



# ESSAY

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## Topic 2

The quote by David Hume argues for the impossibility of defining concrete notions of good and evil, attributing them not to the internal structure of the object which bears them, but rather on the perceiver, the judge. As such, for Hume, they are comparable to the “perceptions” such as heat, cold, sounds, which are not absolute, but rather passing states only able to be recognized by an external perceiver. Hume’s account is ontological in that it rejects the nature of good or evil existing and rejects the possibility that they are real attributes of objects.

Hume’s account however is problematic because it already supposes that there is a stable definition of what things are for them to be compared to perceptions. The essay will argue for the futility and internal problem of endless reduction and as such, the need for a taking of another approach to understanding objects. The objects then are not something entirely stable, and this instability will create the possibility of imagining their truth as presence and non-presence, i.e., closing all possibility of attributing

This essay will try to give reasons as to why this notion is undefinable as any on an ontological level, yet on an ethical one humans are to perceive this notion in as false in being an ontological statement, and either true or false on the basis of other ethical considerations. As such, the ideas presented by Hume could not be a standard for human judgement in the moral sphere. Moreover, the essay will argue for Hume’s wrongness in talking about good and bad only through individual positive perceptions, through the expanding of the framework to include the category of the *unethical*. Ethics are to be states of judgements which give a possibility of ideal and practical action in the world, and actions which go beyond this are to be universally rejected.

1. The passing-by nature of things. Internal difference. The unknowable nature of virtue and vice. An argument towards understanding truth as more than reality of states of affairs, and the positive impacts of such a conception

To absolutize perceptions is to give human judgement a leading role not only in the understanding of the world, but also in its defining. Humans are forced to think through stable structures, definitions and identities. In the mind, we encapsulate the changing structure of things, hence, we make it impossible to give justice to the individual object’s internal change, its *difference in itself*. As such, in giving things identity, we absolutize a part, internal or external, of their nature – be it a utility, a right of the thing to be in itself (as we are doing now), an ethical value, etc. But these are just abstractions of a larger never truly-present totality made through a finite lens. Any metaphysics starts from a point in which ethics, and then human’s relation to



the world are already defined. Hence, it seems, there is an ever-present conception of truth of what things are which nonetheless averts us.

How could we, then, argue for the changing structure of things, if any such attempt is no less susceptible to the ethicalization, to the standing rules for perception as such, than any other? Such a notion helps us be open to all possibilities of existence.

If we say that a particular truth lies on the necessity of another truth, then we will regressively reach a truth which needs to be self-evident. Is it a necessity that the flower grows? Scientifically, it is explained through biology by a state of affairs which drives its cells to act in such a way, what drives them? We will try to look at the internal structure of things until we reach a point in which internal structure is no longer explainable by a reduction; yet latent in our thought is that this point is not final - We have the possibility to go down even further. But states of affairs at the current or any future moment will always be *de jure* and not *de facto*. We have to base our ideas in something present, something for which we have the possibility to say that it is true by virtue of its self-evidence – “I see that everything has an internal structure”, “I see that a scientist’s explanations are logical and describe the world as I see it”, etc. If we base our understanding in self-evidence, however, what is the reason to try, not a reductive approach, but an approach for understanding which takes as evident the value judgements which I can make at the most basic level. “The flower grows” and I can sense the beauty that it projects, I can feel that this is a statement in itself. Of course, this is not a basis for using the word *because*. Moliere satirizes Aristotle for the very same reason, pointing to the absurdity of the purely entelechy-logical reasoning though the picture of the medical student saying that: “Opiates opiate because they have an opiate nature”. But *because* is not the be-all and end-all of reasoning; for a state of affairs should not be the basis for its reduction, but for its betterment. We are only encapsulated by this logicalization of truth; we are striving towards creation or at least a fulfillment, which entails a productive force. The truth of the productive force is not in its comparability to an abstract idea which we have for what is true, but rather for that which allows truth and is true in its existence.

The problematic nature of the positivistic understanding of truth from the standpoint of existence (what is true is the state of affairs) is that its sole conception requires its positing onto everything present, and even more radically – that which is not present. For things that do not exist, are still imagined as things – there is a presence of non-presence. Therefore, nonexistence is subordinate and internal in its definition to presence which makes things that are non-present have the same qualities as those that are present. There should be a truth which explains a thing’s non-existence, but that truth should be external to it, because truth already exists as something (as state of affairs). Thus, all that is not present is in some way false (bad), even only by virtue of its non-presence. We can run contra to such conceptualization by acknowledging the truth **in** non-existence. Non-existence is tied to what existence is but not in a subordinate manner, but a manner which makes things more themselves. A part of a thing is that which it has not yet become. We can always imagine ourselves more ourselves in a future moment (when I have acquired something that I think defines me, that makes me more than I am now) and we can imagine things as being more themselves than they are now – we see just that with the Platonic Forms: an object can be more itself if it becomes closer to the perfect, i.e., unreachable form. We however cannot be sure what this form is, and it could be more inclusive than exclusive, having more qualities than it does now.



Does this mean that there is no border to what things might be? Even if we accept the scientific stance, supporting our hitherto analysis, that particles in an infinite amount of time cross all possible states, does this mean that solid structures as such are also non-definable? The analysis supports that due to the undoubtedly limited nature of our perception, we cannot strictly say that truth does not exist. There is the possibility of truth as such, or truth as a real attribute of things existing, yet we cannot be sure. Yet, as we previously said, there is beauty in the flower's growth, and that beauty could not be otherwise except for that it is. Nobody could be obliged to say that the flower could be a flower if it were to be, for example, a bush. I still think in definitions, and the presence – perceived as such - of an object I could not truly value, allows me to call the flower a bush, and an ugly bush, if I perceive it as such. While my statement then could seem to be an obvious lie, I am exempt from it if I could not be in another state of perception of the moment. What does this mean for the possibility of progress? Am I tied to being seeing-false, and what does this make me? The answer is that I could always further analyze and reach a point of being in which I am closer to the actual truth, while never truly reaching truth. Tied to this is that my perceptions should be ethically oriented towards creating the best state of affairs I could make for the group I am targeting – humans, nature, God, etc. A key point here is that it is not necessary that we regress to a worse understanding to create our desired outcome. We are all given a perception which grows to create such understandings of and feelings towards things that give comparable pleasure to everybody – I and my friend, and other people see flowers as beautiful. The proliferation of beauty could happen if we understand how it functions (what makes things beautiful), but said function could not displace its founding origin – beauty. That which creates beauty should be subordinate to it, and not the other way around, so we could find beauty in that which was perhaps not beautiful, rather than taking away that beauty could be explained by non-beauty.

To summarize this paragraph, we may use an idea by Anselm of Canterbury, who argues that the truth of the sentence is not in that it says something true, but rather in its being itself. Each thing has a role to fulfill, but that role is undefinable by its structure for the lack of said solid structure. Hence, we can understand things as being true for their possibility of defining a better state of affairs, and not just explaining a current situation and thus closing all attempts of future realization. We have, to an extent, radicalized Hume's idea by saying that perceptions are not only inaccurate, but that objects as such never simply exist. Any relation to things is internalized not only by its self-encapsulated nature, but by the ontological basis which prohibits things ever being simply themselves. Vice and virtue, from an epistemological point of view in any point in time, are internal conceptions of judgement tied to definitions of an object which exists as only partially itself, but bears a relation to its virtual possibilities. There is no necessity that virtue does not exist in some external relational structure, that it does not exist as a virtuality of an object, but for all that we see it is not internal. As such, we ought to treat it as it is, for it practically gives us benefits. We ought not simply ask "What is happening?", but as Jean-Francois Lyotard said ask "Is it happening?" in addressing some object of desire.

## 2. Vice and virtue as dialectical categories of the mind. The field of the Unethical

Hume's quote supports that objects in themselves have no vice or virtue, which seems to be the only possible thesis, should we see that they are not internal definites of objects in themselves. Furthermore, we also see how the interaction is made possible by the active interaction with the object at hand – when I think about it or interact with it, through its properties, it affects me in one way or another. Hume here appears to be right for perceptions do not truly reflect the



existing state of a thing but direct to another state which is internal to the judge. For example, we could conceptualize a person who tries a particular kind of food for the first time and is in a neutral in their mood before doing so. As a result, they will judge how said food affects them in an objective manner. This conceptualization however is all too inaccurate, for a human could never exist as an abstract object – we are always in a state of affairs, where not only I and my objects properties show, but those of things that came before (when I drink tea it tastes bitter if I have eaten chocolate prior), that will come after (when I eat unhealthy food I am not at ease because I fear it will impact my health), etc. We could even encapsulate into this way of thinking, material-rejecting ideas of what is good and evil - pain creates the conditions of my betterment, for the proliferation of my positive qualities. Humans are driven in relation to their desires, which are not arbitrarily produced. As such, it is possible to create any possible relation between physically good and physically bad – from hedonism to asceticism, to a position which gives value to both in moderation.

However, such conception takes as given that there is always a lesson to be learned, that every action lies in the field of ethics. Situations such as nuclear bombings, terrorist attacks, etc., on the contrary, are so absolute in their terror that they become unspeakable, they create a notion of encapsulated moments which cannot be related, and as such close the sole possibility of talking of goodness. In this sense, we could say that good and bad both exist in the realm of ethics, and their dialectical nature taken through history is beneficial. But outside of that lies the realm of the *unethical* which closes the possibility of even talking or imagining ethics as related to it. If we take the word vicious to represent the unethical act, what is vicious is not bad simply by it hurting me, but by hurting me in such a manner that it said feelings cannot be communicated, cannot be reimagined in full, and as such cannot be the basis for an ethical takeaway. Unlike color or sound which make their way into the mind in the form of something positive, something which has an inherent nature particular to it, viciousness is only present in its sublime absence. In Lacanian terms, we could say that what is simply bad could be assimilated into Reality – the everyday reality, the constructed reality, the reality of constructed thought, but viciousness breaks Reality and envelops individuals into The Real where no solid understanding or meaning is possible. As such, what we defined to be a good ethical stance about interacting in the world is impossible in this state, and we should not strive towards it, for the idea that in breaking solid meaning it exposes us to unadulterated states of affairs.

### 3. Conclusion

This essay argued about the impossibility of knowing whether vice and virtue are truly conceptions of the mind, or that they could possibly could be real, through positing the ever-changing nature of objects. This stance of absolute uncertainty gave us a reason to seek beyond reductionist understandings of truth – what is, how it is – but through a positive conception aiming at fulfilling human desires, instead of subordinating them to a positivist or scientific understanding. The essay then argued against the simple reduction of categories of judgement to simple good or bad and raised the category of unethical which is to be defined as the undefinable. By virtue of this, the analysis tried to ultimately argue for a non-radical dialectical concept of good and evil, which is aimed at realizing virtue in a desired by the individual way, depending on his judgements.