

David Hume - his assertion that as something being wonderful does not imply that it ought to be for facts and morals are unconnected (and vice versa) - an ought is not an is and an is is not an ought for they are two separate things

Here is an argument.

- 1 When you do what you ought to because you ought to, you are doing what is moral.
- 2 The boy is feeding the poor.
- 3 The boy is morally good.

Many say this argument looks correct but it does not follow that the boy is morally good because of the fact that he feeds the poor. An ought cannot be derived from a fact or an is. If they are right then what?

Then the argument contradicts morality.

It shows that nearly everybody is wrong about morality for they would accept the argument right away and indeed think that way every minute of every day.

The argument is a lie.

The argument is not logical.

The argument is all in your head.

The argument is really an assumption or emotion disguised as an argument.

Many people merely feel that the boy is moral. That is all that they are doing and they don't want to admit it. Feeling somebody is moral is useless for the Nazis felt Hitler was moral. They will claim to know that the boy is moral which shows that moral thinking does have totalitarian inclinations. That is how ideology starts, "I know!"

Even if the argument made sense in itself, it is made valueless in practical terms by the fact that you never see into the heart of another no matter how hard you try. Look into your own and you will see many twists and confusions. There are lots of hearts out there broken over the mistake of thinking otherwise.

The argument makes the assumption that if we can see the boy feeding the poor, we can also see he is morally good. This implies that you are ready to see him as morally bad if he does not. You falsely claim to KNOW he is. But that would mean judging somebody as evil just because you feel they are. Yet morality insists you have no right to do this. Christ said you must not judge by appearances but fairly. Feelings are no reason to condemn anybody's actions.

Morality is incoherent. It is prejudice masquerading as virtue. That would not mean you can ditch it for the alternative is worse. It would be a necessary evil. It shows that because of its bad side it has to be approached with extreme caution and we need to watch out for its guardians.

Here is another version of the argument. This time it is about morality but not morality as in helping others.

- 1 When you do what you ought to, you are doing what is moral.
- 2 The boy is going to Mass or saying a prayer.
- 3 The boy is morally good.

If the previous version of the argument was catastrophic this is terrible beyond words.

We conclude that if morality is hypocritical then we can do without religion adding in "morals" that make it worse. The boy is being degraded by the argument no matter how good Christians feel about his behaviour.

WHAT DID HUME SAY?

We see then the essential reasons for thinking facts do not give you morals. What had David Hume who said just that have to say about it?

David Hume published Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding in 1748.

His points.

Moral philosophy is the science of human nature - it is about what people are and what they are like.

In other words, it is human nature to want to be good and sometimes to be bad. Whether we can be really good or not is beside the point. [Notice how he has assumed that the religious view that morality is about how God wanted to make people and what they are like is wrong. He keeps it human. God is left out and thus opposed. I say opposed for God is usually seen as morality in some sort of divine personal form.]

The error here is in confusing good with morality. The law giving the criminal freedom and a nice holiday would be good but immoral according to most people.

Morality is about control not goodness as such. It implies that you must do good - whatever people think that means - and suffer retribution if you do not. Retribution is about giving you what you deserve. If you are sent to jail to reform you or to put others off committing crimes that is not punishment. Its not concerned about what you have earned. It is not dignifying either.

Christianity used to teach that those who hated the innocent deserved to be hated in return. Now it says that they deserve punishment but not the punishment of being hated. If that is true then retribution is wrong and they have no right to punish anybody. Their doing so is hatred. They make hypocrites of themselves.

Some philosophers think his point could be reworded, "People should seek to be happy." That admits the fact that we like to be happy. It is about what we are. We cannot want plenty of sex partners, money, glory and power for themselves. They are not ends in themselves. They are used to trigger the mechanism that allows happiness to be experienced.

We notice a new difficulty here. If we are here to be happy then we will and can wish it could be done with avarice and greed and unbridled sex. The idea is that with happiness we cannot make it happen but have to do things to let it happen. Working to be happy makes you fear that you will slide and lose the happiness. From that it follows that all that is wrong with rampant drinking and drugs and sex and violent video role playing games is the health consequences. Otherwise if they open the door to happiness even short-term they are morally good!

If "people should seek to be happy" is false, then being a good person is just absurd. Being a moral person is absurd.

But notice this, "people should seek to be happy" is inconsistent. It is an absurdity. Should implies, "Force the person to do this on pain of retribution." But forcing a person to want to be happy or to try to be happy is self-contradictory. Happiness cannot be compelled. And to bring in retribution says, "Thankfully those who do not seek to be happy will suffer for it." If happiness is so good then its a contradiction to say that somebody should be unhappy. To oppose somebody's happiness is to oppose their wellbeing and to act as if you hated them.

There is no way we can find ultimate justification for what we say is morally right and morally wrong.

This is not saying that there is no such thing as right and wrong. It only says that if we do something we cannot prove that it really was right or wrong. If we think we can we are oversimplifying.

The reason is because we cannot work out an ought from an is.

The "is" statement is never an "ought" statement. That is what is being claimed. It is no different from saying a maths statement is never a history statement. They are different kinds of statements.

Now to say action x is evil is to put an ought in there. Evil by definition is that which has to be fought by necessary evil. Evil is that which cannot be tolerated. It says to you, "I am a situation that should not be let to happen." So evil goes with a call to be hated. So with the evil vanquished good will flood into the vacuum. If I destroy an evil situation I do not put good in it but put in a space for good to rush in. Strictly speaking I never directly work on good.

Last thoughts

A fact is just a fact and it is not about compassion love and justice. Hume says then say justice can never be a fact. Ending John's agony does not mean it is a duty or morally good or otherwise to help John.

It is advantageous for us to learn basic mathematics. It does not follow that we ought to learn basic mathematics.

It is good to learn the basics. To say we ought to learn is to suggest that we agree to be forced if we refuse. An ought that we can ignore with impunity is not an ought at all. Ought implies law. A law needs to punish those who break it or its not a law at all.

If you define morality as a duty then it must be a fact that it is a duty. But to call it a duty puts Hume is against you. Some might say it is not a duty but a gift for true goodness should not be forced. So a redefinition might be in order. Those who say morality makes you free - Jesus said that too - deny you are free to argue, "I see no duty to agree that morality exists." So it is not so free after all!

Morality cannot be shown to be something that is knowable as a fact in itself. It cannot even agree with itself as it challenges freedom.