

Phil 104, January 23, 2007
Hume: Moral Judgment

III:i:1: The negative argument

The motivational part of the argument

- (1) Our judgments that people are vicious or virtuous must motivate us.
- (2) As we saw earlier, conclusions of reason cannot motivate us.
- (3) Therefore, our judgment that people are vicious or virtuous cannot be conclusions of reason.

Questions about (2), i.e. the argument from last time:

First argument:

- (A) Reasoning is either logical/mathematical, or causal.
- (B) So-called “reasoning” about what we ought to desire as an end is neither logical/mathematical, or causal.
- (C) Therefore, it is not really reasoning.

Problems?

Second argument:

- (A) Desires are “original existences”: desires don’t represent the world, say how it is.
- (B) Conclusions of reason do represent the world, say how it is.
- (C) Therefore, desires can neither contradict, nor agree with conclusions of reason.

Problems?

Questions about (1):

Why *must* moral judgments motivate us? Argument: Suppose a rich man says: “Giving to charity is virtuous,” but never gives to charity himself. We might think that he is either (i) insincere, or (ii) ignorant of what “virtuous” means.

Problems?

The epistemological part of the argument

In the rest of the chapter, Hume puts aside the problem of how moral evaluations could motivate action, if they were conclusions of reason, and asks instead how moral evaluations could be conclusions of reason at all.

- (1) If moral evaluations are conclusions of reason, then they must either be conclusions about relations of ideas, like the conclusions of logic and mathematics, or conclusions about matters of fact.
- (2) Moral evaluations cannot be conclusions about recognized relations of ideas.
 - (i) The only relations are “resemblance, contrariety, degrees in quality, and proportions in quantity and number.”
 - (ii) Inanimate objects can stand in these relations just as well as persons.
 - (iii) Inanimate objects can’t be virtuous or vicious.
- (3) Moral evaluations cannot be conclusions about hitherto unrecognized relation of ideas.

- (i) The relation in question would have to be between and only between states of mind and external circumstances. Moral good and evil consist in having certain intentions in certain situations.
 - (ii) But it is difficult to imagine any relation that might obtain between states of mind and circumstances that could not also obtain between two states of mind or two situations.
- (i) This relation would have to be “*obligatory* on every rational mind” (465).
 - (ii) This is a *causal* claim, about the effects of this relation on rational minds. (?)
 - (iii) Causal claims are matters of fact, not claims about relations of ideas.
- (4) Moral evaluations cannot be conclusions about matters of fact.
- (i) Just try for yourself to find it!

Hume’s famous conclusion: You cannot deduce an “ought” from an “is.”

III:i:2: The positive argument:

If our moral evaluations are not beliefs about vice and virtue, then what are they?

1. Dispositionalism:

“X is virtuous” means “X causes a certain feeling in me”

2. Expressivism:

“X is virtuous” means “Hooray X!” where this just expresses a certain feeling about X.

3. Projectivism:

“X is virtuous” means “X has a certain quality,” where the quality is in fact a certain feeling that I have and that I have, unwittingly, projected onto X.