

HUME AND HIS PROPOSAL THAT MORALS ARE SUBJECTIVE AND ABOUT EMOTIONS NOT FACTS

David Hume reasoned that as hurting somebody has nothing to do with proving it to be wrong or immoral (a fact cannot give rise to a moral ought) that morals are subjective. They are about what we want to feel is right and wrong.

If there is no other reason why hurting means it has to be wrong to hurt then Hume is right.

If morality is based on reason and morality is real then it follows that in so far as feelings are involved it is immoral. People do try to give feelings a say more or less. Real morality then must be based on reason alone. If morality is feelings to any degree then that is not morality.

If morality is partly feelings that could be tolerable but not ideal but if it is solely feeling that means there is no morality.

Does it make sense to say that morality is based both on reason and emotion and then to say that the emotions part is bad? It does if you see the emotions as a necessary evil. The emotions would be subject to reason. Reason tells you what feelings to encourage. So emotions and reason do not have equal importance.

Objection: Hume said that morality is based on human feelings. Is this not deriving an ought from an is?

Reply: He didn't say morality ought to be based on feelings. So the answer is no.

Hume is not claiming that morality really exists but is based on human feelings. He is merely saying that what we call morality is based on them. Morality talk is talk about feelings and morality is feelings. He was really saying that what is called morality is not morality at all but just feelings disguised as morality. Morality for Hume was not about real right and real wrong but about what humans wanted to be right and wanted to be wrong. He is not saying morality is real in itself. It is only real in our heads. He divorced morality the doctrine of the ought from the ought so he meant something different from the word. He redefined it.

He was not deriving an ought from an is.

Another reply is to say he was but that does not mean we should disregard what he claimed. We could modify it. If an is can be an ought, it doesn't have to be one all the time or in every case.

Suppose morality is feelings that we ought to have. That still makes morality about the ought for you are told what feelings to have.

The person who denies that morality is based on feeling is further away from the truth. The person who bases morality on God not on feelings then is a bad person.

Somebody agreeing with Hume knows what the truth about morality is even if he or she is a bit of a hypocrite. Its about selecting the best out of a number of imperfect options. Suppose Hume is right. The more one claims to know that morality is about real right and real wrong - ie objectively true - the more one should be intolerant. It is a wonder that they are not. And we will see how dangerous it is to claim to know. And if morality is not real then who cares about tolerance?

Objection: Ought depends on what your purpose is. You ought to run faster if your goal or intention is to win the race. If your purpose is to satisfy your feelings and be controlled by them that you ought to do so. If Hume agreed then he was saying that morality ought to be based on feelings. Therefore he was deriving an ought from an is even though he said you cannot do that!

To say that if you want to do something you ought to do what helps you achieve it is to use ought not in the moral sense but in the pragmatic sense. Its just a figure of speech.

Ought has to do with morality only. The use of the word in the pragmatic context is just misuse.

Instead then of saying, "You ought to run faster if your goal or intention is to win the race", you will have to say, "You will want to run faster if your goal or intention is to win the race." That is because it cannot be said to be moral to win the race. You will not be punished for failing.

To say Ought depends on what your purpose is is to make a ridiculous assumption. It says that whatever you do to fulfil

your purpose is moral. But morality is about the notion that not just any purpose will do. It approves of some and condemns others. Its contradictory to say that morally or ought only depends on what you intend.

Is morality real? Should we conclude that it does not matter as long as it seems to help?

But if it is not real it is not really helping.

Believers in God can't accept this conclusion. They try to reinforce morality and make it look more solid than what it is. They even say it is God's objective and unchangeable will.

Reason says that if morality is immaterial then using God to make it matter only makes it worse. This argument shows that there is something badly wrong with the notion that morality does not matter.

There could be real morality but because we are programmed to follow our feelings our motive is not to be moral but to satisfy our needs.

This view implies that a moral God is irrelevant and unnatural for us.

It implies that the priests who try to make us dependent on the notion of God are exploiting and mistreating us.

An implication is that religion is intrinsically dangerous for it rejects the fact that morality as we have it is feeling.

And religion is dangerous in itself and even more so in its implications. If I have the right to say that my feelings of abhorrence for say murder prove that murder really is wrong and abominable I have to agree that if a person feels hatred for Muslims the person has the right to kill them.

Do I help another person because I wish to fulfil the desire to help that person. Or do I do it to help the person and not to fulfil the desire to help the person though I have that desire?

Morality says I must do it to help the person. But surely the reasonable will not care about the motive as long as you act? Of course they will not care. A morality that makes things matter when they don't is a pack of lies. Insisting your motive has to be about the person is just unloving in that sense.

Is to feel love for a person really feeling love for a person? Is it rather a case of feeling love for yourself that is externalised? Do you really love the feeling not the person? The answer is yes. Read the previous paragraph again and see why. Love for another works though it is not really love for another. This proves that religion is nonsense. By trampling upon human nature in the way it does, religion shows that it is a block to how well love can work.

Suppose its true that morality is feeling not fact.

The view that I can know what is really objectively best or not so good is simply false. If I say its immoral to be full of pride then I contradict myself if I claim to know what is right and wrong. Its amazing arrogance to claim that I know. I may disguise that arrogance as humility but it is arrogance of the worst kind. Brazen arrogance is easier to correct in yourself and others. You can't blind yourself to what it is like you can with disguised arrogance.

The stronger I claim to know the more arrogant I become. This is a problem if there is such a thing as objective morality. It is a catastrophe if there isn't!

Those who say, "You think that homosexuality or capital punishment are immoral. You have a right to your opinion", may need correction. It may not be an opinion. It may be a perception of a fact. To falsely say it is a merely an opinion, is to fail to promote a workable morality. It seeks to delude people if morality is feeling not facts.

Some say that some facts are more important than others. Some models about what is real are more accurate than others. So important and accurate bring in and involve an ought. Important and accurate are value words. They are about valuing and about the ought for ought is about valuing.

But notice that even getting to what is fact about the universe involves some ought, in that some descriptions of reality more accurate than others. Scientific method is an ought for getting at what is.

If you tell a very heavy drinker he is at huge risk of dying prematurely he will accuse you of preaching. It is dishonest then if you say, "I am not preaching. I am only giving you a fact." He sees there is an is there from which an ought is derived. Science preaches too.

Finally

"Think of how to describe something is not to prescribe it. A description is not a prescription. There is no way one can demand the other or lead to the other. Teaching is not preaching and preaching is not teaching." This is the view that you cannot get an ought from an is. There are moral facts. Kindness is good even if the consequences are bad for the consequences are not its fault. The ought sometimes is the is and vice versa. A description being different from a prescription does not mean that times the two are one and the same.