is what can be displayed or composed. Refusing that floor is allowed, at a cost Chapter 2 sets.

Two further results, both *established*, concern the rivals. Nothing anywhere binds an agent whom nothing moves, so the lack is shared by every theory and tells against none. An agent turned by a requirement while every response in him stays flat would refute this parity result. None is on record. It also falls if the contested premise below is refused. And the error theorist, who holds that moral talk commits itself to the empty clause and so comes out false, loses his target. That second result alone needs the strong reading of vacancy. A critic who weakens it to saying nothing anyone can discern leaves the others standing and hands the error theorist his premise back.

The survey of rivals is *established* in its negative half, and its list of occupants can be corrected by a position it has not met. The negative half also runs on a premise the chapter names as contested: a favouring that reaches no register anywhere is no favouring. The externalist about reasons rejects it, and the chapter grants that its case against him compels nobody. He may still refuse it, though never for free. He keeps the word “must”, and owes an account of what else it could mean. Two positions survive the survey, each at a stated cost.

One limit carries into everything later. Registrations do not sum, so every verdict on a conflict between people is read under that residue. Chapter 15 asks how competing responses are settled.