

### III The Humean Theory of Motivation

#### Smith's two sorts of reasons, and a third

*Normative reason:* you have reason to get off the person's foot, even if you don't want to;

*Motivating reason:* your desire to hurt the person (and your belief that this hurts) is the reason you keep standing on their foot;

*Psychological but non-intentional reason:* your drunkenness is the reason that you think that standing on their foot is the best way to hurt them.

The Humean theory of motivation is a theory about the second of these. There is a substantial philosophical thesis that all normative reasons must be grounded in desires (sometimes called internalism about reason); but that is somewhat independent of our primary focus here. You could think that all reasons must be grounded in desire, and still think that somebody had a normative reason to do something without a motivating reason; perhaps they hadn't realized that this act would satisfy their desire.

#### Causal explanations

There is a long-standing debate about whether reasons are causes. Many philosophers used to deny that they were. Donald Davidson pointed out that even if we have a desire for something, and a belief that a certain action will bring that thing about, we don't get an explanation of the corresponding action unless we think that the belief and desire caused that action (and caused it, moreover, in the right way).

#### Phenomenology of Desire

Smith argues that it is not a necessary feature of desires that they have a certain phenomenology (i.e. a certain feel) attached. Perhaps certain desires must (hunger for instance); but this is not generally so. Smith only considers certain sorts of phenomenology though. There is a worry for Smith's approach from the fact that when the phenomenology is completely lacking (or perhaps where there is an inappropriate phenomenology) we are reluctant to ascribe desires. Consider compulsion. Philip Quinn gives the example of a compulsive radio-switcher-on-er: he switches on every radio he can find, entirely without any pleasure or satisfaction. Would we say that he wanted to switch the radios on? (Similarly, Anscombe has the example of someone who says, inexplicably, 'I want a pin'; and then, when you give it to them, says simply 'Thank you, my wish is gratified', and puts the pin down.) Could it be that desires have to involve pleasure in the satisfaction; or, more plausibly, pleasure in the anticipation of satisfaction?

#### Desires as Functional Roles and Dispositions

For Smith here, a functional role just is a bunch of dispositions: dispositions to act in certain ways given certain beliefs. Dispositions are clearly related to counterfactuals (statements about

what I would do if ...) but probably shouldn't be identified with them. The dispositions all have a distinctive, mind-world direction of fit.

## Pro-Attitudes

Smith is explicit (p.55) that distinguishing states with a mind-world direction of fit from desires is not a deep objection (he considers hopes and wishes). His response is just to introduce the term 'pro-attitude' (from Davidson) and rephrase the Humean theory in terms of that. But he needs to be careful here. For if the claim is just that anything that gets one to act counts as a desire, then of course whenever we act there will be a desire. In fact Smith is surely not saying that (witness his response to the claim that there might be states with both directions of fit). So we are left with the thought that desires have certain features (that makes the Humean theory non-trivial); and then we can explore whether every action is motivated by states that have those features. One class of states that we shall go on to consider at length is the class of intentions. Intentions have features that plausibly distinguish them from desires (for instance they are under our control in a way that desires are not, they have a different phenomenology); and yet they are plausibly motivating.

## Attitudes with Both Directions of Fit

Some philosophers want to acknowledge the possibility of states that are both belief like and desire like; 'besires' as they are sometimes called. It is sometimes thought that moral judgments are like this: moral judgments are truly judgments, and hence are a kind of belief; but at the same time they involve a disposition to change the world in a certain way (moral internalism). Smith's argument is that these states are incoherent, since no state can simultaneously have both directions of fit. But that seems to muddle up the content of the states with different directions of fit. A belief that, say, racism is wrong, doesn't bring with it a desire to change the world so that it was no longer the case that racism is wrong. Rather it brings a desire to change the world so that there is less racism in it. So Smith's argument is going to have to be that admitting such states brings us no explanatory advantage, so we shouldn't admit them; an application of Ockham's razor.

## Smith's later work

In a subsequent book (*The Moral Problem*) Smith tried to reconcile the Humean theory of motivation with moral internalism (i.e. the thesis that moral beliefs are essentially motivating). Very briefly, his line is that to make a moral judgment that an action is good is to judge that one would desire to perform that action if one were fully rational; and then to argue that rational agents will desire what they judge they will desire if rational. So beliefs and desires are still quite distinct, though rational agents will come to desire what they judge good.