

Phil 290-2, October 2, 2006

Some notes on Smith

What we want to explain: the necessary connection between normative judgment and motivation.

According to Smith:

If I believe that I ought to phi, then it is irrational of me to fail to desire to phi.

Smith's explanation

According to the analysis, the belief that we have a normative reason to phi, or that it is desirable that we phi, can be represented as the belief that we would desire to phi if we were fully rational. But now, suppose we believe that we would desire to phi if we were fully rational and yet fail to desire to phi. Are we irrational? We most certainly are. And by our own lights. For we fail to have a desire that we believe that it is rational for us to have (177).

Two interpretations:

Literal: If I believe that I ought to phi, then I believe that I would desire, if I were fully rational, to phi.

Official: If I believe that I ought to phi, then I believe that I would desire, if I were fully rational, that, as I am, I desire to phi (or simply that, as I am, I phi).

Literal interpretation:

Suppose I believe that I ought to phi, but do not desire to phi.

(a) Do I believe that I am not fully rational?

- I will not conclude this from my belief that I ought to phi, unless I also believe that I do not desire to phi (and I may well conclude this if I believe, falsely, that I do not desire to phi).
- At any rate, I presumably already believe that I am not fully rational.

(b) Do I believe that *my failing to desire to phi* is irrational?

- What follows from the fact (if it is a fact) that I would desire, if I were fully rational, to phi?
- *Perhaps:* If I am otherwise fully rational, then it would be irrational of me to fail to desire to phi.
- *Less obvious:* If I am not otherwise fully rational, then it is irrational of me to fail to desire to phi. Problem of the second-best.

(c) Is my failing to desire to phi *actually* irrational?

- Not unless we assume: If one *believes* that one is being irrational in not desiring to phi, then one *is in fact* being irrational in not desiring to phi.
- This claim entails that a certain kind of belief is self-verifying.
- In any event, this claim seems pretty close to the principle to be explained. How much progress has really been made?

Official interpretation:

Suppose I believe that I ought to phi, but do not desire to phi.

(a) Do I believe that I am not fully rational?

- I am not fully rational does *not* follow from: (i) if I am fully rational, I desire that, as I am, I desire to phi, and (ii) I don't desire to phi.
- I am not fully rational *does* follow from: (i) if I am fully rational, I desire that, as I am, I desire to phi, and (iii) I don't desire that, as I am, I desire to phi.
- It might also follow from: (i) if I am fully rational, I desire that, as I am, I desire to phi, (ii) I don't desire to phi, and (iv) if I desire that, when fully rational, I desire to phi, and I am fully rational, then I desire to phi.
- Again, presumably I already believe that I am not fully rational.

Similar problems as before under (b) and (c).