

THE EMOTIONAL BASIS OF MORALITY: IS AUTONOMY STILL POSSIBLE?

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is focused on how the acceptance of the emotional basis of morality can change the way we approach moral problems, concretely the case of moral autonomy. Is it possible to include the role of emotions in moral agency without losing moral autonomy? Simultaneously, it seems hard provide an account on moral agency without accepting as a premise the existence of moral autonomy. Thus, all this lead us to a picture where the assumption of a premise (“emotions are a precondition to moral agency”) implies the denial of another one (“autonomy is a precondition to moral agency”), and viceversa. With regard to this paradox, the question is therefore how these two facts —that we are necessarily emotional and autonomous— can become compatible. In this sense, I will argue that emotions are not an obstacle but a necessary element to moral autonomy.

Key words: emotions, morality, moral agent, autonomy, dualism.

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LA BASE EMOCIONAL DE LA MORAL: ¿ES POSIBLE LA AUTONOMÍA TODAVÍA?

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RESUMEN

El presente artículo se centra en cómo la aceptación de que la moral tiene una base emocional, puede cambiar la manera en la que abordamos los problemas morales, concretamente el caso de la autonomía. ¿Es posible incluir el papel de las emociones en la agencia moral sin perder el concepto de autonomía moral? Al mismo tiempo, parece difícil hablar de la agencia moral sin apelar a la autonomía del sujeto. Así, estas dos ideas nos llevan a una situación en la que la aceptación de una premisa, a saber, que las emociones son una precondition de la agencia moral, implica la negación de la otra, a saber, que la autonomía es una precondition de la agencia moral, y viceversa. Respecto a esta paradoja, la pregunta es, por tanto, por cómo compatibilizar estos dos hechos. En este sentido, argumentaré que las emociones no son un obstáculo sino un elemento necesario para la autonomía moral.

Palabras clave: emociones, moral, sujeto moral, autonomía, dualismo.

Introduction

THE PRESENT PAPER IS FOCUSED ON how the acceptance of the emotional basis of morality can change the way we approach moral problems, concretely the case of moral autonomy. It is possible to include the role of emotions in moral agency without losing moral autonomy?

If moral judgments necessary imply moral obligations; and if moral judgments are linked to emotions and, at the same time, if emotions are a kind of subjective reactions or responses to relevant stimulus, then (1) emotions and moral obligations are somehow related and, consequently, (2) the defence of moral autonomy can turn to be problematic. In other words, if moral judgments and moral obligations are bound up with emotions, then concepts as moral responsibility, moral deliberation and free will could become questionable.

In fact, it seems that we should whether a) accept a biological or cultural determinism since our emotions “force” us to judge “*X* is good”, and therefore to infer a moral obligation, or b) admit a cultural or social relativism since our emotional reactions are influenced by our cultural and social background. However, in both cases making emotions and autonomy compatible seems to be problematic.

Simultaneously, it seems hard provide an account on moral agency, moral deliberation and moral responsibility without accepting as a premise the existence of moral autonomy. Thus, all this lead us to a picture where the assumption of a premise (“emotions are a precondition to moral agency”) implies the denial of another one (“autonomy is a precondition to moral agency”), and vice versa.

With regards to this paradox, the question is therefore how these two facts —that we are *necessarily* emotional and autonomous— can become compatible.

In this sense, I will argue —as a consequence of going beyond dualism and accepting the interaction between reason and emotion— that emotions are not an obstacle but a necessary element to moral autonomy.

1. The emotional basis of morality

CERTAINLY RECENT RESEARCHES IN NEUROLOGY and psychology suggest that emotions and sentiments are a necessary factor for the development of moral skills. As Hume already said, “moral distinctions derive from moral sentiment” (1948a: II, ii).

At first sight it is easy to see this connection between emotions and morality. In our everyday life we use emotions as a key to find out what the others feel, want or think about many issues, including moral ones. Through emotional reactions and emotional facial expressions we can figure someone else’s moral judgments out as well as we are also able to evaluate the honesty or coherence between the values he/she does defend and the values he/she thinks he/she defends. To put it in a nutshell, If Mary’s emotional reaction after knowing that someone has been torture is indignation, sadness or disgust we can guess that Mary thinks that tortured is morally wrong. But if Mary affirms that she is against discrimination and when she faces a real case of it her emotional reaction is joy, then we will doubt about her honesty believing that her true moral values are not the ones that she openly defends. Emotions and moral judgments must thus be somehow connected.

Secondly, if we just think of moral emotions as guilt and shame, it is not hard to see the impact and influence of these emotions in morality, especially in moral judgments. Indeed, the link is obvious as long as we agree with the fact that —according to Gibbard— “to think X is morally wrong is to think it appropriate to feel guilty for doing X” (1990: 47).

We can come to the same conclusion if we think of other emotions as admiration, gratitude, compassion, revenge or indignation. All these emotions are linked by definition to a negative/positive judgment (conscious or unconsciously) about someone else’s action that implies the wish of punish (if that action is far from the agent’s idea of how things *ought to be*) or recompense (if the action is perfectly coherent with his ideal *ought*).

In the same way, emotions have a clear influence in our conduct and motivation as they can inhibit or promote certain actions that may increase or decrease the well-being of the community where the agent interacts.

Up to this point it could be thought that the link is neither a causal nor a necessary one, but a coincidence since every situation from our lives implies an emotional reaction. Nevertheless, new evidences suggest that there is a causal link so that emotions turn out to be a *condition sine qua non* for morality.

Interestingly, some specialists as Damasio, Greene or DeWaal have also updated the main emotivism's claim from neurology, psychology and ethology, respectively. The three of them suggest from complementary perspectives that emotions are a basic, and therefore necessary, element for moral agency.

Damasio suggests that "in the absence of social emotions and subsequent feelings, even on the unlikely assumption that other intellectual abilities could remain intact, the cultural instruments we know as ethical behaviours [...] either would not have emerged, or would have been a different sort of intelligent construction" (2003: 159).

Empirical evidences about patients with Phineas Gage like damage (Damasio, 2003; Greene, 2004) would come to show that an injury in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex implies a deterioration of the emotional repertoire, an emotional deficit, and therefore the impossibility to make decisions in moral dilemmas. In this sense it is suggested that people in these cases suffer a great deficiency in their social behaviour and skills and are incapable to make interpersonal decisions where other people are involved or affected since this brain region would detect the emotional meaning of a complex stimuli and, along with the amygdale, would take part in the occurrence of emotions. According now to Timoneda and Pérez, it seems certain that "patients who present a malfunctioning emotional prefrontal cortex make decisions without bearing in mind the emotional consequences, what implies catastrophic consequences" (2007: 238).

All this would suggest that there is a causal link between the emotional system, our sociability (De Waal, 2007) and decision making skills, especially in moral dilemmas. Indeed, "ethical behaviour are a subset of social behaviour" (Damasio, 2003: 160) and emotions have a social or intersubjective function, so that a deficit in our social or moral emotions repertoire becomes a lack in our social abilities and, therefore, in our moral development.

Similarly, J. Greene suggests from moral psychology that “there is a great deal of evidence [...] for the general importance of emotions in moral judgments” (2008: 108). Certainly, Greene suspects that there is an emotional component for every moral judgment. “Traditional theories of moral psychology emphasize reasoning and “higher cognition”, while more recent work emphasizes the role of emotion. The present fMRI data support a theory of moral judgment according to which both “cognitive” and emotional processes play crucial and sometimes mutually competitive roles” (2004: 389).

Moll and collg. would also agree with this thesis since they defend that “the brain regions activated in moral judgments tasks have been implicated in experiencing emotions (amygdala), semantic memory (anterior temporal cortex), perception of social cues (STS region) and decision making” (Moll, *et. al*, 2008: 4).

As a last example, psychopaths’ cases would also be revealing in this issue. As a matter of fact, their capacity to make moral judgments, to empathize, to consider other people’s damage morally relevant as well as their skill to internalize moral rules is extraordinarily poor as a result of a lack of moral emotions. In this sense, they would understand moral judgments and values as social conventions, as a symbol of what it is allowed or forbidden in their society, so that the judgments that they are able to elaborate would not imply any understanding, internalization or real acceptance of moral rules. Indeed, a psychopath is a good example of how emotional coldness can lead to moral coldness, that is, to indifference to someone else’s moral damage. Similarly, J. Greene defends that “neuroimaging studies of moral judgment in normal adults, as well as studies of individuals exhibiting aberrant moral behaviour, all point to the conclusion, [...] that emotion is a significant driving force in moral judgment” (Greene & Haidt, 2002: 517-523).

As a result of this, we can conclude that a deficit in emotional competence turns out to be a deficit in moral competences.

2. Moral agency and autonomy

AT THE SAME TIME, AUTONOMY has been and is considered as a necessary condition to moral agency.

In this case, it does not matter how we know that we are autonomous or if we can know this. It is not so important for the aims of this paper to focus the attention on that epistemic problem, that is, on whether we are free or we just have the illusion of being free, first of all, because having just that illusion would be enough to morality, since you would feel that you are responsible of your decisions; secondly because it is a moral presupposition and therefore the problem of whether we can demonstrate it is an epistemic but not a moral one. As long as we talk about moral agency, moral obligations and moral deliberation, we have to admit that we are somehow autonomous —the same way that we admit that there has got to be clouds when it rains, although we could not see them.

Therefore, someone can be defined as a moral agent if and only if it can be said that he is autonomous, that is, if he is free to decide, to choose and to act according to his own decisions, aims and desires (Singer, 1995: 124). But this definition leads us to other necessary conditions.

Since in order to be a moral agent it is necessary to be able to —normatively— regulate yourself, then this kind of agent should be able to choose his own moral rules and, in order to it, he should eventually be able to distinguish between right and wrong, to decide and to deliberate.

Thus, if a moral agent is autonomous, then he is responsible of his decisions, actions and their consequences, what means that he can justify and give reasons for his decisions, so that he should also be self-conscious in two senses: a) he has to be able to recognize himself as the same subject through time and b) he has to be able to recognize himself as a moral agent, that is, as someone who can eventually suffer some moral damage and who deserves moral consideration.

In order to it, the ability of reasoning, deliberating, deciding, intentionally acting and recognizing other's intentions has to be a *sine qua non* condition for moral agent's autonomy. Obviously, a self-aware autonomous human

being who is able to make moral judgments must be able to analyse, to universalise and, therefore, to reason, so that the connection between rationality, autonomy and self-consciousness seems clear.

In fact, moral judgments usually are abstract and universal, what means that if someone is able to elaborate that kind of judgments, then he is also able to put himself in someone else's circumstances or in an abstract situation beyond his own specific context. In terms of A. Smith, this kind of agent must be able to assume the position of an "impartial spectator", which necessarily implies an abstraction exercise that needs the ability of reasoning. Without this one, it would not be possible to adopt a universal perspective as well as to project possible consequences and valuations (Smith, 2004: 223).

Moreover, if moral agents are autonomous agents, they would necessarily be able to act intentionally, that is, to act according to a chosen aim. They should also be able to recognize and evaluate the intentionality of their own and other people's actions. In fact, a non intentional act becomes a moral irrelevant one. Many actions that could lead to moral debates lose their moral interest when we realise that those beings were not able to act intentionally, because there is no moral responsibility in those actions.

Therefore, if a moral agent is autonomous, he has to be able to decide, to universalise, to imagine future consequences, to act intentionally and, eventually, he has to be selfconscious. Simultaneously, if a moral agent posses all this abilities means that he must possess the ability of reasoning. In fact, reason has traditionally been seen as the core of autonomy to such an extent that it is widely admitted that we are free because we can decide and we can decide because we are rational animals.

3. The paradox

IT IS IN THIS POINT WHERE the paradox arises. The description of a moral agent as essentially emotional and autonomous can be problematic since these two conditions seem to be incompatible. Indeed, they seem to be two co-excluding assumptions in many senses.

On the one hand, emotions have been traditionally understood as elements of primitive human psyche that blind our reason and prevent us from thinking clearly or coldly. Emotions have been associated to the

animal side of human beings —to our non rational dimension. They have been thought to be what limits, denies or disturbs rationality and, therefore, moral agent's autonomy. They have even been described as an "illness of the mind" (Lactancio [S.V.F. 1 213]) where our mind becomes "slave of a disturbing agent" (Séneca, I viii, 1). Thus, since emotions have been seen as an inner enemy influenced by culture, education and personal desires, the tendency of viewing emotions as a non suitable source for the normative speech, as an obstacle that would limit the capacity of free decision making, can be understood.

But then, how can something simultaneously be a *sine qua non* condition for X and an obstacle for X?

On the other hand, autonomy is an irreducible precondition for moral agency that presupposes the rationality of that agent as a *sine qua non* condition. Therefore, if emotions were a mistake of evolution, a disturbing element for rationality, and therefore, for autonomy, then we should admit that emotions are the problem and consequently we should erase them.

But then again, if we conclude that the ideal moral agent should be free from emotions, that is, if we deny that emotions are a basic element for morality, then the result we would obtain would be an agent that cannot feel guilt, shame, sadness or indignation, an agent that cannot empathize, that cannot understand the other's emotional reactions because of a lack in his own emotional repertoire, that is, if we eliminate emotions from moral agency we would have a psychopath. "Extinguish all the warm feeling and prepossessions in favour of virtue, and all disgust or aversion to vice; render men totally indifferent towards these distinctions and morality is no longer a practical study, nor has any tendency to regulate our lives and actions" (Hume, 1948b: 177).

Nevertheless, from an evolutionist point of view, it seems that it would make no sense to speak of evolution's mistakes, so that perhaps it would be more accurate to modify our classical perspective about emotions and their bond with reason. Indeed, we are rational animals but we are also highly emotional ones, so the question is "why would anyone want to conceive of minds without emotions? [...] Minds without emotions are not really minds at all. They are souls on ice-cold, lifeless creatures devoid of any desires, fears, sorrows, pains, or pleasures" (Ledoux, 1998: 25).

Briefly said, since both factors are necessary, it is sensible to conclude that the incompatibility's problem lives in the formulation, in the way we approach the problem, instead of on the abilities themselves. In fact, both abilities co-exist in real moral agents, so that the challenge for moral philosophy seems to be how to capture and make sense of what in real life has always co-existed.

In sum, these are the premises that would lead us to the paradox:

Pr. 1. Reason is necessary for autonomy

Pr. 2. Autonomy is necessary for moral agency

Conclusion 1'. Reason is necessary for moral agency

It is thought that:

Pr. A. Emotions are a disturbing element/obstacle for reason

Pr,B.Pr. 1.

Conclusion A'. Emotions are an obstacle for autonomy

But it has been admitted that:

Pr. 1. Emotions are necessary for moral agency, because

Pr. II. A non emotional subject turns out to be a non moral agent, as in the psychopaths' cases.

Thus we cannot deny that autonomy is necessary for moral agency (Pr. 2) and we cannot deny the first syllogism. We can neither deny Pr. 1, since Pr II is true. So the paradox comes from Pr. A and its conclusion, that is, from the way we describe emotions and their relationship with reason. In other words, the paradox comes from the conceptualisation of emotions as non rational elements and reason as the opposite to emotion.

4. The classic model: the fight between reason and emotion

EMOTIONS HAVE ALMOST ALWAYS been viewed—in moral philosophy—from a excluding dualistic and intellectualist perspective, maybe because of an “excessive celebration of reason” (Solomon, 2004: 11).

Nussbaum has also defended that in our philosophical past, any call or interest for emotions has been seen as completely nonsense or irrational in a logic and normative sense (2003).

Since the term “emotion” has been identified throughout history, and from different currents, with a non-rational reality, and since reason has been related to universality, objectivity, autonomy and correctness, then it is easy to see how emotions has been identified with instincts, natural tendencies, disturbances, illnesses, intuitions, or wrong judgments, that is, with all those concepts that share the quality of being “non-rational” or somehow the opposite to reason (Cabezas, 2010).

Indeed, the two main characteristics that can be found in our philosophical past are:

1) the eternal fight between reason and emotion, and 2) a strong intellectualism (sometimes moral intellectualism). Since the term “emotion” has been identified with a non-rational reality, emotions have been seen as the opposite to logic and reason and, therefore, as a passive dysfunctional and non-rational element of our mind.

This fact implies:

a) that they have been defined as a relative concept, and not by themselves, as a second class category: “Emotion is what reason is not”;

b) a constant confusion or identification of the emotional dimension to what is seen as low, negative, primitive or devaluated in any sense, so that everything that is defined as non-rational is supposed to be interconnected;

c) thirdly, from an ethical perspective, it implies the assumption that emotions are the cause of irrational behaviours and actions, what in this case means “morally wrong”, as long as reason is taken as the source of morality: “Unreason as a consequence of emotion makes regular appearances in philosophical as well as common sense discourse” (Frijda, Meanstead & Bem, 2000: 2).

In other words, the sad final result of this picture about emotions is that the only thing we have all agreed in our culture past is that emotions are

the opposite to reason, what means that they are not compatible realities, because even when some philosophers have defended emotions, they have had to deny in some way the role of reason (Cabezas, 2010).

That is, the western philosophical tradition has supposed and assumed—as something given—an excluding dualism, an irreconcilable antagonism between reason and emotion, being emotion the non rational part and reason the non emotional side of us. That is to say, the excluding dualism that this classic model assumes necessarily implies to choose one of them. According again to Solomon, “emotion has almost always placed an inferior role in philosophy, often as antagonist to logic and reason. [...] Along with this general demeaning of emotion in philosophy comes either a wholesale neglect or at least retail distortion in the analysis of emotion (1977: 41).

From this background it is easy to see the core of the paradox. Emotions have been thought as the opposite to reason, that is, as irrational. On the other hand, reason has been thought as the core of autonomy, as the source of logic and moral correctness. Therefore, emotions had to be the cause of irrational actions and behaviours, what in this intellectualist context also means morally wrong actions and behaviours. Thus, emotions would turn out to be the source of irrationality and moral heteronomy. Briefly said, and according to this dualistic context, if emotions are disturbing elements for reason, they are also disturbing elements for moral reasoning.

5. Beyond a dualistic representation of moral agents

FINALLY IT IS OPEN TO DISCUSSION the non complementary, excluding dualism. As J. Kennett points out, “the terms of the debate between rationalists and sentimentalists must be modified. Recent evidence on moral development does not endorse the philosophers’ traditional distinction between the affective and the cognitive, or their attempts to locate morally wholly one or other domain” (2008: 259). Assuming what has been said, the only way of solving the paradox seems to be the abandon of the dualistic paradigm.

Thus, I will argue that reason and emotionality are complementary and interactive dimensions concluding that, in order to be autonomous, it is needed first to be emotional.

Thus, reason and emotion are related in, at least, three ways:

A. Firstly, we can find an evolutionary bond between them. In relation to the evolutionary relation between “cognition” and “emotion” or between the rational brain and the emotional one, it cannot be ignored that the emotional brain (amygdala, ventromedial prefrontal cortex, hypothalamus and anterior basal brain) developed before the rational one (neocortex, hippocampus) (Ledoux, 1998).

Thus, the philosophical disconnection between these two human dimensions should be replaced by an inclusive correlation.

It can be said that the brain’s evolution recreates the *Russian dolls* model, where each new stage includes the previous one. Indeed, if we understand our skills through this model, and if we assume that the old steps are included in the new ones (De Waal, 2007), that is, that the inferior or primitive systems are necessary to reach the highest one, then we could start seeing human emotionality as an evolutionary previous step necessary to be rational, and therefore, to be autonomous. That is, if (1) a moral agent has to be autonomous, if (2) autonomy needs rationality and if (3) the rational brain developed after the emotional brain, then emotions are necessary in order to be a moral agent and also to be rational and autonomous, at least in an evolutionary sense, for we cannot know whether the rational brain could have existed without the emotional and the primitive one. Given the fact that it has not been that way, a rational brain without an emotional one is nowadays simply implausible.

In other words, and as a consequence of what has been said so far, I will assume Ledoux’s suggestions when he affirms that “the wiring of the brain at this point in our evolutionary history is such that connections from the emotional systems to the cognitive systems are stronger than connections from the cognitive systems to the emotional systems” (1999: 19), what is especially relevant here because the union of these two ideas implies: 1) that, so far, there cannot be a rational brain without an emotional one, but not vice versa, and 2) as a consequence of 1), that a moral agent—as long as he is a rational one—has to be an emotional one, that is, has to be provided with an emotional system.

B. Secondly, an interactive bond can be detected. I would like to suggest that reason and emotion maintain not only a diachronical connection, but a synchronical one. That is, the idea is that one system is temporally previous to the other, and also that there is an interaction between them, that is, a functional bond.

There are at least two ways of understanding this connection.

Firstly, if reason and emotion are understood as mental processes beyond neurological boundaries, then reason and emotion would be concepts created to simplify what actually is complex, that is, they would be artificial limits for a blurred reality (Ekman & Davidson, 1994). In sum, if reason is understood as a human dimension that processes information, then emotions can somehow be seen as “cognitions” as they give us information and are involved in information processing.

It can be thought that “emotions are mental status, so that cognitive involvement is substantial, by definition” (Clore, 1994: 181), since “emotional processing requires stimulus input and is therefore dependent to some extent on cognitive systems for stimulus transmission” (Ledoux, 1994: 222-223). In this case, emotions would be connected to rationality as they would already be part of the cognitive system, and therefore emotions and autonomy could coexist as emotions and reason would turn out to be two aspects of a more general system.

Indeed, emotions are coherent according to what we think and want, so that they can be really useful to know ourselves and to make coherent decisions. In other words: “what is irrational about responding to danger with evolutionary perfected reactions?” (Ledoux, 1998: 36).

Secondly, in a stricter sense, if cognition refers to those processes that are based in the neocortex and the hippocampus, then reason and emotion would be two completely different ways of processing information, so that emotion would be a way of evaluate the direct effects of an action, and reason would be a reflexive and sophisticate way of processing that information.

Nevertheless, in both cases we should remember that there are no boundaries in human mind (and not in human brain), so that even in the second case reason and emotion are somehow related. Certainly,

emotions would need a minimum cognitive basis just to process that bodily or perceptive information, and give us a perspective of all that neutral information.

Actually, even in a cold and calculated reasoning process the emotional system is involved, firstly, because emotions concentrate our attention in those pieces of information that are relevant to agent's aim, secondly, because an agent has to be motivated, firstly to adopt that kind of cold reasoning, and secondly to maintain it through time, so that the interaction between both systems is necessary to produce and keep any kind of conduct, including the moral one. We should not forget that we live always under an emotional state; we are always in some mood, so we always see the world through an emotional filter.

On the other hand, reason has also an influence in the emotional system, as we can think about our emotional reactions, learn about us, and eventually try to modify them, so that the superior processes can modify the basic ones (De Waal, 2007: 49). Therefore, it can be said that there is a feedback, an interaction from emotion to reason and then back from reason to emotion, what should modify the way moral agency—and generally human nature—has traditionally been understood.

This interaction and the fact that both systems are functional according to our interests could also explain why in many cases both processes lead us to the same conclusion (Wright, 2007: 119). Thus, the initial paradox would finally vanish.

In sum, the point that I wanted to suggest here is that abandoning an antithetic image of human skills can be an appealing path to achieve new result in moral philosophy.

C. Thirdly, emotion and reason are specially connected in decision making. The emotional system interacts with the rational one in decision making process, what also affects moral decisions, and therefore, autonomy. That is why this third bond can be understood as the most revealing for the paradox.

Recent research in neurology and moral psychology suggest that the emotional system intervene in the deliberation process, which has traditionally been seen as exclusively rational. Contrarily as what it was

thought, and according to Timoneda and Pérez, “our decisions depend on the emotional prefrontal cortex rather than on the reasoning prefrontal cortex. [...] Our fMRI research shows that when we make decisions we do it by linking what we feel to what we think, instead of focusing merely on what we think without taking into account what we feel” (2007: 238).

Actually, the bond seems to be stronger as it could be thought, since it is not a casual one. As Wagar and Thagard suggest, remembering Damasio, Churchland and many others’ researchers, “there is increasing appreciation in cognitive sciences that emotions are an integral part of decision making” (2006: 87).

Needless to say that the influence of the emotional system in the deliberation process would not be understood here as an interference or as a defect, but as a necessary element of the process itself.

Likewise, Damasio clearly explained this bond between reason and emotions in decision making mechanisms:

When circuits in posterior sensory cortices and in temporal and parietal regions process a situation that belongs to a given conceptual category, the prefrontal circuits that records pertinent to that category of events become active. Next comes activation of regions that trigger appropriate emotional signals, such as the ventromedial prefrontal cortices, courtesy of an acquired link between that category of event and past emotional feeling responses. This arrangement allows us to connect categories of social knowledge —whether acquired or refined through individual experience— with the innate, gene-given apparatus of social emotions and their subsequence feelings. Among these emotions/feelings, I accord special importance to those that are associated with the future outcome of actions, because they come to signal a prediction of the future, an anticipation of the consequence of actions (2003: 147)

This idea becomes clearer if we think about what would happen if our reasoning were a “pure” process without any emotional influence due to a deficit or a lack of emotions. In this case, we would start analysing all the logical possibilities and their benefits and costs for us, so that we would lose ourselves in our own calculations and calculations’ consequences, and the consequences’ consequences, so that it would not be functional. Actually, it would turn to be an irrational process. According again to Damasio, “decisions made in these emotion-impoverished circumstances

led to erratic or downright negative results, especially so in terms of future consequences” (2003, 145).

Certainly, without an emotional repertoire an agent would not know what he cares about, what affects him, what is worthy for him etc., so that decisions made under these conditions would not be autonomous, since we would not be able to attach any value to that data. In fact, we would not have any perspective of our world; we would just have neutral information: we would not know how we see the world; we would only know what we see. According to Moll and colleagues, “moral emotions would neither compete with rational processes during moral judgments, nor result from them. Most likely, moral emotions help guide moral judgements by attaching value to whichever behavioural options are contemplated during the tackling of moral dilemma” (Moll, *et.al*, 2008: 5).

In sum, such findings suggest that 1) maybe we need to change or open the traditional concept of rationality in order to include the previous thesis, that is, that emotions favour human reasoning (De Waal, 2007: 43); and that 2) rationality needs emotionality, thus a rational moral agent must be an emotional one.

5. Conclusions

I HAVE PRESENTED EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE for the role of emotions in morality and also for the bond between reason and emotion, and therefore between autonomy and emotionality.

As a consequence of these suggestions we should include the emotional side in a moral account of autonomy, so that the emotional dimension would become an accepted precondition, a necessary factor, not only for moral agency, but for autonomy. The point that I wanted to make here is that what has ordinarily been seen as an obstacle can be reinterpreted as an necessity for morality in many different ways: firstly because nowadays it is evolutionary impossible to talk about reason and autonomy without the emotional previous step, secondly, because reason and emotion modify each other, and thirdly because we could not make moral practical decisions without emotions, what finally lead us to conclude that autonomy and moral reasoning would be diminished without emotions.

As a result, it is a consequence of this suggestion that connecting moral autonomy just with rationality and understanding emotion as the reason's enemy are the cause of the initial paradox.

Nevertheless, accepting the role of emotion in human autonomy can still be problematic. The first problem would be the determinist objection. This objection would affect both skills, the rational and the emotional one, but in this paper I would like to focus on the determinism coming from emotions.

From the determinist point of view, it seems that the more we know about the brain, the more determinism is ineludible. The brain (rational or emotional brain) would determine our decisions and acts, so that we could not speak about autonomy, and therefore, about morality.

Nevertheless, I would like to argue that this accusation is not definitive. Indeed, having the illusion of being autonomous would be enough to morality, since as long as you feel responsible of your actions and decisions, moral consciousness can arise. Likewise, from the moment you realize that you are eventually determined; you are already morally free for as long as you are conscious of that determination, you are free to consequently act. In other words, from a moral perspective, it does not matter whether what you want is a result of the combination of genes and a predetermined brain or not, because autonomy basically consists in being conscious of that aim, and therefore, in making a coherent decision according to those circumstances.

As R. Joyce affirms, "according to many philosophers, freedom does not involve the capacity to alter the course of neural causation by an act of pure mental determination; it simple means acting on your desires" (2007: 9).

The brain can be determined, but in any case, the mind is not the brain, especially in the case of a self-conscious animal that can think about himself, creating a curve or a feedback. Maybe we are also determined to feel that we are not determined. However, this kind of argument will lead us to frustrating endless vicious circles, "since moral beliefs are unlikely to be inevitable even if they have an innate basis, any worries that an evolutionary account of morality would in some sense deprive us of our freedom are countered" (Joyce, 2007: 9).

Even so, what is especially relevant for morality here is that moral autonomy does not reside in how you come to conclude that something is good or not, it does not reside in how you end up assuming a moral rule, but on the fact of deciding whether to follow that rule or not. Needless to say that confusing these two ideas would lead us into a genetic fallacy. In fact, that confusion would mean that we would be assuming that the origin of something and that something are the same. Thus, even though we were determined by our brain, moral agent's —and not just the brain— are the ones that have to feel and do feel that are responsible for their decisions and actions. In other words, moral responsibility and, therefore, moral autonomy, is a public concept that arise in a social context, for the interaction of different agents, even though the brain of those agent were determined.

Thus, the brain is not the same as the product coming from the brain, as well as reason and emotion are not the product resulting from them, i. e., moral agency, consciousness, etc., and thus moral realities can come from neutral amoral realities, as the brain.

Likewise, we should remember that moral agents' autonomy has its roots in the control of the final decision and not in the control of emotions. Emotions motivate and motivation lead us to act, but it does not determine us to act, since other factors are involved in the decision making process (memory, cognition, environmental circumstances, etc.). Consequently, admitting an emotivist thesis does not necessarily implies the negation of reason or autonomy. Actually, it is easy to see that just from a dualistic and intellectualist paradigm the inclusion of emotions in moral philosophy means the lost of autonomy and the slavery of reason.

Knowing that we are not only rational, but emotional agents, should not lead us to accept determinism, and therefore moral heteronomy. Indeed, the fact that emotions have a constitutive role in moral development does not mean that our emotions should guide our moral decisions. That is, accepting the emotional basis of morality does not mean that emotions are themselves normative criterions, it does not mean that you ought to do what your emotions tell you to do. On the contrary, it only means that reason and emotion are two skills involved in the development of moral abilities.

Consequently, if we defend that emotion have a strong biological base, then we could analyse what our emotional reactions have in common, what we all what to avoid, and what our general aims are. Maybe through this analysis we could see that no one wants to be abused or wants to suffer any moral damage against his will. Thus, maybe our emotional reactions could tell us that we all search for surviving and well-being, what is quite relevant for moral philosophy.

The second problem would be the relativistic objection. This objection would also appear especially after accepting the role of emotion in morality. We can think that our emotions are influenced by the culture; we can think that our emotional reactions depend on where you have grown up, what kind of education you have been given, etc. As a result of this, we could conclude that we are not autonomous as long as morality is influenced by emotions and emotions are influenced by cultural conventions.

However, I think we can still defend the idea of moral autonomy. First of all, because as it has previously been said, the final product (morality) cannot be identified with its ingredients (reason, emotion), so that the factors that conform the ingredients are the characteristics that define the final product whilst there is a qualitative difference. Secondly, even if we think that our emotional reactions are a cultural product, just because they are seen as a product made by us, they can be changed and improved since we change and improve any other cultural products that we produce. Needless to say that, for example, our emotional and moral reactions towards some current moral issues are not the reactions that our grandparents used to express.

In this sense, admitting the emotional basis of morality does not necessary implies either admitting a cultural relativism, a biological determinism, or the negation of moral autonomy. On the contrary, emotions inform us —as alarms— on what our objectives, our beliefs and our expectations are; they inform us on how we valued the world and how we see ourselves in it. For instance, if you feel afraid, you know you believe something is dangerous for your well-being, you know that you want to survive, and you know that you do not feel prepared to face that —or at least you doubt it—.

For this reason, the point that I want to make here is that we could speak about emotions, autonomy and even moral progress through emotional education, surpassing the relativism's objection. Since emotional education implies the development of our own abilities (1) to recognize and identify our emotional reactions when they occur, (2) to recognize other people's emotional reactions and expressions, and (3) to regulate and manage them, then an emotional education can turn out to be a moral education (Fernández- Berrocal y Ramos, 2005). In other words, now that we have learnt that we are not only rational, but emotional animals, we should educate those emotions the best way possible, since the better knowledge we have about our emotional life, the better we will know ourselves as moral agents.

As long as morality has an emotional basis, it would be relevant to improve these skills, since they will have a direct impact in our moral development. Firstly, if we are aware of our own emotional reactions, we already have a useful tool to know about our own beliefs behind our reactions —also moral beliefs—. This can be useful in order to face our own moral prejudices and, therefore, in order to gain more control in our decisions and acts. Secondly, improving our skill in recognizing other people's reactions opens a door to communication, intersubjectivity and sociability, and, as a consequence, to morality. Thus, we can know, through their emotional reactions, what they think, what they want and how they see themselves in relation to their circumstances —also moral ones. Thus, the improvement of this second emotional skill could be useful in our ability to recognize somebody else's moral damage. Thirdly, through the information taken from our emotions, we could regulate and manage our emotional and moral reactions, so that we could better know what our conditions, beliefs, aims and values are and, as a result, we could finally improve our ability in moral decision making.

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