

### 1.1

In line with Moore, Smith claims that we should start our ethical investigations by starting with metaethics. Smith claims that 'philosophers have surely been right to give metaethical questions a certain priority over questions in normative ethics.' (pg 2) After all, if moral disagreement is not correctly explained as being a kind of rational disagreement, then it is unclear how we are to have an objective morality. Smith is committed to defending the claim that moral disagreement is a kind of rational disagreement, and that an analysis of 'should' will support this claim.

### 1.2

There is no uncontroversial position in metaethics. As we have seen, for any stance one can take, there always seems to be a plausible argument to the contrary. Even among moral skeptics (those who deny that there are moral facts), it is not uncontroversial as to whether or not moral claims are truth-apt. Among those who claim moral facts exist, their nature is controversial. Smith intends to diagnose the lack of dominant views in metaethics.

### 1.3

Smith takes it as his starting point that morality has two distinctive features.

**Morality is Objective:** Moral questions have correct answers, are made correct by objective moral facts, and moral facts are wholly determined by circumstances. (pg 6)

**Morality is Practical:** Morality has practical implications. 'Should' is to be analyzed as a reason to act. (pg7)

These two features, however, are inconsistent with a widely accepted theory of human psychology. According to the *Humean theory of motivation* there are two main kinds of psychological states. The first are *beliefs*. Beliefs are supposed to be the kind of psychological entity that represent the world in a particular way. Beliefs are true if they represent the world correctly, and false otherwise. The second are *desires*. Desires are supposed to be a piece of our psychology which represents the way the world is to be. Desires are not truth-apt as they do not even purport to represent the way that the world is.

Given these differences between belief and desire, Hume would conclude that the two were always separable (i.e. logically independent). In fact, desires are not, according to Hume, rationally criticizable *at all*. Desires can be non-rationally changed by new beliefs, but that is all. (e.g. spiders, pg 8) As one qualification, the Humean picture does allow that some desires are rationally criticizable when and only when they are based on false beliefs. When a false belief produces a desire, then that desire is (in a sense) built on a bad foundation.

**The Humean Model:** a model of human psychology whereby beliefs inform us as to how the world is. These desires inform us as to how the world is to be, which

then produces new beliefs about how we need to change the world to align with those desires. Actions are the product of these two psychological states.

The Humean Model has an interesting consequence when combined with the two features of morality. On the Humean model, a moral judgment (a belief) that one ought to  $\phi$ , does *not* entail that one has a reason to  $\phi$ , but the practicality of moral judgment claims we do. Worse, the Humean model also removes the ability to rationally criticize those who do not have such reasons. On the Humean model we only have reason to do what we have a desire to do. Our moral judgements, then, would just be *expressions* of our desires.<sup>1</sup> This division between the two features of morality and the Humean model explain, according to Smith, why metaethical questions generate so much disagreement. This challenge is what Smith calls *the moral problem*.

Given that all three claims cannot all be true at the same time, much of the literature in metaethics can be seen as a debate about which of the three to reject. You could reject that moral questions have correct answers and arrive at a version of expressivism. You could reject that moral judgements have practical implications. You could reject the Humean model. However, in denying one of these three claims, Smith views their denials as less plausible than the claim itself. Each of the theorists who reject one of these adobe positions, according to Smith, 'argue that the [position] that they reject, as opposed to the propositions the others reject, is a mere philosophical fantasy; something to be explained away. But...no matter which [position] these philosophers choose to reject, they are bound to end up denying something that seems more certain than the theories they themselves go on to offer. (pg 13)

#### 1.4

Smith's goal is to defend the idea that morality claims are both objective and practical while also allowing that beliefs and desires are distinct. Smith will, contrary to Hume, argue that there are *two* kinds of reasons: motivating and normative. The Humean model will be argued to apply *only* to motivating reasons. A second category of reasons, according to Smith, cannot be accounted for on the Humean model. These are *normative reasons*. Normative reasons, in contrast to motivating reasons, *are* subject to rational criticism. Hence, the solution to the moral problem is not to deny the Humean model, but to show that there are more than one kind of reason. If Smith is successful, then there is no reason to reject the objectivity of morality, that morality is practical, nor that the Humean model is correct (insofar as it is only an explanation of motivating reasons).

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<sup>1</sup> Ayer has entered the chat.