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Is Moral Compromise Feasible?

I. Introduction

“It seems that compromise is one of those values both necessary and impossible”

Avishai Margalit, On Compromise and Rotten Compromises.

This quote from Avishai Margalit (2010, 12) expresses the dilemma that motivates this paper: If compromise is indeed both necessary and seemingly impossible, this is a cause for concern.¹ However, while the necessity of compromise is increasingly acknowledged in political theory, the question of its feasibility is seldom explicitly addressed.

The necessity of compromise is often justified with reference to its role in resolving moral disagreements that emerge naturally in pluralistic societies (Bohman 1996, Bellamy 1999).² By resolving moral disagreement, compromise contributes to avoiding potential social

¹ The term “compromise”, as it is used in this paper, refers moral compromise specifically. In particular, this paper is concerned with moral compromise in civil society, i.e. compromise between citizens with conflicting moral values.

² It should be noted that compromise “resolves” disagreement in a practical, not in an epistemic sense. In a compromise, the disagreeing parties continue to disagree epistemically, but they resolve their disagreement with regard to its potential consequences in practice, such as violent conflict.

strife, violent protest or even war – all of which are possible consequences of unresolved moral disagreement. Furthermore, it has been argued that compromise is necessary for avoiding stagnation in political decision-making. Political stagnation can easily result from unresolved disagreements, which is particularly problematic because political stagnation oftentimes preserves an unjust status quo (Gutmann and Thompson 2012). Finally, compromise is considered to be appropriate for accommodating reasonable disagreements, because it does justice to the fact that all sides to a disagreement have – at least from their own point of view – good reasons for their respective position (Bellamy 2012, Bellamy et al. 2012, Weinstock 2006, 2013).

While we might intuitively agree that compromise is necessary in pluralistic societies, Margalit's impression that compromise seems to be impossible might be counterintuitive. After all, why should we think that compromise is impossible if it is so significant for social peace and justice? If we are aware of the benefits of compromise in terms of avoiding war and injustice, it stands to reason that we are also motivated to compromise. I argue that while intuitively plausible, this view is mistaken. Instead, Margalit has a point in indicating a potential feasibility problem for (moral) compromise.

I suggest that the feasibility problem for moral compromise is based on a powerful emotional reluctance towards compromising on moral values. This emotional reluctance, which I call "affective aversion", is likely to overshadow the voice of consequentialist reasoning that might speak in favor of compromise. I argue that affective aversion tends to be our default position towards moral compromise, which potentially reduces its feasibility. I use the qualifier "potentially" because affective aversion can be addressed with the proper antidote. This antidote,

I suggest, is an affective attitude of respect that we experience for each other by virtue of being fellow human beings.

In section II, I develop the notion of affective aversion with reference to research in cognitive science on moral judgment formation. In section III, I assess the implications of affective aversion for two dominant normative conceptions of compromise, principled and pragmatic compromise. I argue that moral compromise is more likely to be realized if it is motivated by principled instead of pragmatic reasons. This means that even if we agree that compromise can only be *justified* for pragmatic reasons (May 2005), our motivation to *realize* moral compromise in practice has to be based on principled reasons.

II. The affective aversion to compromise

In this section, I develop the argument that our attitude towards moral compromise tends to be characterized by an affective aversion to compromise on moral values. The term affective aversion does not merely designate the idea that it is hard to sacrifice one's values. Rather, the affective aversion to compromise is *fundamental* in that it results from the emotion-based, and to a large degree non-conscious, process of moral judgment formation.

The process of moral judgment formation is important in this context because moral disagreement is *constituted* by (conflicting) moral judgments. Thus understood, moral disagreement is essentially a cognitive phenomenon: We have a moral disagreement on, say, abortion or immigration policies, if we have conflicting moral judgments about whether abortion is morally right or wrong or whether immigration policies should be guided by liberal or conservative concerns.

In this sense, compromise is about accommodating the conflicting moral judgments of the parties to a disagreement. To resolve moral disagreement then, compromise-oriented strategies need to take into account the psychological complexity of moral judgment formation. In what follows, I use research in cognitive science on moral judgment formation as a foundation for developing the notion of affective aversion.

It should be noted that two kinds of moral judgment are relevant in the context of compromise. The first kind of judgment pertains to concrete moral issues such as abortion, immigration, the environment, or animal rights. Conflicting judgments on such issues constitute moral disagreement. The second kind of judgment pertains to the decision on whether or not to compromise *on* the first kind of judgment. We might think of the first kind of judgment as “first-order judgments” and of the second kind of judgment as “second-order judgments”. As I will show, second-order judgments (on whether or not to compromise) are inherently linked to the emotional basis of first-order judgments on specific moral issues.

Emotional primacy

I develop the concept of affective aversion in line with the growing consensus in cognitive science that moral judgments emerge primarily from emotional processes. While the list of researchers who endorse this view is long (e.g. Greene et al. 2001; Damasio 1994, 2003; Frijda et al. 2000; Helion and Pizarro 2015; Johnson 2014; LeDoux 1996; Lerner et al. 2015; Nichols 2004), I focus in this paper on three well-established approaches to moral judgment formation:

Jonathan Haidt's *Social Intuitionist Model* (Haidt 2001, 2012), Joshua Greene's *Dual Process Model* (Greene 2008, 2013, 2014), and Jesse Prinz's *Constitution Model* (Prinz 2006, 2007).³

To start with, the “emotional primacy” in moral judgment formation has been prominently articulated in Jonathan Haidt's Social Intuitionist Model, according to which moral judgment is based on intuition by default.⁴ A moral intuition, according to Haidt, emerges from automatic and non-conscious processes. This means that we are not aware of the processes that lead to an intuition, but only of the intuition as such, which we experience as an “affective valence”, such as a feeling of liking or disliking (Haidt 2001, 818).

Unlike moral intuitions, moral reasoning is considered to be slow, effortful and conscious. However, Haidt argues that rather than contributing to genuine judgment formation, moral reasoning serves primarily to justify the judgments that we have already made intuitively.

³ Each model, obviously, takes a slightly different view on the relation between the emotions and moral judgment. The details in which each model differs from each other is, however, not of concern for this paper. The important point is that all three models overlap in the core assumption that the emotions play a significant role in moral judgment formation; and it is this core assumption that is relevant for my argument.

⁴ It should be noted that Haidt's research focuses on intuition rather than on the emotions specifically, while the argument presented in this paper is about emotion, not intuition. That being said, Haidt's research remains relevant for the purpose of my argument, since, in Haidt's understanding, emotions and intuitions share important cognitive features (Haidt 2012, 385). Hence, Haidt's research on what he labels “intuition” is, to a significant degree, also research on the emotions.

Haidt labels this phenomenon “post hoc reasoning” (Haidt 2001, 818). Since we cannot identify the non-conscious processes as the source of our judgments, we refer instead to cultural norms and values to develop post hoc justifications for our judgments.

As an example, consider a person – let us call her Ava – who believes that abortion is morally wrong. We might think that Ava holds this view *because* she believes (among other things) that life begins at conception. However, according to Haidt, Ava’s moral judgment would be better understood in the following way: Based on a variety of external (e.g. cultural) and innate (e.g. evolutionary) influences, Ava has developed the intuition that abortion is wrong. She then contrives the post hoc reason that life begins at conception *in order to justify her intuition* (see Haidt 2001, 817).

The emotional primacy in moral judgment formation is supported by considerable empirical evidence (Greene et al. 2001; Haidt et al. 1993; Schnall et al. 2008; Wheatley and Haidt 2005). For example, one study found that a large majority of study participants continued to condemn a fictive case of consensual incest between two siblings, even after the experimenters were able to refute all of the participants’ specific objections. Eventually, the study participants justified their condemnation with reference to their emotions, stating that they just *feel* that incest is wrong (Haidt 2012). Given the empirical evidence and the increasing consensus in cognitive science on emotional primacy in moral judgment formation, this paper proceeds from the assumption that moral judgment formation is best understood in terms of emotional primacy.

Deontological primacy

Based on neuroscientific research on moral judgment formation, Joshua Greene has formulated a Dual-Process-Model of moral judgment formation, according to which moral judgment can be

based on both, automatic, emotional processes or controlled reasoning processes (Greene 2013, 2014). Greene claims that depending on which of the two processes a judgment is based, the judgment will emerge as a deontological or as a consequentialist judgment. More specifically, Greene claims that automatic, emotional processes tend to support deontological judgments while controlled reasoning processes tend to support consequentialist judgments. He calls this the “central tension principle” (Greene 2014, 699). In Greene’s conception, deontological judgments are characterized by a concern with rights and duties, while consequentialist judgments are characterized by a concern with the consequences that a moral judgment entails.

At this point, one might wonder if the weighing of consequences does not involve emotional processes as well. After all, how can we evaluate the harms and benefits of a specific judgment if we do not experience some kind of emotional feedback? If emotional feedback is necessary for consequentialist judgments, does it make sense to say, as Greene does, that consequentialist judgments are based on reasoning processes?

Greene addresses this concern by pointing out that controlled reasoning also involves the emotions (Greene 2008). But, according to Greene, controlled reasoning processes involve a different *kind* of emotions than automatic processes. In this context, he differentiates between emotions that are “alarm-like” and emotions that are “subtle”. Alarm-like emotions are like powerful commands that tell us “Don’t do it!” or “Must do it!” (Greene 2008, 64). The alarm-like kind of emotions is involved in automatic processes, which tend to cause deontological judgments. In contrast, subtle emotions are more like a “currency” for weighing the pros and cons of a decision. They tell us “such-and-such matters this much. Factor it in” (Greene 2008, 64). The subtle kind of emotions is involved in controlled reasoning processes, which tend to cause consequentialist judgments.

In this paper, I understand the difference between reasoned and automatic moral judgment in accordance with the differentiation proposed by Greene. That is, reasoned judgment is understood to involve subtle emotions while automatic judgment is understood to involve alarm-like emotions.

Now, if we accept both emotional primacy and the central tension principle, the logical consequence is what we might call a “deontological primacy”. That is, if moral judgment is by default based on automatic processes, in the sense that it is based on processes involving alarm-like emotions (emotional primacy) and if automatic processes lead to judgments that tend to be deontological (central tension principle), then, by consequence, moral judgments tend to be deontological by default.

In the context of moral disagreement, deontological primacy means that those involved in a disagreement will not necessarily opt for the solution with the best overall consequences. Instead, they will tend to act according to what *they* think is the morally *right* thing to do, even if that is in opposition to what is best for everyone involved in the conflict. What each person considers to be right will be based on their deontological perspective – which is oftentimes opposed to what might be considered to be right from a consequentialist perspective.

Indeed, I claim that the divergence between deontological and consequentialist conceptions of what is right constitutes a crucial reason why moral compromise is so difficult to achieve. From a consequentialist perspective, compromise is the right thing to do if it leads to the best consequences, such as avoiding violent conflict or political stagnation. From a deontological perspective, however, the threat of violence or political stagnation is not necessarily considered to be a sufficiently good reason to compromise on what is (or what one considers to be) right. I explore this idea in more detail in what follows.

Defending what is right: the deontological aversion against compromise

I suggest in the following that deontological primacy implicates an affective aversion to compromise. More specifically, I suggest that if we morally disagree with another person, we are likely to consider it our moral *duty* to defend our judgments against being compromised. In what follows, I develop an explanation why we experience deontological primacy as a duty to defend, rather than to compromise, our values.

Jesse Prinz's Constitution Model of moral judgment formation, and his conception of self-justifying judgments in particular, are helpful for understanding why deontological primacy constitutes a problem for the feasibility of moral compromise. Prinz's Constitution Model holds that moral judgments are *constituted* by emotions. This means that what we believe to be right or wrong is determined by feelings of approbation or disapprobation respectively (Prinz 2007). Because they are constituted by feelings of approbation or disapprobation, moral judgments are *self-justifying*. More precisely, the feeling of approbation towards the values that we endorse in our judgments inherently conveys the impression that our judgment is justified (Prinz 2006).

According to Prinz, the emotions that constitute a moral judgment convey a sense of moral rightness, because "emotionally grounded moral judgments have a kind of perception-like immediacy that does not seem to require further support" (Prinz 2006, 37). In other words, when we make a moral judgment, we immediately experience a sense of rightness that is directed towards our own moral view and that negates the necessity for further justification. To illustrate this point, let us apply Prinz's account of moral judgment to the example of Ava discussed earlier. According to Prinz's model, if Ava holds the moral judgment that abortion is wrong, she

believes at the same time that this judgment is justified because the feeling of approbation that constitutes her judgment also conveys a sense that her judgment is right.⁵

These considerations allow us to understand why deontological primacy implicates an affective aversion to compromise. In a situation of moral disagreement, the felt deontological duty to do what is right translates into a duty to defend our moral judgment against being compromised, because we emotionally associate our judgment with moral rightness. For this reason, I argue, the second-order judgment on whether or not to compromise is intrinsically linked to the emotional basis of first-order judgments: The feeling of moral rightness that is inherent in first-order judgments emerges also at the level of second-order judgments – namely as the distinct impression that we must not compromise on what we *feel* is the right moral position. This means that the second-order judgment on whether or not to compromise will likely be in favor of defending rather than compromising on our values.

⁵ It should be noted that, for Prinz, a moral judgment can be constituted by both a disposition to experience an emotion and by the actual experience of an emotion. Prinz distinguishes in this context between emotions and sentiments, where a sentiment is the disposition to experience an emotion and an emotion is the actual feeling of bodily changes (Prinz 2006). This means that I can sincerely claim to consider sexism to be wrong, without necessarily experiencing the “perception-like immediacy” of a disapproving emotion (e.g. anger) while making that claim. However, to sincerely hold the moral view that sexism is wrong, I will have to feel anger (or another disapproving emotion) at least in some instances when I am confronted with sexism. Otherwise, if I never feel disapproving emotions in the face of sexism, I cannot not truly hold the view that sexism is wrong (see Prinz 2006).

The analysis of affective aversion indicates that compromise is a very demanding strategy for resolving moral disagreement. Moral compromise requires that we sacrifice some of the values that we consider to be right and concede to the implementation of values that we believe to be wrong. Crucially, we believe the respective values to be right and wrong not merely at the (conscious) level of reasoning, but also at the (non-conscious) visceral level with all its motivational force.

Differences in experiencing affective aversion

I suggest that affective aversion is our default position towards moral compromise. This is so because affective aversion results from the emotions on which moral judgments are based by default. However, it is noteworthy that different persons will likely differ in the *degree* to which they experience an affective aversion to compromise. I propose that two factors are particularly decisive for determining the strength of affective aversion.

First, the degree of aversion will depend on the *stakes* that are involved for the parties to a disagreement. As Scott Atran and Jeremy Ginges point out, the stakes are especially high if the contested values are “fused” with one’s identity. For example, they studied individuals that strongly identified with either a pro-life or pro-choice position on abortion and found that “the greater the fusion with those values, the greater the willingness to take extreme action” (Atran and Ginges 2015, 77-78). Their findings show that the higher the stakes involved, the stronger the urge to defend one’s values – and thus, I submit, the stronger the aversion to compromise.

A second factor that determines the strength of affective aversion pertains to individual differences in “visual” or “verbal” cognitive styles. A visual cognitive style is “inherently concrete” while a verbal cognitive style involves a high level of abstraction (Amit and Greene

2012, 862). That is, visual cognition is concerned with concrete images while verbal cognition is concerned with abstract meaning.⁶

Eleanor Amit and Joshua Greene found that a pronounced visual cognitive style supports deontological judgments while a pronounced verbal cognitive style supports consequentialist judgments (Amit and Greene 2012). Amit and Greene explain this result by pointing out that individuals with a pronounced visual style are more concerned with the *means*, rather than the ends, that a moral decision entails. Importantly, the focus on means implies a focus on the *concrete* implications of a specific moral decision, such as the harm that is to be done in order to achieve a certain goal.

Applied to moral compromise, these findings suggest that when deciding on whether or not to compromise, individuals with a pronounced visual cognitive style will focus on the means necessary to achieve a compromise. This implies that the very idea of a moral compromise is met with an aversive mindset because the means necessary to achieve a moral compromise inherently entail the sacrifice of moral values. Individuals with a pronounced visual cognitive style are therefore likely to experience an increased aversion to compromise because they focus on the harmful means that are required *to achieve* a compromise rather than on the beneficial ends that can be *achieved by* a compromise.

⁶ For example, a person with a pronounced visual cognitive style will think of a chair in terms of a specific chair that she can envision in its particularities; e.g. a comfortable reading chair with soft, beige cushions, stable wooden legs and broad armrests. In contrast, a person with a pronounced verbal cognitive style will think of a chair in terms of its general constituents, e.g. four legs and a seat.

Vice versa, individuals with a pronounced verbal cognitive style tend to focus on the ends or consequences rather than the means of their decision (Amit and Greene 2012). This means that individuals with a verbal cognitive style tend to experience a weaker aversion towards compromise because they focus on the beneficial ends that a compromise can achieve rather than on the sacrifice that a compromise requires.

Note that according to my argument, individuals with both verbal and visual cognitive styles will experience an affective aversion to compromise. This is so because affective aversion is based on emotional primacy, which applies to *first-order* judgments independent of whether someone has a visual or a verbal cognitive style. Different cognitive styles rather make a difference with regard to the *second-order* judgment on whether or not to compromise on a particular first-order judgment. That is, different cognitive styles make a difference with regard to whether (and to what degree) the emotional basis of first-order judgments *translates* into a compromise-aversive attitude at the level of second-order judgments.

More specifically, I suggest that different cognitive styles can make a difference for the strength of affective aversion in second-order judgments, because verbal and visual cognitive styles imply a difference in focus. As indicated above, individuals with a pronounced visual cognitive style tend to focus on the required sacrifice of moral values (meaning that they focus on the very source of affective aversion), while individuals with a pronounced verbal cognitive style tend to focus on what makes compromise desirable: The positive consequences in terms of avoiding conflict and strife.

In sum, I suggest that affective aversion will be experienced more strongly in individuals that have high stakes in a moral conflict and that have a pronounced visual cognitive style. And

conversely, affective aversion will be experienced less strongly for individuals that have lower stakes in a moral conflict and that have a pronounced verbal cognitive style.

However, while theoretically a combination of “low stakes and verbal cognitive style” would increase the feasibility of moral compromise, it would be irresponsible to count on that combination to characterize those involved in a moral disagreement. Indeed, usually it is precisely because the parties to a moral disagreement experience the stakes to be high that the disagreement requires resolution in the first place: The higher the stakes in a moral disagreement, the greater the willingness to engage in violent conflict (Atran and Ginges 2015) – and the greater the need for compromise.

III. Implications for the feasibility of principled and pragmatic compromise

Much of the debate on moral compromise revolves around the normative question whether compromise is justified for principled or for pragmatic reasons (Bellamy 2012; Jones and O’Flynn 2012; May 2005; Weinstock 2013). In this section, I contribute to this debate from the perspective of feasibility. I claim that principled compromise is more feasible than pragmatic compromise. More precisely, I argue that *if* a particular compromise is normatively justified – whether for principled or for pragmatic reasons – we are unlikely to realize that compromise in practice if we are motivated by pragmatic reasons alone. Instead, a principled endorsement of compromise that is based on mutual respect is more likely to provide a sufficiently strong counterweight to affective aversion.

Why pragmatic compromise is unlikely to be feasible

The term “pragmatic compromise” designates the normative view that we should agree to

compromise only if we have pragmatic reasons to do so (May 2005).⁷ According to Simon May, there is no intrinsic appeal to compromise, because compromise inevitably entails sacrifice: “[T]he simple fact that compromise involves some moral loss, however small, stands as an undefeated reason against those moral compromises that are not pragmatically necessary” (May 2005, 348). We therefore should, according to May, only compromise if doing so is advisable from an instrumental perspective; for example, if a compromise is necessary for achieving important moral goals that we cannot achieve otherwise. According to a pragmatic conception of compromise, the desirability of compromise is to be evaluated with regard to consequences, not with regard to principles.

I argue that even if we agree with May’s normative justification of pragmatic compromise, we cannot rely on pragmatic reasons in practice. Pragmatic reasons involve the kind of consequentialist judgment that is unlikely to motivate moral compromise, for two reasons. First, the consequentialist reasoning that underlies pragmatic reasons is not likely to counterbalance our affective aversion to compromise. This is so because consequentialist reasoning involves only the subtle emotions – but in order to counterbalance affective aversion, alarm-like emotions are more promising. I will elaborate on this point below. Here, it is important to recall that, according to Greene’s account of moral judgment formation, alarm-like emotions do not characterize pragmatic reasoning about consequences. Rather, alarm-like

⁷ In a recent expansion of his argument, Simon May (2011) suggests that principled compromise can be justified in personal relationships, but that this does not contradict his argument in favour of pragmatic compromise between citizens.

emotions characterize deontological reasoning, which, I have argued, implicates an aversion to compromise.

Secondly, moral opponents might not even recognize the pragmatic necessity of compromise in its entirety. When we evaluate whether or not to compromise, the pragmatic reasons that we might develop are more likely to be based on post hoc reasoning rather than on genuine reasoning about the necessity of compromise. As post hoc reasons, however, pragmatic reasons will tend to confirm rather than reduce the aversion to compromise.

This claim is based on Haidt's model of moral judgment formation as described earlier. According to Haidt, if we experience strong emotions towards an issue, reasoning takes the form of post hoc reasoning, which aims to confirm the rightfulness of whatever emotional experience we have (Haidt 2001, 2012). And in situations of moral disagreement, the salient emotion is likely an aversion to compromise.

Therefore, even though we might think that we pragmatically compare the costs and benefits of a particular compromise, we are in fact – and under the radar of our awareness – developing reasons that support our intuitive aversion to compromise. We might, for example, search more intensely for reasons against a particular compromise, or we might weigh those reasons more heavily than the reasons that speak in favor of the compromise. I therefore claim that moral opponents are unlikely to compromise on moral issues if they are supposed to be motivated by consequentialist reasoning alone.

The inefficiency of pragmatic reasons for motivating moral compromise is, however, largely underestimated in the literature on compromise. Recall Margalit's counterintuitive claim that compromise is at the same time necessary and impossible. I suggest that underestimating the

motivational inefficiency of pragmatic reasons explains why we might consider Margalit's claim to be counterintuitive.

If we assume that a (normative) pragmatic reason *for* compromise also constitutes a (practical) reason *to* compromise, we will plausibly find it counterintuitive to assume that people can fail to compromise for the sake of peace. In that case, we should indeed be puzzled by the reoccurring phenomenon that, as Margalit puts it, "rational agents [can] fail to reach an intermediary compromise point rather than end in a bloody war" (Margalit 2010, 52). But the idea that compromise is both necessary and impossible is only counterintuitive if we assume that pragmatic reasons are sufficiently motivational for moral opponents to compromise. And, as I have argued above, this is very likely not the case.

In sum, I propose that pragmatic compromise, i.e. compromise that is based solely on pragmatic reasons, is unlikely to be feasible because 1) pragmatic reasoning is characterized by subtle and not by alarm-like emotions (the latter of which, as I will argue in a moment, are more promising for reducing affective aversion); and because 2) pragmatic reasoning is likely to manifest as post hoc reasoning that supports our affective aversion to compromise. Rather than urging us to compromise then, pragmatic reasons are more likely to justify the emotionally salient aversion towards compromising on our values. In the following, I develop the argument that the feasibility of moral compromise increases if compromise is motivated by principled reasons of respect.

Respect-based principled compromise

The term "principled compromise" designates the normative view that compromise can be justified by principled reasons. A principled reason for compromise that is frequently discussed in the literature is respect. For example, Richard Bellamy states that "deep compromises need not

just to *involve* principles but also to *be principled*, showing mutual respect for the views of others” (Bellamy 2012, 465).⁸ In Bellamy’s conception, deep compromises aim to accommodate the concerns of others *as a matter of principle* and that principle is mutual respect. Similarly, Patrick Dobel claims that mutual respect “directs individuals to consider political compromises as the norm” (Dobel 1990, 80). According to Dobel, respect can justify compromise for a variety of reasons. For example, compromise allows individuals to respect the legitimacy of their opponents’ claims or to empower underrepresented groups. A related defense of respect as a principled reason for compromise is developed by Daniel Weinstock, who argues that compromise constitutes a remedy to institutional imperfections regarding democratic respect. More precisely, Weinstock claims that compromise allows to “integrate the concerns of ‘losers’ in recognition of the fact that deliberative mechanisms often fail to embody full satisfaction of the principle of democratic respect and inclusion” (Weinstock 2013, 549).⁹

The argument from feasibility as developed in this paper supports these accounts of principled compromise in the following way. According to a normative account of principled compromise, respect justifies compromise because compromise allows to (partially) accommodate all of the conflicting positions. In this way, compromise provides an opportunity

⁸ Peter Jones makes the interesting argument that respect for beliefs is ultimately respect for the persons holding the beliefs: “The ultimate objects of concern in the principle of respect for beliefs are not beliefs as such but the people who hold them” (Jones 1990, 421). I will argue later that for the purpose of achieving moral compromise, respect for persons rather than respect for beliefs is required.

⁹ For a rejection of respect as a principled reason for compromise, see May 2005.

to express respect for persons with different moral views. According to a principled conception of compromise, a justified compromise therefore presupposes that the involved parties respect each other. A respectful attitude is, as I will show in the following, precisely the mindset that the argument from feasibility supports. To be clear, this paper does not take a stance with regard to the question whether principled compromise is preferable to pragmatic compromise in a normative sense. Rather, my argument is that principled compromise is preferable to pragmatic compromise in the *practical* sense that principled compromise is more likely to be feasible. That is, even if a compromise is justified for pragmatic reasons, we have higher chances to realize that compromise if we have principled reasons to compromise as well.

Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson also advance the view that compromise is more likely if the disagreeing parties respect each other. More specifically, Gutmann and Thompson claim that mutual respect is an essential feature of a “compromising mindset”, i.e. a mindset that supports a general willingness to compromise. According to Gutmann and Thompson, respect is essential for a compromising mindset, because respect constitutes an antidote to the mutual mistrust that makes compromise oftentimes difficult to achieve (Gutmann and Thompson 2012).

While I agree with their claim that compromise requires respect, I propose that respect has a more significant role to play than Gutmann and Thompson suggest.¹⁰ Even though I do not

¹⁰ My understanding of a “compromising mindset” differs from Gutmann and Thompson not only with regard to the precise function of respect, but also with regard to their notion of “principled prudence”, which they consider to be a second feature of a compromising mindset (Gutmann and Thompson 2012, 16). According to Gutmann and Thompson, a mindset that is characterized by principled prudence supports compromise if compromise is preferable to

object to Gutmann and Thompson's argument that respect is important to overcome mutual mistrust, I believe that respect can also serve the – with regard to feasibility – more important function to overcome affective aversion. In what follows, I first clarify what kind of respect is required for increasing the feasibility of moral compromise and, based on the conceptual clarification, I proceed to explain why respect can increase the feasibility of moral compromise.

What kind of respect does compromise require?

What kind of respect is required to increase the feasibility of compromise? The debate on principled compromise refers primarily to a form of respect that can be subsumed under the labels “appraisal respect” or “epistemic respect”.

The notion of appraisal respect derives from Stephen Darwall's differentiation between recognition respect and appraisal respect. Recognition respect designates a form of respect that concerns a person's moral status as a human being while appraisal respect designates a form of respect that concerns a person's qualities of character or behavior (Darwall 1977).

With reference to Darwall's conceptual distinction, May claims that recognition respect “has no bearing on principled compromise” (May 2005, 340), because disrespecting another person's moral status constitutes an injustice that requires correction rather than compromise. Instead, May suggests that appraisal respect is conceptually more pertinent to compromise. As he

alternative options in terms of the consequences that each option entails. Principled prudence thus requires the kind of consequentialist reasoning that, as I have argued, is unlikely to prevail against affective aversion. I therefore disagree with Gutmann and Thompson's claim that principled prudence is an essential feature of a compromising mindset.

puts it, appraisal respect is “the sense in play when it is argued that the value of respect generates principled reasons for moral compromise” (May 2005, 341). But May denies that moral compromise can be justified on the basis of appraisal respect because compromise is not the only way in which we can express respect for another person’s qualities of character (such as their reasonableness).

In a recent critique of May’s argument, Weinstock defends the relevance of respect for justifying principled compromise. He makes use of an epistemic conception of respect, which holds that respect is due as a matter of respecting one’s epistemic peers. That is, if we acknowledge that our reasoning capacities are limited, we ought to respect that others might be as justified in their judgment as (we think) we are. We are then compelled to compromise with those we disagree with “not in virtue of their moral status as fellow citizens, as moral agents, as ends in themselves, or whatever, but in virtue of their status as knowers and as moral reasoners” (Weinstock 2013, 547).

While Weinstock and May disagree about whether appraisal or epistemic respect can *justify* compromise, both seem to agree on a similar conception of respect to be *relevant* for discussing the justification of moral compromise. This is so because both appraisal and epistemic respect concern the reasonableness of moral opponents rather than their humanness.

I suggest, however, that for the purpose of increasing the feasibility of compromise, a different conception of respect is relevant. The problem is that neither epistemic nor appraisal respect is likely to characterize the mindset of those involved in a moral disagreement. On the contrary, research suggests that rather than to acknowledge the reasonableness of our moral opponents, “we see those who disagree with us as biased and incapable of objective reasoning” (Kennedy and Pronin 2008, 845). This speaks against the likelihood of epistemic or appraisal

respect to emerge between the parties to a moral conflict. Rather, the very fact of disagreement will likely be considered to be a reason for epistemic *disrespect*.

One reason why we tend to see our moral opponents as biased is our tendency to assume that however *we* conceive of the world (and of what is right and wrong) reflects an objective reality. If we are objectively right, then whoever disagrees with us must be wrong, or biased at the least. In this sense, we are “naïve realists” (Kennedy and Pronin 2008, 834). This view of naïve realism is also in accordance with Prinz’s conception of self-justifying judgments that I have presented earlier.

According to Prinz, “moral judgments are self-justifying because the emotions that we experience when we grasp those judgments are also responsible for making the judgments true” (Prinz 2007, 88). This means that we mistake the feeling of approbation that constitutes a moral judgment to be reflective of an objective reality. Hence, because *we feel* that we are right, we assume that someone with an opposing moral view must be mistaken. This contradicts the assumption underlying appraisal or epistemic respect that we acknowledge the reasonableness of other people’s judgments even if these contradict our own moral views.

I suggest that instead of appraisal or epistemic respect, a conception of feasible compromise has to rely on the very notion of recognition respect that both May and Weinstock reject as a relevant form of respect in the context of moral compromise. Recognition respect, or so I propose, is more promising in the matter of feasibility because it does not require moral opponents to respect each other in virtue of what the other person thinks, but simply in virtue of being human.

Recognition respect is therefore likely to persist in situations of disagreement where we disapprove of the other person’s moral outlook. That is, *even if* we disagree with someone on

moral values that are important to us, we can still respect that person in virtue of being a fellow human being. In the following, I explain in more detail how recognition respect can increase the feasibility of moral compromise.

How can respect increase the feasibility of moral compromise?

The suggestion that a respectful mindset increases the feasibility of moral compromise is in line with the empirical work of Atran and Ginges, which indicates that displays of respect can increase the likelihood of compromise (Atran and Ginges 2015). However, according to Atran and Ginges, it is not yet clear why respect has this effect on the willingness to compromise. I propose the following explanation.

In a nutshell, I propose that respect increases the willingness to compromise because it involves a *shift of focus* away from contentious *moral judgments* and towards the *persons* involved in a disagreement. This shift of focus makes moral compromise more feasible because drawing attention away from conflicting moral judgments means to draw attention away from the very source of affective aversion. The shift of focus allows us to engage with our moral opponents in their capacity as fellow human beings, rather than as persons that hold – in our view – severely mistaken moral views.

One might object that it is not clear why we should assume that respect *can* shift our focus away from contested issues in the first place. Indeed, the question arises how this assumption would be different from assuming that consequentialist reasoning can shift our focus away from contested issues and towards desirable outcomes. Since I have argued that consequentialist reasoning is unlikely to be an effective counterweight to affective aversion, why would a respectful attitude be more effective?

I argue that respect is more powerful in shifting the focus of attention because it is an *affective* attitude. By this, I mean that respect is not an attitude that we can just decide to have. Instead, respect is better understood as an attitude that is *emotionally cultivated*. This conception of respect as an affective attitude is similar to Karen Jones's conception of trust as an affective attitude (Jones 1996). Jones claims that because trust is affective, it cannot be adopted at will – but it can be cultivated if we focus on what makes us trust each other instead of focussing on reasons for distrust. Similarly, I propose that respect is an affective attitude that cannot be adopted at will, but that can be cultivated if we focus on what we respect in each other instead of focussing on reasons for disrespect.

Why does it matter that respect is affective? The guiding idea here is that an unwanted emotion is best counterbalanced with an “opposite” emotion. This idea has been recognized by influential thinkers such as Baruch Spinoza (Spinoza 2000) or William James (James 1890) and is supported by recent research in psychology that emphasizes the importance of the emotions in influencing (moral) judgments and attitudes (Haidt 2012, Lerner et al. 2015). In line with this research, I suggest that an effective remedy to the affective aversion to compromise is to cultivate an affective attitude of respect.

As an affective attitude, respect also increases the feasibility of moral compromise because it is not subject to choice. That is, we cannot simply *decide* to feel respect or disrespect in concrete situations. More precisely, if we have cultivated an affective attitude of respect, we cannot suddenly decide *not* to feel respect for someone else, in case that we disagree with that person's moral outlook.

Still, one might object that my argument neglects the possibility that we might experience a strong emotional reaction (such as fear) towards the *consequences* of not compromising. When

we think about the potential violence and destruction that might result if we do not compromise in a moral conflict, will we not experience a strong motivation to compromise, even on dearly held values? In that case, pragmatic reasons would constitute a powerful counterweight to affective aversion, which would question my earlier rejection of this claim.

As intuitively plausible as this objection might seem, it is not justified psychologically. If Greene's central tension principle is correct, thinking about consequences is inherently less emotional than thinking about means. This is so because the mental processes that we employ when we think about consequences do not involve the kind of alarm-like emotions that characterize our concern with means. A concern with consequences is therefore not likely to provide a sufficiently strong emotional counterbalance to affective aversion.

This point is supported by further empirical research. Atran and Ginges have shown that in situations of moral conflict, thinking about consequences does not significantly influence decision-making, even if the consequences *should* be emotionally salient. For example, they found that even "the prospects of crippling economic burdens and huge numbers of deaths do not necessarily sway people from positions on whether going to war or opting for revolution is the right or wrong choice" (Atran and Ginges 2015, 71). It therefore stands to reason that the affective aversion to compromise tends to persist in spite of potentially terrifying consequences of not compromising.

In sum, I suggest that respect, understood as an affective attitude that has been cultivated over time, is an emotion-based mental state that can guide our interactions with others independent of whether or not we disagree with their moral views. Therefore, even though we will still experience an affective aversion to compromise on moral issues, an affective attitude of respect makes moral compromise more feasible because it means that aversion is not the only

behaviour-guiding emotion that we experience: Having cultivated a respectful mindset, we also feel the pull of respect which, as a matter of principle, can lead us towards compromise.

IV. Conclusion

This paper has addressed the question whether moral compromise is feasible. Section II has shed light on potential feasibility problems for moral compromise that emerge from the emotional basis of moral judgments (i.e. the very judgments that are the subject of moral compromise). With reference to research in cognitive science on moral judgment formation, I have developed the argument that we are likely to experience an affective aversion towards compromising on moral values.

Section III has focused on the implications of affective aversion for the feasibility of principled and pragmatic compromise respectively. I have argued that pragmatic compromise is not likely to be feasible because the consequentialist reasoning on which it is based is unlikely to provide an effective counterweight to affective aversion. I have suggested that principled compromise, in contrast, can be feasible if it is motivated by an affective attitude of respect.

The conclusion of this paper therefore is that whether (and to what degree) moral compromise is feasible depends on whether we aim to achieve a respective compromise with reference to pragmatic or principled reasons. This also means that whichever conception of compromise we prefer from a normative perspective, in practice, we are well advised to endorse a principled conception of compromise. May claims that “a willingness to engage in (...) moral compromise is best understood as a healthy pragmatism in the pursuit of a basic humanist commitment” (May 2005, 323). Ironically, contrary to May’s claim, in practice, healthy pragmatism consists in principled rather than pragmatic reasons for compromise.

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