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Moral education and the justification of basic moral standards: replies to Clayton, Stevens and D'Olimpio

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ABSTRACT: Matthew Clayton, David Stevens and Laura D'Olimpio have advanced a series of objections to arguments I set out in my recent book A Theory of Moral Education – in particular to the problem-of-sociality justification for basic moral standards. Here I reply to their objections.

KEYWORDS: moral education, moral standards, contractarianism, problem of sociality, reasonable disagreement, indoctrination, virtue, rough equality

In my recent book *A Theory of Moral Education* (Hand, 2018a), I attempt to solve the problem for moral education posed by reasonable disagreement about morality. The problem, I suggest, consists in the difficulty of reconciling three plausible claims:

- (1) Moral education aims to bring it about that children subscribe to moral standards and believe them to be justified.
- (2) There is reasonable disagreement about the content and justification of morality.
- (3) Teaching propositions as true, or standards as justified, when there is reasonable disagreement about them, is indoctrinatory.

The solution I propose is this. While it is certainly true that there is reasonable disagreement about the content and justification of morality, it is not true that no moral standards are robustly justified. Reasonable disagreement about morality does not go all the way down. Some basic moral standards to which almost everyone currently subscribes enjoy the support of a decisive justificatory argument. Moral educators can properly aim to bring it about that children subscribe to these standards and believe them to be justified; and they can realise this aim without resorting to anything that resembles indoctrination.

The basic moral standards I take to be robustly justified include prohibitions on killing and causing harm, stealing and extorting, lying and cheating, and requirements to treat others fairly, keep one's promises and help those in need. The justificatory argument that vindicates these standards is that their currency in society ameliorates the *problem of sociality* – the standing propensity in human social groups to breakdowns in cooperation and outbreaks of conflict. Social groups have this propensity because of three contingent but permanent features of the human condition, sometimes dubbed the 'circumstances of justice': (i) rough equality, (ii) limited sympathy and (iii) moderate scarcity of resources. Under the circumstances of justice, we can rely on neither prudence nor altruism to keep the peace: we must commit to holding ourselves

and each other to some cooperation-sustaining and conflict-averting standards of conduct.

This justificatory argument may be described as ‘contractarian’, on the grounds that undertaking to comply with a moral code in the expectation that others will do likewise is in some ways akin to making a contract with those others. The description is, of course, metaphorical. No actual contract is drawn up and there is no historical moment of negotiation and agreement. But the justification has a reciprocal or quid pro quo aspect that assumes tacit agreement among the members of a social group. Hume characterises the agreement like this:

I observe, that it will be for my interest to leave another in the possession of his goods, provided he will act in the same manner with regard to me. He is sensible of a like interest in the regulation of his conduct. When this common sense of interest is mutually expressed, and is known to both, it produces a suitable resolution and behaviour. And this may properly enough be called a convention or agreement betwixt us, though without the interposition of a promise; since the actions of each of us have a reference to those of the other, and are performed upon the supposition that something is to be performed on the other part. (Hume, 1896 [1739], p.490)

In their searching critiques of my book, Matthew Clayton and David Stevens (2019) and Laura D’Olimpio (2019) pay particular attention to this contractarian justification for basic moral standards. In what follows, I try to show that their worries about it are unfounded.

Reply to Clayton and Stevens

Clayton and Stevens take me to be contractarian in a much more thoroughgoing sense than I actually am. They assert that my ‘conception of morality is contractarian in nature’ (Clayton and Stevens, 2019, p.1), describe me as defending a ‘contractarian conception of moral education’ (p.13), and assume that I favour ‘the desire conception of reasons that is characteristic of many contractarian theories’ (p.10). They go so far as to suggest that contractarianism is akin to a comprehensive doctrine for me. I am, they think, ‘after the whole truth about morality’ (p.4), where ‘the whole truth’ is understood in the Rawlsian sense: ‘in discussing constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice we are not to appeal to comprehensive religious and philosophical doctrines – to what we as individuals or members of associations see as the whole truth’ (Rawls, 2005, pp.224-5).

All this is wide of the mark. Neither my account of morality itself, nor my account of moral education, is well-described as contractarian, and I do not commit myself to any general account of reasons for action. My conception of morality is, to use David Copp’s term, ‘attitudinal’ (Copp, 1995, p.82): a standard is moral when a person subscribes to it in a certain way. Specifically, I hold that a person’s moral standards are those to which her subscription is *universally-enlisting* and *penalty-endorsing*. Attitudinal conceptions of morality are distinct from ‘material’ conceptions, which define moral standards in

terms of their content or justification (p.78). And the distinguishing feature of my conception of moral education is the requirement that moral standards are taught in accordance with their justificatory status: subscription to justified standards is to be encouraged, to unjustified standards discouraged, and to controversial standards neither encouraged nor discouraged. Whatever the merits of this conception of moral education, they are independent of my view about the justification of basic moral standards.

The suggestion that I adhere to a contractarian comprehensive doctrine is still further from the truth. A comprehensive doctrine, says Rawls, 'includes conceptions of what is of value in human life, and ideals of personal character, as well as ideals of friendship and of familial and associational relationships, and much else that is to inform our conduct, and in the limit to our life as a whole' (Rawls, 2005, p.13). It seems to me obvious that there are great swathes of ethical life, not least in the areas of friendship, family and personal character, in which contractarian forms of justification would be hopelessly out of place.

What I claim in the book is that the problem-of-sociality justification, which can be characterised as contractarian, succeeds in vindicating some basic moral standards. I readily allow that justificatory arguments of other kinds are alive and well in the moral domain, and I leave open the possibility that one or more of these arguments succeeds in vindicating the same or additional moral standards. There is no special connection between morality and contractarian arguments: it is just that subscription to certain moral standards is in fact justified by a sound contractarian argument. Contractarianism, then, plays a more modest and more circumscribed role in my theory than Clayton and Stevens imply.

With that clarification in mind, let us turn to the three specific objections advanced by Clayton and Stevens. The first is that my use of the term 'reasonable disagreement' is misleading. As they put it, 'references to reasonable disagreement obscure what is really central in [Hand's] work' (Clayton and Stevens, 2019, p.3). Happily, this objection is just semantic. Clayton and Stevens surmise, quite correctly, that I take something to be a matter of reasonable disagreement when 'there exist alternative conclusions that are compatible with the available evidence and arguments' (p.5). Their complaint is merely that this use of 'reasonable disagreement' differs from the use they favour. They prefer to reserve the term for matters on which reasonable people *happen to disagree*, even if their disagreement is not warranted by the available evidence and argument.

This divergence of linguistic intuitions is not too troubling. To my ear, a reasonable disagreement is one that is epistemically warranted; to the ears of Clayton and Stevens, it is a disagreement among good reasoners who may or may not be reasoning well on this occasion. Naturally I do not think it misleading to describe the problem I tackle in the book as the problem of reasonable moral disagreement. But I willingly concede that other descriptions are available: the problem can certainly be articulated in a way that 'makes no reference to disagreement' (p.5).

The second objection Clayton and Stevens raise is that there is a 'tension between Hand's contractarianism and his strict prohibition on indoctrination' (p.6). The tension is elaborated as follows:

Recall, for Hand, indoctrination consists in imparting beliefs to people such that they hold them without appreciating the reasons for so doing. However, if the aim of the contractarian is to bring about subscription to moral standards in order to avert socially detrimental conflict and to sustain cooperation, then it is not obvious why indoctrination is ruled out. In some cases, indoctrination may be an effective way of securing peaceful cooperation. (p.6)

One reply to this objection is that my theory does not require the prohibition on indoctrination to be moral. There may be good pedagogical reasons to avoid indoctrination that do not require universally-enlisting and penalty-endorsing subscription to a standard that prohibits it. If, for example, and as I have argued elsewhere, 'the central aim of education is to equip students with a capacity for, and inclination to, rational thought and action' (Hand, 2008, p.218), and if indoctrination diminishes the capacity for rational thought, then it would be self-defeating for educators to resort to indoctrinatory methods of teaching. The grounds for the pedagogical prohibition could simply be that indoctrinating children is incompatible with educating them.

Clayton and Stevens anticipate this reply and find it unsatisfactory: 'The claim cannot be merely that indoctrination does not square with the meaning of education, because in that case we may ask why we are morally required to pursue the project of education so construed' (p.8). But whether, and under what circumstances, anyone, or everyone, has a moral obligation to educate is a question that lies well beyond the scope of my project. For my purposes it is sufficient to note that, insofar as we are engaged in the project of education, we have good reason to refrain from indoctrination.

Be that as it may, I do in fact think that indoctrination is morally wrong, and for reasons that fall squarely within the scope of the problem-of-sociality justification for basic moral standards. One of the moral standards whose currency in society is necessary to sustain cooperation and avert conflict is the prohibition on causing harm. And I am at pains in the opening chapter of the book to explain exactly why I take indoctrination to constitute 'a significant harm' (Hand, 2018a, pp.6-7). When we indoctrinate children we impede their ability to think for themselves: as John Wilson has it, 'here we have taken over, or put to sleep, a central part of the child's personality – his ability to think rationally in a certain area' (Wilson *et al*, 1967, p.174). Indoctrination is wrong not just pedagogically, because it frustrates the central aim of education, but also morally, because it harms those being indoctrinated.

Clayton and Stevens' third and final objection is that 'the kind of morality contractarians favour is unjustified' (Clayton and Stevens, 2019, p.9). They offer two arguments in support of this verdict: first, contractarians favour 'the desire conception of reasons', which conception is wrong; and second, contractarianism does not 'deal adequately with the plight of those who may be disadvantaged because they are vulnerable' (p.10).

On the desire conception of reasons, as Clayton and Stevens characterise it, 'reasons tell us what actions are necessary or sufficient to realise our desires', 'our fundamental desires cannot be evaluated as good or bad' and 'what is good or bad for an individual

depends on her desires' (p.10). This account of practical reasoning precludes the possibility of desires being irrational. But plainly desires sometimes *are* irrational (Clayton and Stevens illustrate the point with reference to the hedonist whose pattern of desire includes future-Tuesday indifference to pain). So the desire conception of reasons must be rejected.

Now, as Clayton and Stevens acknowledge, I do not offer 'an account of the nature of reasons for action' (p.10). For the record, I am not drawn to any of the salient features of the desire conception they identify. My inclination is to say that some but not all exercises of practical reason focus on the actions necessary to realise our desires; that we can and often do evaluate our desires; and that what is good for an individual frequently diverges from what she wants. I will not venture an opinion on whether contractarians in general can fairly be accused of favouring the desire conception of reasons, but I am reasonably confident in denying that the accusation can be levelled at me.

In any case, attachment to an erroneous account of practical reasoning would only matter, for our present purposes, if the contractarian justification for basic moral standards somehow presupposed that account. Clayton and Stevens presumably think it does, but they say frustratingly little about why. What they do say is this:

we need to do more than rest our moral code on generalisations about the fundamental desires individuals have, as contractarians typically do. For example, an individual's desire for self-preservation or 'commodious living', or limited sympathy, cannot be taken as immune from evaluation. Rather, we need to ask whether there are considerations that count in favour of having these ambitions such that an action-guiding code that serves them is justified. (p.10)

Talk of limited sympathy as a desire or ambition is odd: rough equality, limited sympathy and moderate scarcity of resources are not desires to be realised, but permanent features of the human condition that give rise to the problem of sociality. But it is fair to say that the problem of sociality matters to us because of our fundamental desires for survival, safety and stability. And clearly we can distinguish between those for whom fundamental desires are at justificatory bedrock and those who are willing to ask further justificatory questions about them. What is puzzling is why Clayton and Stevens think contractarians must belong to the former camp. Certainly contractarians must hold that grounding morality in fundamental desires represents significant justificatory progress. If it were as hard to see why we should want to survive as it is to see why we should go in for universally-enlisting and penalty-endorsing subscription to standards, then the contractarian argument would have little to offer us. But these things are not comparably hard to see: the desire for survival, as H.L.A. Hart observes, is not only taken for granted by more or less everyone, but also presupposed in the conceptual apparatus we use to make sense of the world:

For it is not merely that an overwhelming majority of men do wish to live, even at the cost of hideous misery, but that this is reflected in whole structures of our thought and language, in terms of which we describe the world and each other. We could not subtract the general wish to live and leave intact concepts like

danger and safety, harm and benefit, need and function, disease and cure; for these are ways of simultaneously describing and appraising things by reference to the contribution they make to survival which is accepted as an aim. (Hart, 1994 [1961], pp.191-2)

So rooting morality in 'the general wish to live' is a decisive justificatory gain. As long as this is admitted, contractarians have no need to deny the possibility of raising further justificatory questions. They can, if they prefer, remain agnostic about the correct account of practical reasoning and leave others to argue about whether and how fundamental desires might be evaluated. That, anyway, is my own preference, and the line I have taken elsewhere in response to similar objections raised by John White (2016, 2017) and John Tillson (2017):

What [White and Tillson] seem to want is an account of how and why anything at all gives us reason to act. That, at any rate, is the implication of White's insistence that the foundationalist will 'press further' than the survival value of morality and ask what reason there is to survive. But the justification for morality I defend does not purport to justify any and every exercise of practical reason; in that sense it is a rather less ambitious theoretical undertaking than White and Tillson take it to be. (Hand, 2018b, p.372)

Clayton and Stevens' second argument for the view that 'contractarianism is mistaken' (Clayton and Stevens, 2019, p.10) is that it fails to justify moral protection of the vulnerable. This is, of course, a familiar worry about contractarian arguments and I address it directly in the book: I argue that there are good prudential and altruistic reasons for including the infirm in the sphere of moral obligation and protection. But Clayton and Stevens think there is an important category of vulnerable people I overlook: 'distant future generations' (p.11). They contend that 'the idea of sustainability', which we should surely want schools to endorse, is designed to protect distant future generations; but because the members of this group can do nothing 'to help or hinder the interests of the present generation', the idea of sustainability cannot be endorsed on contractarian grounds (p.11). 'The poverty of contractarian morality', they conclude, 'is that it fails to accord equal or adequate protection to vulnerable future generations whose prospective indigence does not happen to trigger the sympathy of the strong' (p.11).

There are two oddities about this example. First, the idea of sustainability is not itself a standard of conduct, so not the sort of thing to which universally-enlisting and penalty-endorsing subscription is possible. Perhaps we can deal with this by replacing the idea of sustainability with such familiar standards as 'recycle', 'buy local', 'avoid unnecessary air travel', etc. But second, and more confoundingly, it seems clear that the most compelling reasons for subscribing to these standards have nothing to do with the plight of distant future generations: they have to do with the current and imminent effects of the environmental crisis on our own lives and the lives of our children. It is for the sake of ourselves and our loved ones that we need to take immediate collective action on climate change – and it is precisely in circumstances like these that contractarian arguments have traction.

Maybe there are other standards to which Clayton and Stevens think it obvious we should morally subscribe but of which the only beneficiaries are distant future generations. If so, it would be good to hear what they are. In the absence of plausible examples, my reply to the objection at this point is just to bite the bullet: moral standards whose sole beneficiaries are distant future generations will require the support of some other argument than the problem-of-sociality justification. As already indicated, my account leaves open the possibility that one or more of the other justificatory arguments alive and well in the moral domain may succeed in vindicating some additional moral standards. If Clayton and Stevens can produce a sound justification for subscription to the future-generation-protecting standards they favour, I should be happy to see those standards actively promoted in schools. But if they cannot, the correct pedagogy for their favoured standards is nondirective moral inquiry, aimed at equipping children to form their own considered views.

Reply to D'Olimpio

D'Olimpio professes to be sympathetic to the book's central claims and conclusions, but considers it vulnerable to criticism on two fronts. First, it is missing a 'discussion of the role of virtues' (D'Olimpio, 2019, p.2). This omission, she thinks, is fairly easily corrected: I can simply supplement my account of cultivating subscription to moral standards with an account of cultivating the virtues. Second, and more problematically, one of the premises of the contractarian justification for morality I defend is false: human beings do not find themselves in a situation of 'rough equality', but are in fact 'tremendously unequal in their capacities' (p.9). While D'Olimpio does not appear to hold that this error in the standard account of the circumstances of justice is fatal to the contractarian justificatory project, she does take it to mean that 'the contract itself needs adjustment if it is to support a viable theory of moral education' (p.10).

It is true that I have little to say about virtues in the book. That is not because I am sceptical about virtue-talk, or because I think there is no role for the cultivation of virtues in education and upbringing. It is because I am not sure how much sense it makes to describe virtues as 'moral'. On my attitudinal conception of morality, whereby a person's moral standards are those to which her subscription is universally-enlisting and penalty-endorsing, virtues do not seem to belong in the moral realm. They fit much more naturally into the realm of ethics, a realm delimited by the scope of Socrates' question, 'How should one live?' (Williams, 1985). On any plausible account of it, the kind of life most worth living will involve the possession and exercise of certain virtues; but there is no virtue possession of which is in part a matter of wanting and expecting everyone to possess it and supporting some kind of punishment for non-possession.

It is helpful to think of virtues as moderating basic human emotions and motivations, rather than regulating conduct directly. Courage, on this view, is not a disposition to perform or refrain from performing a specified type of action; it is a disposition to be neither paralysed by fear nor oblivious to it, to feel proportionate, non-debilitating and action-motivating levels of fear. Similarly, patience is a disposition not to be derailed by annoyance, frustration or discomfort; temperance a disposition to keep in check the bodily appetites. People's lives obviously go better when they are able to manage and

contain their feelings and desires. So educators can properly aim to bring it about both that children possess the virtues of courage, patience and temperance and that they believe those virtues to be justified. And, like moral education, virtue education can and should take place in schools as well as homes: it would be arbitrary to stipulate that parents but not teachers can assist children with the moderation of their emotions.

Insofar, then, as D'Olimpio is inviting me to acknowledge that virtue education is 'compatible with' and can 'usefully supplement' moral education (p.3), I am pleased to accept her invitation. Virtues are not themselves moral, and they help us with much more in life than moral compliance, but there is no question that we are better equipped to meet our moral obligations if we can effectively manage our fears, frustrations, appetites and desires.

But D'Olimpio is not just issuing this invitation. She also suggests that my account of moral education is in danger of leaving children unmotivated to comply with justified moral standards, and that cultivating the virtues can fill the motivational gap. She writes:

This is why we need to add the virtues, including rational emotions such as compassion, to Hand's account... [G]iven the emotional aspect of our nature, we must sufficiently account for the motivational role reasonable emotions may play in moral action. Reason alone will not generate moral action without an additional motivating force. (p.6)

D'Olimpio's thought here appears to be that I have only explained how children can be brought to hold beliefs about the justificatory status of moral standards – in other words, that I have only supplied an account of *moral inquiry*. If that were true, I could indeed be charged with neglecting the gap between grasping the justification for moral standards and being motivated to comply with them. But it is not true: I make it clear in the book that an adequate programme of moral education will comprise both moral inquiry and *moral formation*, where the latter involves cultivating the conative, affective and behavioural dispositions that constitute moral subscription. I list what I take to be the principal methods of moral formation, though I do not claim that the list is exhaustive: they are (i) the issuing of prescriptions, (ii) the rewarding of compliance, (iii) the punishing of non-compliance, (iv) the modelling of compliance, and (v) the modelling of reactions to the compliance and non-compliance of others. By these methods moral educators bring it about that children intend and incline to comply with moral standards, want and expect others to comply with them, and endorse penalties for non-compliance.

So my theory explains both how children can be persuaded that subscription to moral standards is justified *and* how their subscription to those standards can be cultivated. There is no motivational gap for virtue education to fill. Moreover, if virtues are rightly understood as moderating basic human emotions and motivations, it is not clear that they would be the right kind of dispositions to fill a gap between cognition and conation anyway. I therefore reject the suggestion that virtue education might mend a deficiency in my account of moral education.

D'Olimpio's second criticism of the book is that the circumstance of justice usually described as 'rough equality' does not, in fact, obtain:

Hand follows other proponents of the social contract, such as Locke, Hobbes, and Rawls, in assuming that people are roughly equal; morally, physically as well as intellectually. And this simply is not true... The contractarian justification of moral standards rests upon the fundamental equality of the moral agents in question. However, moral agents are not fundamentally equal in terms of their abilities to understand, participate in, or contribute to society. (pp.9-10)

Despite her denial of rough equality, D'Olimpio still seems to think that a contractarian justification of basic moral standards is possible. But she holds that the set of standards whose currency in society is necessary to ameliorate the problem of sociality, on her revised understanding of it, will be different from the set of standards I defend. As she puts it, 'the contract itself needs adjustment if it is to support a viable theory of moral education' (p.10). Frustratingly, she does not say what adjustments are needed or how she would shorten, lengthen or otherwise amend the list of basic moral standards.

I think this line of criticism is misplaced, for two related reasons: first, it misunderstands the notion of rough equality; and second, it misconstrues the kind of contractarian argument I am making.

To assert the rough equality of human beings is not to claim that all people are equally good, strong or intelligent, or equally able to understand, participate in or contribute to society. There is no denial here of the wide variation in human capacities, competences, preferences and powers. The crucial similarity between people captured by the notion of rough equality is our vulnerability to harm at one another's hands. The differences between us are never so great as to make the strongest and fastest immune to attack by the weakest and slowest. We are roughly equal in the sense that none of us can safely ignore the aggression or discontent of others, nor hope to keep it indefinitely at bay by a show of superior strength. Here is Hobbes:

Nature hath made men so equall, in the faculties of body, and mind; as that though there bee found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body, or of quicker mind then another; yet when all is reckoned together, the difference between man, and man, is not so considerable, as that one man can thereupon claim to himselfe any benefit, to which another may not pretend, as well as he. For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others, that are in the same danger with himselfe. (Hobbes, 1929 [1651], p.94)

The claim of rough equality, then, is the rather modest one that none of us is so much stronger than the rest that we can secure benefits 'to which another may not pretend', or dismiss the threat of those who would do us harm 'by secret machination, or by confederacy with others'.

Without this modest claim, it is hard to see how a contractarian justification for morality could get off the ground. The threat we pose to one another is precisely the reason we each have to reach agreement on some conflict-averting and cooperation-sustaining standards of conduct. So I disagree with D'Olimpio that rough equality is a claim the contractarian can do without. But I also disagree with her that the claim is a questionable one.

The other reason I think D'Olimpio's second line of criticism is misplaced is that it relies heavily on Martha Nussbaum's critique of social contract theories in her *Frontiers of Justice* (Nussbaum, 2006), and in that book Nussbaum operates with a *procedural* conception of contractarian arguments. She writes:

Rawls' approach, like most social contract doctrines, is a procedural approach to justice. In other words, it does not go directly to outcomes and examine these for hallmarks of moral adequacy. Instead it designs a procedure that models certain key features of fairness and impartiality, and relies on these procedures to generate an adequately just outcome. Given an adequate design of the original situation, whatever principles emerge will be by definition just. (Nussbaum, 2006, p.81)

If what is just is defined as whatever participants in a hypothetical bargaining situation would agree to, then it will obviously matter a great deal how those participants are characterised. If they are imbued – deliberately or inadvertently – with the preferences and privileges of able-bodied, economically-productive men, there will be good reason to worry about the principles of justice they can be expected to choose:

The classical theories all assumed that their contracting agents were men who were roughly equal in capacity, and capable of productive economic activity. They thus omitted from the bargaining situation women (understood as non-‘productive’), children, and elderly people... No social contract doctrine includes people with severe and atypical physical and mental impairments in the group of those by whom basic political principles are chosen. (p.14)

If the contractarian argument for basic moral standards I advance were of this procedural kind, D'Olimpio's titular challenge – ‘Whose contract is it anyway?’ – would be a fair one. It would certainly be incumbent on me to show that I had set up the hypothetical bargaining situation in a way that did not load the dice in favour of some group or other. But my argument is not of this kind. On my view, the content of the basic moral code we are entitled to regard as robustly justified is determined not by speculation about the choices of hypothetical bargainers, but by identification of the constraints on conduct necessary to solve the problem of sociality. The moral standards we need are those whose currency in society will curb the standing propensity in human social groups to outbreaks of conflict and breakdowns in cooperation. To deal with the danger to each person of others coming ‘to dispossesse, and deprive him, not only of the fruit of his labour, but also of his life, or liberty’ (Hobbes, 1929 [1651], p.95), there must be standards that afford basic protection to people and their property; and to overcome the distrust that threatens to make us ‘lose our harvests for want of mutual

confidence and security' (Mackie, 1977, pp.111), there must be standards that oblige us to be fair, honest and reliable in our dealings with each other, and to extend each other a helping hand in times of need. This way of determining the content of basic morality is not procedural, in Nussbaum's sense: it belongs to the class of arguments that 'go directly to outcomes'.

Perhaps it will be asked whether a non-procedural contractarian argument is really a contractarian argument at all. If there are those who would prefer to reserve the term 'contractarian' for arguments that derive moral or political norms from the choices of hypothetical bargainers, I am quite willing to do without it. But, as indicated above, I think there is still a straightforward sense in which the problem-of-sociality justification qualifies as contractarian: the logic of subscription to basic moral standards has a reciprocal or quid pro quo aspect. The problem of sociality is not solved by unilateral subscription: indeed, if only a few subscribe, the problem may actually be exacerbated. If some members of a social group commit themselves to prohibitions on theft and violence and other members do not, the former succeed only in making themselves more attractive targets to the latter. For basic moral standards to do their job, they must be current in society, which is to say that everyone or almost everyone must subscribe to them. Our good reason to subscribe depends on our reasonable expectation that everyone else will subscribe too. Collective recognition of this fact, as Hume says, 'may properly enough be called a convention or agreement betwixt us' (Hume, 1896 [1739], p.490).

In its reliance on reciprocity, the problem-of-sociality justification for basic morality bears at least one of the characteristic features of contractarian arguments. It is, at any rate, on the basis of this feature, not any procedural derivation of moral content, that I describe the justification as contractarian. Insofar as D'Olimpio's worries about rough equality are rooted in Nussbaumian distrust of hypothetical bargaining situations, they get no purchase on my argument.

Conclusion

I am grateful to Clayton, Stevens and D'Olimpio for the opportunity their critiques have afforded me to clarify parts of my theory, in particular the scope and structure of the contractarian justification of basic moral standards. For the reasons I have given, I do not think their objections pose any serious threat to my view. But their challenges have forced me to be more precise about the kind of contractarian argument I am making and the work it does in my account of moral education.

I am grateful too for their kind words about the book. D'Olimpio graciously remarks that my defence of the possibility of a non-indoctrinatory form of moral education 'satisfactorily quietens the sceptic' (p.1). Sceptics about that possibility are a stubborn breed and I must confess to some pessimism about quietening them. But it is my hope that the book might at least help to fend off such scepticism where it has not yet taken root. Moral education is a task of the first importance and it matters a great deal that parents and teachers are equipped to undertake it rationally, wholeheartedly and without fear of educational impropriety.

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