Instinct, Tradition and Reason
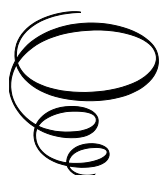
Instinct, Tradition and Reason:

The Moral Philosophy of F.A. Hayek

By

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FOREWORD

A Life of Distinction

Friedrich August von Hayek was born in 1899 to an eminent family of Viennese intellectuals. He read economics at the University of Vienna, earning his two doctorates in 1921 and 1923. He was motivated to study economics by the poverty of post-war Vienna and by the desire to ameliorate social conditions in the city.

As a young man, he was attracted to socialism as the surest remedy to these ills, but the powerful influence of Ludwig von Mises, the author of *Die Gemeinwirtschaft*, published in English as *Socialism*, caused him to change his mind fundamentally. For many years, he participated in Mises' celebrated *Privatseminar,* the fulcrum of Austrian economic thought in the 1920s and the place where he found his own intellectual voice and vocation.

In 1931 he left Austria to join the faculty of the London School of Economics, departing in 1950 to join the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. It was at this stage of his academic career that his focus of interest began to move away from pure economic theory (and in particular his influential research on capital and the business cycle) and towards a broader, more philosophical interest in psychology and politics. In 1974, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Economics.

His greatest work is undoubtedly *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, published in three volumes between 1973 and 1979, and in which he sought to distil his mature thoughts on the liberal principles of justice and political economy. He died in 1992 in Freiburg, Germany, where he had lived since leaving Chicago in 1961.

He lived long enough to witness the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, events that he deserved to relish if only because his entire intellectual life had been dedicated to the conceptual overthrow of

socialist ideology and what he felt to be the hegemony of left-wing thinking within the intelligentsia.

What is his epitaph? In the minds of many of his greatest admirers, as well as his fiercest critics, he remains something of a paradox: he was an intellectual acutely aware of the moral biases and shortcomings to which intellectuals are particularly prone, an economist disdainful of the arcane mathematisation of economics throughout the 20th century, a scientist with a deeply philosophical interest in the moral foundations of the open society, a deeply conservative man who nevertheless swam courageously against the current of contemporary thought, and a scholar who took an intense interest throughout his life in the mundane practicalities of commerce and trade.

The Core Concept of Catallaxy

"The best way to explain how a philosopher arrived at his most obscure metaphysical assertions is to ask: what morality is he aiming at"
*(*Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil)*

Hayek's writings cover an enormous range of inquiry. He was a psychologist of distinction, a highly influential economist, a political scientist revered by many practicing politicians, and an original philosopher in the classical liberal tradition of John Stuart Mill. His *Constitution of Liberty* has been described by a distinguished living historian of ideas as 'the most powerful and profound defense of individual freedom in our time' (Gray 1982. 19).

Yet the relationships between the ideas that he developed within each of these disciplines – how they hold together and reinforce one another – have not perhaps been given the attention due to them. For example, the centrality and integrating power of Hayek's pioneering work in epistemology, especially in his development of the concept of *catallaxy*, deserves greater recognition than it has so far received. It is the purpose of this book to make this argument and to redress this deficit.

Hayek defined catallaxy as 'the order brought about by the mutual adjustment of many individual economies in a market' (Hayek 1982. 108-9). He drew an important distinction between an economy and a catallaxy:

an *economy*, such as a household or a school or a firm, implies a unitary hierarchy of aims or objectives, where the knowledge required to achieve these shared goals is essentially explicit and therefore available to its 'members' as data for the furnishing of plans.

A catallaxy is a network of such purposeful economies but *without a purpose of its own* (other than that of facilitating the achievement of each economy's own aims and objectives). It is simply the system of exchange relationships amongst the constituent economies. A catallaxy, unlike an economy, produces beneficial outcomes without the need for perfect information, a master plan, a design authority, or a coordinating bureaucracy.

Hayek expanded the notion of catallaxy into a normative theory of economic policy, social well-being and moral practice. His greatest moral injunction was that an attitude of humility towards our inherited traditions and institutions should lead us to 'submit to conventions which are not the result of intelligent design, whose justification in the particular instant may not be recognizable, and which will … often appear unintelligible and irrational' (Hayek 1948. 23). He argued that catallaxy was just as critical to the creation of an ordered society and an ordered morality as it is to an ordered economy. In each case, catallactic processes generate data that act as potent signals by which individuals rationally steer their course through life.

Throughout his life, Hayek challenged the inflated claims that philosophers had traditionally made on behalf of reason – and the intellectual vanity that had often accompanied these claims. Instead, he preferred to see man's knowledge as articulated, first and foremost, in his social institutions and customs rather than in his theories and thoughts; he sought to steer man's rationality away from a fascination with the wholesale redesign of society as though from first principles, which he regarded as the curse of the twentieth century, and towards a more modest recognition of its own powers; and he insisted on explaining man's morality as the manifestation of the traditions that constituted his culture rather than the result of reason or the operation of instinct.

His greatest philosophical insight, perhaps, was that a society cannot reliably or rationally be assessed for its moral content if only because the minds doing the judging are themselves the product of society; on the other hand, what *can* be assessed, he believed, is a society's propensity to create and use the tacit knowledge that accumulates in its traditions and institutions – and the trust that it places in this cumulative wisdom. As soon as we acknowledge the limitations of human reasoning and the paucity of explicit knowledge, we must recognize that certain popular and deeply-held political ideologies and moral systems – such as socialism and other forms of strong state intervention, as well as the societies that place their faith in these beliefs – are making irrational and possibly immoral demands on man's cognitive powers.

The Structure of the Argument

Hayek's economic and political theories, justly celebrated for their undisputed contribution to human knowledge, have been extensively reviewed, analysed and critiqued. However, his philosophical theories, particularly his ethics, have received far less attention, even though an understanding of his moral theories is indispensable to a full appreciation of his economic and political ideas and ideals.

In the attempt to redress the balance, each chapter focusses upon one of Hayek's more important ethical propositions, particularly those that sprang from his concept of catallaxy, and how they combine to form an integrated moral belief system:

1. The **evolutionary** development of man's **moral sensibility** – and the associated perils of believing in the perfectibility of man, given the plurality of the resulting values and their intrinsic incompatibility;

2. The **spontaneity** of the process by which the **moral order** of an open society is created – and the hubristic folly of believing that reason could radically improve upon it, or that a revisionary ethics is possible, let alone desirable;

3. The **tacit** nature of the **practical knowledge** underpinning this moral order – including the abstract nature of the norms embedded in this

knowledge, and the misconception that such knowledge could be articulated, tested and enhanced; and

4. The **individualistic** meaning attached to purpose and **moral progress** – and the fatal bias contained in the belief that one's moral responsibility for one's own life could, or even should, be outsourced to the state or to some self-appointed elite.

In each part, I will set out the claim in detail, attempting to make explicit what Hayek sometimes only implied in his writings; I will then develop the claim critically, drawing from philosophers, such as Karl Popper and Robert Nozick, who were sympathetic to Hayek's line of thought, as well as from philosophers, such as Isaiah Berlin and Philip Kitcher, whose ideas, although developed independently, serve to illuminate, complement or challenge Hayek's vision; and throughout, I will add some thoughts of my own, either suggesting potentially fruitful directions in which his ideas might be taken, or seeking to repair some of the areas in which Hayek's thought may be considered to be unclear, inconsistent, or misconceived.

THE EVOLUTIONARY LOGIC OF MORAL DISCOVERY AND THE PLURALITY OF VALUES

Hayek's Theory of the Three Levels of Moral Beliefs

'Our moral traditions developed concurrently with our reason,
not as its product'
(Hayek 1982. 160)

Hayek was a pluralist in the following, rather restricted sense. He envisaged morality as a battlefield between nature, reason and tradition. Each of these forces makes claims on us, and these claims are invariably incompatible. He conceptualized moral dilemmas as problems that compel us to choose between the domain to which the problem truly belongs.

He identified three quite distinct sources of man's moral sensibility, which he believed were layered: the first level is our instinctive, genetically based drives, the second level is our cultural traditions laid down in response to successive challenges of living in varying social and physical environments; and the third level is the thin layer of consciously adopted rules designed to serve known purposes.

Hayek was challenging the dichotomy that Sophist philosophers had invented to explain all human phenomena: causes that were either natural (*physis*) or conventional, in the sense of 'consciously designed' (*nomos*). Hayek argued for a third set of causes, namely that of self-regulating social structures that owed nothing either to instinctive habits or intentional design, but which had evolved simply by means of the natural selection of the tacit rules of perception and action that had proved themselves useful in the practice of living. It is the convergence of different communities adhering to different traditions upon a common set of behavioural rules,

through a process of imitation and contagion, that explains the emergence of the spontaneously derived patterns of behaviour, such as morality, that we call human culture.

This is how Hayek described the essential elements of his ethical theory and the resulting predicament that faces anyone with a moral choice to make:

> 'Our basic problem is that we have three levels of moral beliefs. We have, in the first instance, our intuitive moral feelings, which are adapted to the small person-to-person society, where we act toward people that we know. Then we have a society run by moral traditions which – unlike what modern rationalists believe – are not intellectual discoveries of men who designed them. They are an example of a process that I now prefer to describe by the biological term of group selection.
>
> Those groups that quite accidentally developed favorable habits, such as a tradition of private property and the family, succeeded but they never understood this.
>
> So, we owe our present extended order of human co-operation very largely to a moral tradition, of which the intellectual does not approve because it had never been intellectually designed. It has to compete with a third level of moral beliefs; the morals that intellectuals design in the hope that they can better satisfy man's instincts than the traditional rules.
>
> And we live in a world where the three moral traditions are in constant conflict; the innate ones, the traditional ones, and the intellectually designed ones …
>
> You can explain the whole of social conflicts of the last 200 years by the conflict of the three.' (Hayek 1988)

These are bold claims. They run counter both to the zeitgeist of the 20th century and to most of the moral theories developed therein. But they are also important claims in the sense that, if true, they provide an explanation for many of the moral aberrations that blighted the last century and they offer us a normative framework for how to handle the moral challenges of the century to come.

Let us take a practical example of a global problem where nature, tradition and reason pull us in different moral directions – that of climate change. Our

instinct may be to ignore it, or at least to hope vaguely that something will turn up that serves as a remedy. This faintly fatalistic position is the one adopted by most climate change skeptics. Our *pragmatism,* or *trust in tradition* as members of an open democratic society with liberal institutions encourages us to believe that a market solution offers the best hope. This is the view that, for example, by pricing the true costs of carbon emissions we can internalize what has long been a perilous market externality and thereby put the profit incentive to work to solve the problem. In short, we would be putting the principles of catallaxy to work. Finally, our *intellect* is urging us to design a top-down, expert-led, comprehensive solution to the problem, embodied in statutes and regulations, with strong sanctions for law-breakers. This, by and large, is the view of the IPCC and its members and supporters. All of us can relate to all of these arguments, and we can find something credible and attractive in all three sets of policies. And yet these arguments have become intensely polarized as the lure of nature, tradition and reason pull us in different directions according to our different moral biases and priorities.

Hayek's belief was that most of our problems are best solved by placing our trust in what he called the *spontaneous order* of those societal traditions and institutions, such as the customs, laws and economic arrangements that have developed over time to serve our collective needs. He felt that most of the serious economic problems that beset us are the result of applying an intellectually derived 'dirigiste' solution rather than a catallaxy to these problems.

Sometimes he seems to be suggesting that there is a hierarchy of moral domains – some sort of lexical ordering of the three sources of moral values – and that tradition should trump both intellect and instinct. As quoted earlier, he wrote that 'what has made men good is neither nature nor reason, but tradition' (Hayek 1982. 160). Yet, in this statement and in much of Hayek's writings on policy, there is an unresolved ambiguity. On the one hand, he seems to be putting forward a purely descriptive evolutionary narrative – a genealogy – of how morality came to be what it is. On the other hand, he appears to be making strong prescriptive claims, either for why the 'standard morality' of mankind, inherited from tribal times, needed to be revised if society were to evolve and improve, or for why such

improvements should not – and could not – arise from rationalistic or constructivist intentions. In short, was Hayek seeking to debunk all forms of normative morality by reducing them to the status of epiphenomena of a 'blind' historical process or was he putting forward a theory of moral progress whereby the changing norms of society are a rational response to the evolving economic and social challenges facing mankind?

Is Hayek's Pluralism a Descriptive Account or a Normative Model?

Whenever Hayek touches upon pluralism, he adopts one of two roles: either he is playing the anthropologist, describing the moral history of mankind as he sees it; or he is playing the ethicist, prescribing a moral life for mankind as he would wish it. At times, the two become conflated and it becomes difficult to distinguish the evolutionary tale from the moral parable.

In his descriptive role, he is putting forward a theory of the origins and function of man's layered moral beliefs. His views are expressed in a quiet voice, in the manner of a fable, tentatively suggesting how various human traditions could have been laid down without the need either for a directing sense of purpose or for an organizing principle of coordination. As Hayek himself put it, 'Our moral traditions developed concurrently with our reason, not as its product.' We can compare this model of the emergence of man's morality – piecemeal, cumulative and serendipitous – with Otto Neurath's celebrated metaphor of the construction of a boat which is already at sea:

> 'We are like sailors who on the open sea must reconstruct their ship but are never able to start afresh from the bottom. Where a beam is taken away a new one must at once be put there, and for this the rest of the ship is used as support. In this way, by using the old beams and driftwood the ship can be shaped entirely anew, but only by gradual reconstruction.'
> (Cartright et al 1996. 89)

Contradictions seem to arise only when Hayek chooses to adopt a louder, more insistent, more moralistic tone, as though his voice were being heard from outside its own moral tradition, expressing a variety of rationally argued convictions for how different moral traditions ought to be assessed

(or enhanced) and how morality as a whole is a tale of human progress. This is Hayek the secular priest. He makes appeals to absolute standards and consequentialist claims; he speaks of morality as the accumulation of practical knowledge; he describes socialism as an atavistic creed; he talks of roads to serfdom; he bemoans the undue influence (and biases) of intellectual elites; he is censorious of the corruption of language by self-styled progressive thinkers (using 'weasel' expressions such as 'social justice'); and he praises the particular virtues of those to which entrepreneurial capitalism owes its success – and why he fears for the demise of these values.

His rationalism is at its most vociferous when he uses the criterion of the population-carrying capacity of a capitalist society as perhaps its most laudable quality. He claimed that most people alive today owe this fact to capitalism, and that a socialist world could only support a population a fraction of its current size. This is an interesting twist on the utilitarian maxim of the maximum happiness of the maximum number by drawing attention more to the criterion of number than of happiness. The same happiness enjoyed by twice as many people must, for Hayek, represent moral progress just as surely as twice the happiness of the same number of people. Capitalism, Hayek continuously reminded us, can support a much larger population than socialism – and he used this argument increasingly towards the end of his life to defend and proselytize the virtues of a market economy.

The ease with which Hayek moves from description to prescription reminds one of Hume's celebrated observation that, when reading authors on moral themes, 'all of [a] sudden I am surprised to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*' (Hume 1739).

There is no better example of this insight of Hume's than Hayek's genealogy of morals and the way he distinguished, both descriptively and normatively, between what he called the 'old' and the 'new' morality – that is, between the traditional morality of tribal communities or agrarian societies and what Karl Popper called the 'abstract morality' of the modern age.

His historical argument was that our intuitive moral sensibilities had taken shape over something like 50,000 generations during which time mankind was living in hunter-gatherer bands of no more than 150 members. In these conditions, certain values were critical to group survival and success. Amongst these values, the most important were altruism and solidarity. Indeed, these principles became the bedrock of man's traditional moral code – Hayek's 'old morality'.

Altruism meant the sharing goods and resources easily and routinely across all members of the community. This was feasible because everyone knew each other and it was therefore relatively straightforward to come to a shared view of both the objectives they were pursuing as a community and the methods they were using to do so. In a sense, they were genuinely communist communities.

Solidarity meant the pursuit of a shared purpose and outcome. It did not countenance internal dissent. It provided no forum for heretical ideas. The deviant voice, if it were ever heard, would have been ignored, or pilloried, or even ostracized. The concept of the individual, as we understand that idea today, had not been invented and therefore played no part in the development of the mores of the tribe. To the extent that some voices were more powerful than others, given that tribal hierarchies were a feature of these primordial societies, harmony and alignment were achieved by the appropriate level of deference.

For 200,000 years or so, mankind became habituated to this pattern of life and to this communitarian morality. No wonder then that the twin values of altruism and solidarity retain their hold on our affections. Few experiences provide as much joy and pleasure as those that have us joining with others in a shared enterprise. Present-day organisations, such as firms, clubs, charities and local associations thrive because they tap into this rich seam of primordial morality.

Problems arise only when we bring these noble values to situations that call for a different code of behaviour. For example, altruism and solidarity are poor guides to the development of trading relationships with strangers or neighbouring communities. In fact, Hayek argued that dutiful obedience to

these instincts would have prevented any evolution of society or growth of wealth or expansion of population or development of civilization. Staying with the old values would have been a recipe for permanent poverty and irredeemable primitivism. Indeed, those communities that remained most loyal to their traditional code of behaviour would invariably have died out.

For Hayek, the moral duty of altruism in a primitive society resided in making 'the right choice' between the magnitude of known needs of known other people and the urgency of one's own needs. However, when those people whose needs we feel we have a duty to serve are *unknown* to us, the same obligation is more effectively met by 'impersonal' or 'catallactic' market principles. Thus, if we interpret altruism as our duty to meet the needs of our neighbours before we pursue profit from trading with strangers, then its mass acceptance as a moral imperative would have rendered impossible the development of society beyond the tribal community. As with solidarity, a reliance on altruism as the bedrock of our moral obligation to one another would have inhibited the development of the open society.

It is these two instincts, altruism and solidarity, ingrained in our purely natural or intuitive reactions, which frustrated (and, in many parts of the world, still frustrate) the development of a modern market economy. For Hayek, history is the story of the gradual subduing of these good natural instincts by culturally developed rules of conduct which no longer concern concrete ends and concrete needs of known people but are purely abstract rules of behaviour having little to do with what our instincts tell us to do.

Does Hayek's Pluralism Contain a Theory of Immorality?

For Hayek, moral complexity has its roots in the fact that the sources of our moral sensibility lead to mutually incompatible prescriptions. In his eyes, much of the wrongdoing in the world, particularly in the 20th century, derived from an erroneous reading of the situation in which we found ourselves, and the state of confusion resulting from it. We can extend Hayek's theory to argue that immorality often takes the form of a category mistake, taking the virtues and moral dispositions appropriate to one domain (say, tribal society) and applying them doggedly or witlessly to a different domain (say, the market economy). Moral intelligence lies essentially in the

ability to identify the right domain for any given human problem. His critique of socialism was based on the view that it is 'simply a re-assertion of that tribal ethics whose gradual weakening has made an approach to the Great Society possible' (Hayek 1982. 133).

With this argument, Hayek reveals himself at his most utilitarian. To any rationalist suspicious of the merits of tradition and sympathetic to the older, more instinctive virtues, Hayek would pose a question such as:

> 'Knowing what you know of human history from the vantage point of contemporary society, do you feel greater allegiance to your 'moral emotions' or to those impersonal rules of conduct which were neither designed nor chosen for their moral quality, but upon which we rely for the 'extended economic order' that has endowed the world with its current levels of prosperity?' (Hayek 1978*. 7.7))

Hayek's reliance upon abstract rules rather than instinctive emotions becomes more contentious when the issues are more starkly moral than economic. If we take the case of the ongoing immigration crisis in Europe, and, to recall, for example, the tragic and disturbing image of Aylan Kurdi, the child whose body was washed up on a beach in Turkey in 2015, and whose family were making a final, desperate attempt to flee from the fighting in Syria to relatives in Canada, even though their asylum application had been rejected. This image had the effect of suddenly changing the lens through which Europeans regarded their moral responsibilities. Migrants were no longer just statistics; the problem was no longer just a calculative issue; the solution was no longer simply compliance with the law; now our altruistic instincts were being drawn into the debate.

Which is the right 'category' for the immigration problem? In short, is the solution one of reliance on instinct, or custom, or reason?

Hayek's tripartite model of values – and the social order that emerges from the joint effect of all three forces – can be traced back to Aristotelian ethics. For Aristotle, both the civilised order of a community and the moral order of an individual life are the product of nature (*physis*), habit (*ethos*), and reason (*logos*). A critical difference between both philosophies is that, unlike Hayek, Aristotle believed in the ultimate harmony of all three forces.

We find something of the same reasoning in Charles Darwin's explanation of man's moral sense: man evolved as a social animal with strong groupish instincts, sensitive to the judgmental assessments made of him by his fellow creatures; man's ability to learn from experience and from mutual imitation meant that over time certain habits and customs developed that embodied the behavioural norms that communities found to be pragmatically beneficial; and man's intellectual capacity led to the codification of these social norms in the form of a set of abstract rules of conduct, such as the Golden Rule and the categorical imperative.

This is how Darwin himself summarized his moral theory: 'Ultimately a highly complex sentiment, having its first origin in the social instincts, largely guided by the approbation of our fellow men, rules by reason, self-interest, and in later times by deep religious feelings, confirmed by instruction and habit, all combined, constitute our moral sense or conscience' (Darwin 1871, 1:72).

More recently, Jonathan Haidt has drawn upon a variety of insights from anthropology and evolutionary biology to build upon Darwinian moral theory. In *The Righteous Mind*, he introduces what he has termed *Moral Foundations Theory, or 'MFT' (Haidt 2012)*. Designed to explore the pluralistic nature of morality – and, in particular, the moral differences between cultures and ideologies – MFT identifies six variables from which any moral code would seem to be constructed. Haidt likens these variables to taste receptors, such as sweet, sour, salt and bitter, from which particular cuisines are created. The six 'moral taste receptors' identified by Haidt are:

> **Care/harm**: the sense of compassion for, or empathy with, those who are suffering or in harm's way – and an equivalent disdain for the selfish.

> **Fairness/cheating**: the sense of justice – whether or not people are getting what they deserve – and the demonisation of cheats, scroungers and free riders.

> **Liberty/oppression**: the sense of personal autonomy and freedom, and the corresponding resentment towards restrictions on choice, whether by tyrants, bullies or regulators.

Loyalty/betrayal: the sense of affiliation – who is 'us' and who is not – and the contempt reserved for traitors, or a terror of deviance.

Authority/subversion: the sense of order – including a respect for hierarchy – and a dislike of anarchists or law-breakers.

Sanctity/degradation: the sense of the sacred and the pure, and feelings of alarm towards whatever is seen as profane.

We can see how these disparate values combine differently in diverse ideologies. In fact, Haidt sought to show that these six factors cluster into three clearly identifiable ideological positions – ones that Hayek would have instantly recognised. Socialists tend to prioritise the care dimension, whilst conservatives choose to emphasise loyalty, authority and sanctity, and libertarians, in their turn, prefer to give prominence to freedom.

Likewise, the concept of fairness is given subtly different interpretations depending upon one's political allegiance:

'The left values fairness more when it is presented as equality, particularly equality of outcomes between groups (which is at the heart of social justice). The right values fairness more than the left when it is presented as proportionality – a focus on merit, which includes a desire to let people fail when they are perceived to have been lazy or otherwise undeserving' (Ekius and Haidt 2016).

Pluralism runs deep in any genuinely problematic moral dilemma. MFT brings Darwin's more intuitive theory of moral evolution up to date and invests moral pluralism (which Haidt himself characterized as a 'descriptive truth') with scientific credentials. We might want to say that not only are there multiple sources of morality, as Hayek suggested, but that each of these sources can be manifested in diverse ways.

Hayek admired Darwin and was deeply influenced by his theories. Both his father and his paternal grandfather were biologists, so he grew up in an environment highly favorable to evolutionary ways of thinking. John Gray, in his intellectual biography of Hayek, compliments him particularly on the 'evolutionary turn' taken by his philosophical writings on matters of morality.

However, Hayek is at his most controversial when he moves away from Aristotle and Darwin by insisting that, faced by any moral dilemma, we should be guided by tradition alone, free from any interference from either nature or reason. Elsewhere, he softened his stance, noting that:

> 'Neither what is instinctively recognized as right, nor what is rationally recognized as serving specific purposes, but inherited traditional rules, or that what is neither instinct nor reason but tradition should often be most beneficial to the functioning of society, is a truth which the dominant constructivist outlook of our times refuses to accept' (Hayek 1982, 162).

But how can tradition be relied upon to be the dominant source and guide to our moral decisions? Are we to assume that, now that our abstract society is as developed as it is, that we never again need our nature or our reasoning powers to shape our moral decisions, actions and priorities? At what moment in history did reason become redundant to our moral life? Why should we surrender our rationality to our habits when most of these traditions owe their origins, at least in part, to our collective rational appraisal of their effects? It may well make sense not to rely too much on our reason to *invent* new experiments in living, but surely the *evaluation* of these 'natural' experiments requires an active rational mind. Larry Arnhart, the political scientist, has written, 'Moral order arises from two kinds of spontaneous order – human nature and human custom. Morality also arises

from the deliberate order of human reason. Mistakes are made when people think that one of these three kinds of order is sufficient' (Arnhart 2007. 136-37).

Hayek, no doubt because he felt almost alone in his arguments against the post-Enlightenment consensus, may have felt the need to exaggerate, and thus to make his case for tradition too acerbically. One way perhaps of reconciling Hayek and Darwin, without impairing Hayek's critical insights, might be to think of his three sources of value in terms of a nested hierarchy: instinct, rather than reason, initiates the experiments around which traditions and moralities take shape; reason, rather than instinct, assesses the costs and benefits of these traditions, acting as a selective mechanism and shaping those that survive; and man's reasoning powers, rather than his instincts, are being continuously enhanced by the institutions that manifest

these evolving traditions. Thus, our morality has been shaped first by our primordial experience, then by the transmutation of these instincts and natural predispositions into shared customs and habits, which in turn found expression in our institutions and traditions, which are then themselves reformed or enhanced by the active involvement of the rational mind.

In this evolutionary account, Hayek's belief that our ethics can all too easily lag both our science and our culture strikes a chord. As our institutions evolve, thereby demanding an adjustment to our values if they are to deliver the maximum utilitarian benefit, it is not surprising that some individuals and some communities will find it difficult or irksome to adjust their morality accordingly. Indeed, many of our everyday judgments are likely to be atavistic, appropriate perhaps to earlier times and conditions but poorly matched to the demands of the modern age and the abstract society.

Does Hayek's Pluralism Entail a Form of Moral Relativism?

The shortcoming of any evolutionary theory of morality is that it tends to identify what is good with whatever survives. Why, though, should we be willing to 'outsource' our moral judgments to this competitive process? What reason can an evolutionary ethicist, as Hayek sometimes appears to be, offer for preferring or praising one social system or set of moral practices to any other, simply because it emerged later in the evolutionary process? Indeed, man has good reason not to be overly confident in the judgments drawn by his own evolutionary history. Only too rarely has it produced the kind of free society that Hayek himself sought to promote – and yet he would not have wanted this fact to be used as a reason for arguing against the primacy of liberty as a value.

Does this mean, therefore, that Hayek's theory of cultural and institutional evolution is morally neutral, in so far as it cannot prescribe any standard for the moral appraisal of different civilisations, social mores or political systems? Was he, at root, a moral relativist?

Hayek went out of his way to insist that he was not:

'It is, of course, a mistake to believe that we can draw conclusions about what our values ought to be simply because we realize that they are a product of evolution. But we cannot reasonably doubt that these values are created and altered by the same evolutionary forces that have produced our intelligence' (Hayek 1960. 35-36).

Thus, whilst acknowledging the evolutionary logic of the development of morality, Hayek did not think of himself as an ethical relativist. He believed that every moral code – every answer that man has given to the question of how best to live – has possessed a common core of immutable values, corresponding to a common repertoire of human experiences:

'While we know that all these values are relative to something, we do not know to what they are relative' (Hayek 1967. 109).

He was greatly influenced by Hume's argument that the human predicament is characterized by a small number of universal facts and that these facts furnish every moral code with a common set of principles. Amongst these facts are man's finite capacity for generosity, the shortcomings of his intellect, and the scarcity of resources in the natural world for meeting his needs.

'It is thus the nature of the circumstances, what Hume calls 'the necessity of human society', that gives rise to the 'three fundamental laws of nature': those of 'the stability of possessions, of its transference by consent, and of the performance of promises' (Hayek 1967. 113).

Hayek gave his own interpretation of Hume's 'anthropological laws' by expressing them in the following way: first, any set of laws must have precedence over any personalised claim to welfare if the general welfare is to be defended; second, the virtue of requiring property to be transferred only by consent is that it creates a protected, private space and thereby safeguards and promotes the freedom of the individual; and third, the laws themselves must be known and understood by all individuals if they are to make the best use of their own knowledge and resources.

Hayek acknowledged that those things that we currently regard as good or beautiful, including these laws of Hume, are changeable, albeit at a very

slow pace. 'We have no more ground to ascribe to them eternal existence than to the human race itself' (Hayek 1967. 38).

How Does Hayek's Theory Relate to the Pluralism of Isaiah Berlin?

> *"The only truth which I have ever found out for myself is, I think, this one: of the unavoidability of conflicting ends."*
> Isaiah Berlin (Ignatieff 1998. 246)

Hayek's evolutionary model of pluralism finds an echo in Isaiah Berlin's belief that there cannot be a unitary theory of the good. The different interpretations that mankind has always given to what is right, or virtuous, or good are mutually incompatible. Therefore, moral problems are always and everywhere problems of judging which virtues amongst many should take precedence in any situation. Every moral choice is a dilemma – not necessarily between right and wrong – but, more puzzlingly, between different versions of the right. However, there are important distinctions to be drawn between Hayek and Berlin: for Hayek, moral pluralism has its origins in man's history as a species and shows up as a plurality of problem situations calling for different principles; for Berlin, it is innate to the concept of morality as a human invention.

It might be asked: is there any reason why multiple causal sources of morality should necessarily lead to incompatible definitions of the good. Hayek's response would surely have been that notions of value are likely to be as incompatible as the social and economic conditions that gave rise to them are different. As has been argued earlier, closed societies only flourish when social solidarity is the norm; open societies only flourish when individualism is given full rein.

Moral pluralism is manifested most clearly and dramatically in the political domain. The three core political ideologies – conservatism, libertarianism and socialism – map directly onto Hayek's tripartite model of moral foundations.

If we imagine this threefold model as a triangle, with the angles representing instinct, reason and tradition, then each ideology can be seen as occupying

one side of the triangle whilst facing an opposing corner. Conservatism places its trust in a combination of instinct and tradition, whilst fearful of too much authority being given to reason; socialism is attracted to a blend of reason and instinct, but is wary of too much deference to tradition; and libertarianism is most comfortable with a blend of tradition and reason, but skeptical of the role of instinct.

The theory of cognitive bias, particularly in Daniel Kahneman's formulation of *loss aversion*, suggests that man is more driven by fear than hope: we dream vaguely but we dread precisely. If we were to express this thought vividly, conservatism is particularly fearful of utopian visionaries, single-issue fanatics and pathological altruists; socialism loathes small-minded nationalists, greedy capitalists and unfeeling reactionaries; and libertarianism is particularly hostile to self-styled victims, politically correct elites, and fellow travelers. There is something almost visceral, if not genetic, about the strength with which these prejudices are held, given the depth of the belief systems and moral perspectives that drive them. (It was in this vein that Hayek felt socialism to be atavistic, reactionary and superstitious.)

The fact that ideology maps onto the Hayekian three-fold source of value so neatly might be interpreted as follows: 1) if politics can indeed be said to be grounded in morality, in so far as they both reflect and express deep-seated, tacit belief systems, then we should expect *three* political traditions corresponding to Hayek's *three* moral domains; 2) the standard right-left duality does not do justice to this tripartite spectrum of beliefs; 3) this degree of moral pluralism offers an explanation of polarization, the state of affairs that arises when strength of belief exceeds any imaginable evidence and ideological extremism takes root; 4) on the political stage, there are 'moral games' being played in which moral postures are routinely struck that exaggerate their rightful dominion. Hayek observed that, 'From the saintly and single-minded idealist to the fanatic is often but a step' (Hayek 1944. 40-41).

The ease with which fanaticism takes hold finds empirical support in Barbara Oakley's concept of *pathological altruism* (Oakley et al 2012). and Jonathan Haidt's warnings about the perils of *moral idealism*. Oakley chose to examine the harm that altruism and empathy can sometimes cause when

carried to excess.   The pathological states of mind that she examined included self-righteousness, guilt, moral fervour, hyper-sensitivity to others and selflessness gone awry. She showed how an exaggerated focus on others to the detriment of one's own needs leads to such outcomes as depression and burn-out amongst healthcare professionals, women tolerating their abusive partners, anorexia, the hoarding of animals, and counter-productive philanthropic gestures. In the most extreme cases, suicide bombings and genocidal atrocities need to be understood as the logical consequence of a righteous belief in the purity of one's own cause and in the utter perfidy of all competing causes. In effect, Oakley is substantiating the popular maxim that the road to hell is paved with good intentions; and indeed, Hayek's entire moral philosophy is, in a sense, a warning to those who would judge an action by the ostensive nobility of its intent.

Oakley's work connects naturally with Jonathan Haidt's research on various forms of immoral behaviour. Haidt has examined four sources of evil: greed, sadism, humiliation and self-righteousness. His conclusion is that the first two are relatively insignificant, and that the woes of the world are more accurately laid at the door of those who feel either so humiliated that they have every reason to lash out against an unfair world, or so morally righteous that they give themselves the right, indeed the duty, to inflict harm on an immoral foe. There is in Haidt's theory a clear relationship to Hayek's unconventional view that altruism is not a universal or unqualified moral value. In today's world, self-righteousness finds itself taking the form of what has been called 'political correctness' and 'virtue signaling'.

Isaiah Berlin's version of value pluralism bears remarkable similarities to Hayek's, despite their very different intellectual heritage. Berlin's understanding of the history of ideas led him to argue against the notion, common to almost all ethical theories since classical times, that it should be possible to envisage the *perfect society* or the *perfect man* - and that there is no moral problem to which there is not, at least in principle, the *perfect solution*. Here he was thinking perhaps of Plato's Form of the Good and Aristotle's monist conception of virtue.

Historically, the belief had been that every coherent question has, by definition, a single answer, and that it cannot make sense either to imagine

incompatibilities amongst different conceptions of the good or to set limits on the power of reason to reconcile these seeming conflicts. For people of faith, a belief in God had always led logically to a belief in the unity of the good.

Berlin disputed these assumptions. His claim was that any developed morality with a modicum of complexity must create for its adherents a host of everyday moral dilemmas that evade rational solutions. He believed that dilemmas are endemic to any ethical code of conduct and that this is what makes the moral life both difficult and tragic. At some point, reasoning gives out and pure subjective choice is compelled to take over. Central to Berlin's liberalism is the idea of radical choice, embodying strong voluntarist, decisionist and existentialist elements, in which criteria or principles are never quite sufficient to provide the grounds for a fully rational decision.

There are three kinds of incompatibility in Berlin's scheme of things: those that exist between *different moral systems* (for example, between the virtues illustrated in the *Iliad* and those advocated in the Sermon on the Mount); those that exist between the ultimate values of any *single moral system* (for example, between liberty and equality in a modern democratic state); and those that exist within any one of these *particular values* (for example, between liberty of information and liberty of privacy).

To illustrate his argument, Berlin invites us to rank the following conceptions of the good:

- Aristotle's notion of the *great-souled man*
- Christian conceptions of *humility* and *brotherly love*
- Renaissance ideas of *virtù* and *supervia*

These influential and powerful descriptions of a life well lived are not only incommensurable; they are also uncombinable, in the sense that a given individual could not adhere to more than one of these moral conceptions. If this were so, there would at least be no dilemmas, since everyone would have an internally coherent moral system and would be untroubled by the claims of the others.

Is pluralism then simply a variety of moral skepticism or relativism? Unlike moral relativism, pluralism does not deny that there are some universal values, merely that they cannot be ranked. Berlin's attacks on moral monism did not entail his rejection of the elemental human values that, for example, HLA Hart has referred to as the 'minimum content of natural law' (Hart 1961. 26). By this are meant the values of human decency and such virtues as fairness, courage, and sympathy. Indeed, anthropological studies have shown just how universal are these categories of moral thought. Berlin says this:

> 'The basic categories in terms of which we define men – such notions as society, freedom, sense of time and change, suffering, happiness, productivity, good and bad, right and wrong, choice, effort, truth, illusion – are not matters of induction or hypothesis. To think of someone as a human being is ipso facto to bring all these notions into play: so that to say of someone that he is a man, but that choice, or the notion of truth, mean nothing to him, would be eccentric: it would clash with what we mean by 'man' not as a matter of verbal definition, but as intrinsic to the way we think, and evidently cannot but think' (Berlin 1979. 166).

Berlin's most original claim – and the one that unites him with Hayek more than with almost any other 20th century thinker – is that the categories of thought that constitute man's moral universe generate objective dilemmas that are both unavoidable in practice and insoluble by reason.

How might we summarise the implications of a belief in moral pluralism as Hayek and Berlin, in their different ways, present the theory? What are the practical consequences for the ways in which we can and should make moral and political decisions? Three conclusions suggest themselves:

1. There is no such thing as perfection, whether applied to a society, or a human life, or a moral decision. The search for perfection is misconceived and meaningless. Aiming for perfection is futile and potentially perilous. History is not a utopian project or a tale of inevitable progress.
2. As a practical consequence of pluralism, a hierarchical structure of values is an illusion. We cannot rely on any moral algorithm to make our choices for us. Every moral problem that confronts us is a situationally specific dilemma, where the choice is between one version