HOW NOT TO BE MUDDLED BY A MEDDLESOME MUGGLETONIAN

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I. Introduction

Before reading Richard Holton's 'Reason, value and the Muggletonians' [3], we did not know anything about Ludowick Muggleton (1609-1698) or the Christian sect he founded. Even now Holton's paper is the source of almost everything we know about Muggleton, his cousin Reeve, their teachings and their followers. Nevertheless, we are certain that Holton is mistaken in claiming that this sect poses a counter-example to the analysis of value which Smith proposes in *The Moral Problem* [8]. There must be at least one respect in which, we are sure, Holton has misdescribed the beliefs, desires or values of the Muggletonians.

Now this might sound presumptuous. 'How could the ignorant Bigelow and Smith be so sure that the knowledgeable Holton has misdescribed the Muggletonians when, as they admit, Holton knows so much more about them?' But our worries bear not on Holton's historical research but rather on the words he selects to express his results, and the ways in which he links those words to the words Smith uses in framing his analysis of value. Holton is arguing against a philosophical analysis, so defenders of this analysis are entitled to argue a priori from their armchairs.

We take the historical Muggletonians as a springboard for a range of different thought experiments, stretching over various possible ways the Muggletonians could have been, and searching for any one of those possible ways which might constitute a counter-example to Smith's analysis of value. If the actual Muggletonians did not actually quite do what Holton's argument requires of them, then imagine – if you can – quasi-Muggletonians who do. Yet it does not matter which way you turn in your descriptions and redescriptions of the historical case, neither the Muggletonians nor any of their possible counterparts constitute a counter-example to Smith's analysis of value. This, in any case, is to be our argument.

II. Smith's Theory

In a number of papers [6, 7, 9, 10], and in *The Moral Problem* [8], Smith has put forward an analysis of what we might call the 'normatively valuable', and of the counterpart attitude of 'normatively valuing':

> X's ϕ-ing in C is normatively valuable iff X would desire that she ϕs in C if she were fully rational;
> X normatively values her ϕ-ing in C iff X believes that she would desire that she ϕs in C if she were fully rational.

It is the latter of these two analyses which Holton claims to have refuted by counter-example.

Holton argues against Smith's analysis by *reductio*. If Smith's analysis were correct then it would be logically impossible for someone to normatively value (say) obedience to their creator in all circumstances, and yet also at the same time to believe that if they were fully *rational* then they would *not* desire that they be obedient to their creator in *any* circumstances. Yet this is not logically impossible at all, says Holton: it cannot be logically impossible because it has actually happened in the case of Muggleton and his followers. Or so Holton maintains.

III. Holton's Muggletonian Argument

Holton's argument aims to establish two lemmas, from which the final conclusion follows. In fact, from the Muggletonian material Holton presents, each of his two lemmas is implicitly double-barrelled:

First Lemma
> 1.1 The Muggletonians *did not* normatively value disobedience to their creator; and
> 1.2 the Muggletonians *did* normatively value obedience to their creator.

Second Lemma
> 2.1 The Muggletonians *did* believe that, if they were fully rational, then they would desire for themselves in their actual circumstances that they be *disobedient* to their creator; and
> 2.2 the Muggletonians *did not* believe that, if they were fully rational, then they would desire for themselves in their actual circumstances that they be *obedient* to their creator.

Conclusion
> Smith's analysis is refuted by a sound counter-example.

Smith's analysis is given in a biconditional of the form:

> A if and only if B

(crudely, 'someone values . . . iff and only if they believe . . . ').
> Yet from 1.1 and 2.1 we have:

> not-A and yet B

('they do not value disobedience yet they do believe . . . '); and from 1.2 and 2.2 we have:

> A and yet not-B

('they do value obedience yet they do not believe . . . '); and either of these would be sufficient to show that Smith is mistaken in saying that A is true if and only if B. This argument is valid, and so to block Holton's conclusion we have to claim that at least one of the Lemmas is false. We present Holton with a dilemma.

There is one possible way of interpreting the Muggletonian case, one internally consistent history, which would ensure that Holton's First Lemma would indeed be true. Under this construal of the case, the Muggletonians did normatively value obedience to their creator. In that case, we will argue, Holton's Second Lemma would be sure to be false: the Muggletonians in any such case would be certain to have exactly the beliefs required by Smith's analysis, at least as tacit beliefs if not as explicitly avowed ones.

There is another way of interpreting the Muggletonian case, and this second interpretation is one which would make Holton's Second Lemma true. On this second interpretation, the Muggletonians did *not* believe, even tacitly, that being fully rational would lead them to desire that people be obedient to their creator. However, in a case like that the First Lemma would certainly fail. If the Muggletonians did not think that being fully rational would lead them to desire that people be obedient to their creator, then they did not normatively value obedience to their creator.

Holton is thus answered by the dilemma: if the Muggletonian case satisfies the First Lemma then it fails to satisfy the Second Lemma; and hence if on the contrary the case were one which satisfied Holton's Second Lemma then it would necessarily fail to satisfy the First Lemma. Holton cannot have it both ways. That is how we will argue. But first we will outline, and indeed enlarge upon, Holton's supporting reasons for his two lemmas.

IV. First Lemma

The Muggletonian sect was one which seemed, from Holton's account, to be characterized by two distinctive features. In the first place, to be a good Muggletonian was to be someone for whom obedience to your creator was one of your most important values, and disobedience to the creator was one of your most important disvalues. In the second place, the Muggletonians believed that Reason was one of the very most dangerous things there is in this world of temptation, because Reason always leads human beings into disobedience to their creator. There are two things going on here: the *valuing* of obedience, and the *belief* that reasoning leads to disobedience. Let us focus on valuing first.

Importantly, in providing his analysis of value Smith was concerned with what it is to value something in the sense of assigning *normative significance* to that thing. Smith was not merely stipulatively defining a theoretical term of his own devising, he was aiming to capture a concept of value which is current and central in everyday thought and talk. But he need not and does not claim that there is *only one concept of value* which is current in everyday thought and talk. He is aiming to carve out and clarify one among several distinguishable concepts of value: one which is essentially linked to the existence of *reasons* for acting.

In identifying this reason-giving sense of 'value' Smith is tapping into an idea with a venerable pedigree in ethics. The history of the subject is replete with alleged analyses of value that have failed because the *analysans* cited things which seemed arbitrary, from the

point of view of giving *reasons* for choosing one way rather than another – and hence the analysis could not be seen to be analysing anything of any normative significance.

Plato's *Euthyphro* furnishes one obvious example. Can you analyse what it is for something to be good by saying: 'to be good is to be applauded by the gods'? No, for the following reason. If there were no reason why you would want to please the gods, then there would really be no reason for choosing the option which the gods would applaud. There might be a reason for choosing this option *conditional* upon your having some reason for trying to please the gods – because, say, this would keep you out of trouble. Yet having any such conditional reason does not give you a reason *simpliciter*. If you only have a reason for doing one thing conditional upon your trying to achieve something else, but you have no reason for trying to achieve that something else, then you really have no *reason* for doing the thing which furthers that arbitrary, conditional end – no 'reason' in the normative sense which Smith is exploring. So if we take the 'good' to be the *normatively* good, that is, to be that which we have some *reason* for pursuing, then we cannot rest content with an analysis which identifies the good with what the gods would applaud – that analysis would leave out the essential normativity of goodness.

Another, more recent and perhaps familiar illustration comes from the literature on the early non-cognitivists' suggestion that the sentence 'I value x' is typically used to express an emotion, much like the sentence 'Hooray for x!'. The immediate objection to the early non-cognitivists was that their analysis simply could not be right because there would then be no significant distinction between a normative judgment on the one hand, and a mere ejaculation or sounding off on the other, something which, for instance, expresses an arbitrary whim [2]. Later non-cognitivists took this objection very much to heart. They agreed that if someone merely expressed an emotion of the kind we typically express when we say 'Hooray!' then they would simply be sounding off in a way which has no normative significance. This led them to revise the analysis of evaluative judgments, suggesting that such judgments express not arbitrary emotions, but rather: desires for which we can give reasons (Hare's suggestion [2]); or desires which are supported by a structured welter of higher-order attitudes with which the agent identifies (Blackburn's suggestion [1]); or desires which come and go in the hurly-burly of an argumentative practice (Price's suggestion [5]); or some other variant of that general sort. In this way they tried to remove the charge of arbitrariness, and they did so precisely by connecting valuing with reason-giving.

Smith himself thinks that even these revised analyses still leave the later non-cognitivists vulnerable to the same original arbitrariness objection. The standpoint of a fully rational self is, he thinks, the only non-arbitrary standpoint to occupy. If the non-cognitivists claim that someone can value their φ-ing in C *without* believing that their fully *rational* self would want them to φ in C then, says Smith, this shows that the desires that the non-cognitivists think get expressed in an evaluation are themselves still acknowledged as being arbitrary, even by the valuers themselves [11]. The point we wish to emphasize here, however, is not so much that Smith and the later non-cognitivists residually disagree about something, but rather that they agree about something. They agree that there is a concept of normative value, they agree that normatively valuing something is inconsistent with that attitude's being essentially arbitrary, and they agree that in order to analyse normative value we need to connect it up with reason-giving in some very

intimate way.

Smith can, of course, agree that there are other uses of the term 'valuing' as well. For example, there is the semi-technical use of the term 'valuing' rife in rational choice theory, standard economics, revealed preference theory, and the like – according to which someone 'values' something just in case she desires it in the relevant sense, and she desires it in the relevant sense just in case she chooses it over other options. We might call this 'decision-theoretic' valuing. The concept of decision-theoretic valuing is, however, clearly distinct from the concept of normatively valuing. Someone can decision-theoretically value something without assigning it *any* normative significance (think of a drug addict who hates his addiction [8, pp. 133-134]), and they can assign normative significance to something without decision-theoretically valuing it (think of a depressive who sees all the value there is to be realized, but who is so overcome by his depression that he is incapable of action [8, p. 135]).

There is also the important notion of what we might call 'conventional' values. Etiquette furnishes one illustration (and, on positivistic interpretations, the law furnishes another: see Smith [8, pp. 77-84]). In ordinary language there may even be a sense of the term 'reason' in which the fact that something is good manners (or accords with the law) counts as a kind of reason for doing it – a non-derivative reason, a reason in itself – *in addition* to whatever various consequentialist and other reasons one might also have for being well-mannered (or obeying the law). But, once again, the concept of valuing and reasons in this conventional sense is clearly distinct from the concept of normative value. People can evidently ask whether displaying good manners (or obeying the law) has any normative significance, because practices of etiquette (and laws) may have been erected on a completely arbitrary foundation. People require reassurance that there are reasons, non-arbitrary reasons, for being well-mannered (or obeying the law), before they have any *normative* reasons for doing so.

In sum, then, Smith was not aiming to analyse 'the' folk concept of value: but he does contend that there is *a* folk concept of normative value – as opposed to decision-theoretic, conventional, or other kinds of value – and, along with even the non-cognitivists (or at least the canniest among them), he insists that this is the concept of value that lies at the heart of morality. The question we must ask is, therefore, not whether the Muggletonians conventionally or legalistically or decision-theoretically valued obedience to their creator, or whether they valued obedience to their creator in some other technical or semi-technical or ordinary-language sense of the term 'value', but whether they *normatively* valued obedience to their creator, in the Smith-relevant sense. Did they? We do not know enough history to be sure.

It would be good to have lots of information in the premises here about how the Muggletonians raised their children and so forth, all sorts of things which would show what their normative values were – and whether indeed they had any normative values, as opposed to merely decision-theoretic or conventional or other sorts of values. In order for the Muggletonians to have normatively valued obedience their practices would have to have involved, as we have seen, the giving of reasons in at least some minimal sense, a sense that would preclude any acknowledged and unredeemed *arbitrariness* in what they can get away with citing as the grounds for their decisions and actions. We may say that a reason for an option is acknowledged to be 'arbitrary' when it is acknowledged

that it is not self-evident that this is a reason for that option, and yet it is also acknowledged that no further reasons can be given for accepting this as a reason for that option.

The Muggletonians were hostile to Reason; but if they are to constitute a counterexample to Smith then that hostility had better not be so intense that they never enter into the practice of giving reasons for their actions, or of challenging reasons when they appear to be completely arbitrary. They might have been so hostile to Reason that they might flinch at the use of the *word* 'reason' in 'a *reason* to do it'. They might prefer to say something else, like 'that's why you should do it', or 'do it because it's what your creator wants you to do'. But it comes to the same thing. It is fairly plausible to suppose that the Muggletonians would have gone in for the 'giving of reasons' in this sense, and that they took these reasons to be non-arbitrary, and that they assumed that, for anyone at all, the fact that their creator wants them to do something *does* constitute a *reason* for them to do it, whether they realize this or not. And if they did engage in reason-givings of this kind, that would be enough to support Holton's First Lemma.

Thus, we may suppose that the Muggletonians thought there were such things as 'good reasons' for people to choose one way rather than another – when those reasons take the form, 'because your creator wishes it'; and, indeed, we need to suppose that the Muggletonians thought that these were reasons *for anyone* and not just for those people who happen to desire obedience to their creator. The fact that your creator wants you to do something gives you a reason to do it whether you realize this, and whether you want to be obedient, or not. Or so we presume the Muggletonians to have tacitly believed, and so Holton *needs* to presume if the case is to present a problem for Smith. If hearing that something is what their creator wants a person to do *did not* strike the Muggletonians as a *reason* for that person to do it, then they would not be correctly described as having, in the relevant sense, *normatively* valued obedience to their creator.

Thus, we will presume for the sake of the argument that the Muggletonians, like many of their contemporaries, did normatively value obedience to their creator. The Muggletonians were a distinctive group. But we will suppose, at this stage of the argument, that what made them distinctive was *not* the fact that they normatively valued obedience to their creator. That was something they shared with many other sects. We will presume, rather, that what was distinctive about the Muggletonians, and what makes them useful to Holton, is something about their *beliefs*, and specifically, their beliefs about the *consequences of reasoning* and where it will lead.

V. Second Lemma

The Muggletonians were a distinctive sect not (we are supposing) in their valuing obedience to their creator, but rather, in some of their *beliefs*: their beliefs about the consequences which attempts at reasoning would inevitably have for creatures like us. The distinctive thing that Muggleton and his cousin Reeve did apparently feel an urgent need to say, stridently and repeatedly, was something about *Reason*: that it was leading people astray, and that this was because it is of the essence of Reason itself that it leads creatures like us into disobedience.

The Muggletonians may or may not have thought that God shuns Reason – that is not strictly relevant to Holton's argument. Strictly, Holton's argument might allow the Muggletonians to *approve* of Reason, though only *provided* that it is wielded by God, the angels, or someone or something else which is non-human. For all Holton's argument is concerned, Reason might be a good thing when pursued by non-human beings. Human attempts at reasoning, however, are another matter. What is crucial for Holton's argument is only that the Muggletonians believed that it was impossible, in the strongest sense, for *human beings* to engage in reasoning without this leading them to recommend universal disobedience to the creator. If the Muggletonians held that belief about human capacities, then they would believe that even if they were to be as 'fully rational' as it is logically possible *for them* to be, they would still desire universal disobedience to the creator. Hence, it would seem, Smith's analysis of normative value would entail that they *valued* disobedience to the creator. And that is absurd – thus runs Holton's objection to Smith.

It is easy to imagine the Muggletonians to have believed that there are many ways of reasoning *wrongly* which would lead people to desire universal disobedience to the creator. Holton's argument, however, requires more than this. It requires them to have believed that *even the very best* reasoning which it is logically possible for people to engage in *would still* lead them to desire universal disobedience to the creator. They must not be thought of as giving one hundred percent epistemic weight to one piece of reasoning, and zero percent epistemic weight to all other pieces of reasoning. Then the Muggletonians would differ only in degree and not in kind from other people – everyone has to give different epistemic weights to different samples of reasoning. The Muggletonians would just be giving maximal weight to one and zero weight to every other sample of reasoning. But that would present no problem, not even a prima facie problem, for Smith's analysis of normative value. For Holton to raise a problem for Smith, he must construe the Muggletonians as assigning zero epistemic weight to *every* kind of reasoning.

Yet it is not as easy as it might seem, to imagine what it would be like for the Muggletonians to have really failed to believe, even tacitly, that there are some ways of reasoning *rightly*, which would lead to a desire for universal obedience to the creator. There are two ways, in particular, in which an incautious Muggletonian could be tricked into an endorsement of 'right reasoning'. The first is by offering them simple and plausible ways of supporting the value of obedience, by grounding it in other values. For instance, perhaps some of them tacitly believed that if they were obedient to their creator then they would be more likely to go to heaven, and if they were disobedient they would be more likely to go to hell, and that this gave them a good prudential (and moral) reason to be obedient. If they did reason in that way, however, then although they might have thought that some kinds of reasoning would lead us astray, clearly they would be assuming that not all kinds of reasoning would lead us astray.

A second way in which a Muggletonian could be tricked into endorsing one kind of reasoning would be by offering them simple and plausible ways of supporting the value of obedience through an epistemic division of labour – deferring the assessment of reasons to God and just trusting his judgment. If the Muggletonians thought that whenever the creator wanted you to do something, there was sure to be a good reason for you to do

that thing, then it would be very hard for them to keep their valuing of obedience hygienically cleansed of all reasoning. There would be a constant temptation for them to have reasoned like this:

> The creator is supremely wise and good and would not want you to do something unless there were a very good reason for your doing it; so, therefore, if the creator wants you to do something then there must be very good reasons for your doing it; so if the creator wants you to do something then there is a good reason for you to do it.

If the Muggletonians reasoned in that way, from the creator's desires to the existence of reasons, then they would not be as hostile to reason as Holton's Second Lemma needs them to be. It would seem pretty obvious to the Muggletonians that anyone who was optimally rational would be moved by *that* argument, and so *would* after all end up valuing obedience to the creator. Smith's analysis of normative value would then face no counter-example here, not even a prima facie counter-example – since then there would be one piece of 'right reasoning' which would endorse precisely what they value.

Hence it would be congenial to Holton's Second Lemma if the Muggletonians' valuing of obedience were a basic value – if they took it to be self-evident that the fact that the creator wants you to do something gives you an over-riding reason for doing it. And it would be congenial, also, if the Muggletonians took it to be the case that God needs no reasons whatsoever for his desiring what he does – if they took it to be the case that God's desires were entirely *arbitrary*. And in this respect the Muggletonian case is well selected for Holton's purposes. Consider, first, whether obedience was a basic value, and then secondly, whether God has good reasons for his desires.

It is relatively plausible to suppose that obedience to the creator might have been a fundamental and self-evident value for the Muggletonians. The history of Christian doctrine is very complicated, and there do seem to have been members of some sects who believed in predestination, original sin, and the salvation of the elect: Calvinists, for instance. Some Calvinists did at least *say* that they believed that nothing whatever that you might do could possibly have any effect on the likelihood of your going to heaven or hell. Such sects do *seem* to have valued obedience to their creator without trying to justify this by reasoning from any value of the consequences of obedience, like the manifest value of going to heaven, or from any other values. Those who are saved are (some of them may have thought) those who seek obedience for its own sake, not those who try to be obedient just so that they can get to heaven. Arguably, those who professed to value obedience for its own sake may have been involved in a degree of self deception or confusion: but this would need to be argued elsewhere. If what such sects said of themselves did accurately represent what they were really like, then for them obedience to their creator would have been a value that they did not derive by reasoning from any other values. If the Muggletonians were like that, then this would help Holton to present the Muggletonians as *maximally* hostile to reason. Their valuing of obedience would not be grounded in their *reasoning* from any deeper values.

Furthermore, it would be still easier for Holton to establish the Second Lemma if he could establish that the Muggletonians also believed that the desires of their creator were entirely *arbitrary*. That is, it would help Holton's case if the Muggletonians thought that God did not have any reasons at all for desiring what he does desire for us to do – not even the recognition that to him it is *self-evident* that this would be a good or desirable thing for us to do, something which he infallibly recognizes that there is *good reason* for us to do. This might seem relatively easy to grant, since many Christians have at least *said* that the creator's desires do not need to be constrained by reasons – that God's freedom is absolute, unconstrained even by logic, self-evidence, and so on. We would be willing to concede, for the sake of the argument, that the creator has no reasons for his desires. This would make it easier for Holton to support his Second Lemma. On balance, however, it would not be an unambiguously friendly concession. This is because if we concede on this point then we will have to at least reconsider, if not retract, our earlier concession that the Muggletonians did indeed *normatively* value obedience to their creator.

Were you to believe that the desires of the creator were entirely arbitrary, then (we say) it is very hard to see how you could believe that the fact that the creator wants you to do something – by itself – gives you a reason to do it, in the sense of displaying a non-arbitrary rationale for doing it. If the Muggletonians saw the desires of the creator as *truly* arbitrary, then it is not clear how they *could* have thought they had any (non-arbitrary) *reason* for doing what the creator desires them to do simply because the creator desires them to do it. If the Muggletonians did indeed normatively value obedience, then it is extremely difficult to avoid construing them as believing, at least implicitly, that there were reasons for the creator's desires. However much they might also have worked themselves into a confused state in which they also – officially – believed (or at least said and believed that they believed) the creator's desires to be arbitrary, it is *almost inevitable* that we should construe them as having presupposed the contrary. It is almost inevitable, but perhaps not quite.

Holton may have identified a tiny corner of logical space, which might be occupied by some very careful Muggletonians, who not only take the value of obedience to be self-evident, but who also really do refrain from grounding this value in any reasoning whatsoever – either reasoning of their own, or deferred reasoning by God. The important thing about Holton's Muggletonians, then, was their absolute hostility to any attempts that *we sons of Adam and daughters of Eve* might make to engage in reasoning. *We* should not try to penetrate the creator's reasons for anything, or even to wonder whether or not the creator has or needs any reasons for anything. The creator may have reasons for desiring us to perform a certain action, but if so, *that* is not what we should think about in reflecting on what provides *us* with a reason for so acting. We should rest content with the fact that acting in the relevant way would constitute obedience to the creator. Reasoning would corrupt *our* desires, and that is all that matters for the Holton case study. This, we will grant at least for this dialectical moment in the argument. What the Muggletonians are to be understood as believing is that no matter how careful they were in their reasoning, no matter how much more rational they became, *as humans*, they could be sure that reasoning would inexorably lead them into disobedience.

VI. More on the Second Lemma

It does appear that the Muggletonians sincerely thought that, necessarily, if any human beings do attempt to reason things out for themselves then they will become more disobedient to the creator. And disobedience is something which the Muggletonians very strongly, and perhaps fundamentally (in the sense already explained), *disvalued*. We are inclined to grant this much, but is it a problem for Smith's analysis?

As Smith acknowledges at length in his book, [8, pp. 149-150, 152-153, 212-213 fn. 2] it is an empirical question what the consequences will be of attempts at reasoning, when undertaken in our actual circumstances. This is highly relevant to the case of the Muggletonians. They thought that, in our actual circumstances, the more we have reasoned the less obedient we have become. So far, however, this is no problem at all for Smith. As Smith fulsomely acknowledges, everyone has to admit that reasoning can sometimes get us into trouble. If you want to make friends, for example, then perhaps the worst way of attempting to do so is by engaging in a process of reasoning about how to go about making friends. Better just to be spontaneous. In Parfit's terms, reasoning can thus be 'self-defeating' [4]. The Muggletonians' worries about the consequences of reasoning were, perhaps, simply these writ large. They thought that reasoning *always* gets us into trouble, not just sometimes.

We should acknowledge that there is conceptual space for someone who thinks that the more you reason the worse it gets (meaning, the more rebellious you will become against the creator) *without limit*. That there are *no* grounds for the pious hope that if only you were to reason better and better, eventually you would finally start desiring that people, yourself included, be obedient to the creator. That every increase in reasoning, every attempt at reasoning more carefully, has resulted in greater, not less, disobedience. Projecting: a fully rational agent would be absolutely disobedient, like Satan.

But, by itself, even this is no problem for Smith. A belief that reasoning would make you disobedient is not enough to make the Muggletonians even a prima facie counter-example to Smith, when you look carefully at what Smith's analysis says. To get a prima facie counter-example running we would need to suppose not that being fully rational would lead a person to *become disobedient* to the creator, but that reasoning perfectly would lead to that person's *desiring* for themselves, in their actual circumstances *before* they had taken the path of Reason, that in *those* circumstances they be disobedient to the creator.

As Holton rightly explains, however, it is very plausible to suppose that the Muggletonians would indeed predict *not only* that reason would lead them to become disobedient in the state they would themselves reach by means of reasoning, *but also* that it would lead them to then desire that their actual selves, in their actual circumstances prior to engaging in such reasoning, should have been disobedient too. Satan is a model to think of here – a possible Satan at any rate, a Satan who has no regrets. (Here we draw on some of Holton's thoughts, in an as yet unpublished paper, on Milton's Satan.) Not only is Satan himself disobedient, he also (notoriously) desires others to be disobedient too; and, furthermore, he does *not* wish that, in the circumstances he faced before his disobedience, he had not taken the course of Reason which led to disobedience. A Satan like that just needs to be *thinkable*, and to be thinkable *by Muggletonians*. Holton does

not need to suppose such a Satan to be really possible, only that such a Satan might be believed in by the Muggletonians.

Now, would this pose a threat to the Smith analysis of value? It might seem so, because it seems to take us very close to having established both Holton's First and his Second Lemmas. We have conceded that the Muggletonians did *value* obedience; and that they *believed* that, for humans, reasoning will always and necessarily lead to a desire for everyone to be *disobedient*. This sounds like trouble for Smith's theory. Yet we are still unpersuaded. We think that there has been an equivocation on the terms 'reasoning' and 'rational'.

VII. From the Grounds to the Lemmas

We grant that Holton has made it very plausible that there could have been people like the Muggletonians he describes, who were such that:

First Lemma
> (1.1) they did not normatively value disobedience to their creator; and
> (1.2) they did normatively value obedience to their creator

Nearly Second Lemma
> (nearly-2.1) they believed that following the path of Reason would lead them to desire for themselves and for others, including their actual selves in their actual circumstances, that they be *disobedient* to the creator; and
> (nearly-2.2) they did not believe that following the path of Reason would lead them to desire for themselves and for others, including their actual selves in their actual context, that they be obedient to their creator.

This sums up the grounds for Holton's case.

We will, for the sake of the argument, grant all of this. We acknowledge that this does take us very close indeed to a powerful case against Smith's theory of value. All Holton would have to do is to turn (nearly-2.1) and (nearly-2.2) into (2.1) and (2.2). All he would have to do is to make a crucial leap: from what the Muggletonians believed about 'reasoning' and 'the path of Reason', to what they believed about being 'fully rational' *in the sense relevant to Smith's analysis*. And this is what we claim Holton cannot do. Not if we hold in place the supposition that the Muggletonians did indeed normatively value obedience to their creator.

We contest both the step from (nearly-2.1) to (2.1) – from belief about 'the path of Reason' to belief about 'Smith's analysis of rationality' – and the step from (nearly 2.2) to (2.2) – from *lack* of belief about 'the path of Reason' to *lack* of belief about 'Smith's analysis of rationality'. We will take these in reverse order.

VIII. Explicit and Implicit Beliefs

If the Muggletonians did normatively value obedience to the creator then, we say, they *did* believe that if they were fully rational, in the sense relevant to Smith's analysis of normative value, then they would desire for themselves in the actual context that they be

obedient to the creator.

Holton has quoted Muggleton, showing persuasively that his *stated* views entailed that if we were to be 'fully rational' – in *some* salient sense of those words, the sense in which we 'follow the path of Reason', as we have put it – then we would desire that our actual selves be disobedient. As a best-case scenario for Holton, and a worst-case scenario for Smith, suppose that this would still be so even if we were to take 'fully rational' in precisely the sense relevant to Smith's analysis. So: grant that Muggleton said things which entailed that if we were fully rational (in the Smith sense) then we would desire disobedience. Furthermore, suppose him to be sincere, and thus to have *believed* that he believed rationality, as analysed by Smith, to be conducive to disobedience. Still further, suppose him actually to have believed just what he thought and said that he believed. So grant: Muggleton did *believe* rationality, as analysed by Smith, to be conducive to disobedience.

Yet the *presence* of that belief does not by itself entail the *lack* of the further belief: that if we were fully rational in the Smith sense, then we would desire for our actual selves in our actual circumstances that we be obedient to the desires of our creator. Perhaps Muggleton had both the former belief and this latter belief as well: both the one he propounded explicitly in his writings, and also (albeit tacitly) the one Smith's analysis would need him to have. Muggleton could have had those two beliefs at once. This would be logically inconsistent, of course, but then not all of us think that people like Muggleton have to be so charitably interpreted as to guarantee that their beliefs are always logically consistent.

We say that, deep down, the Muggletonians *cannot* have *failed* to believe, at least tacitly, that being rational, as analysed by Smith, would lead to a desire for obedience – that is, they could not have failed to believe this, provided that we are able to hold in place the supposition that they were people who did *normatively value* obedience to their creator. On Smith's theory, what it is for someone to normatively value something is at least partly for them to engage in certain *reason-giving practices*. It is then necessary to look to see what is implicit in those practices. We will argue in the next section that in normatively valuing obedience to their creator, the Muggletonians *must* thereby tacitly believe that if they were fully rational, in the sense relevant to Smith's analysis, then they would desire for themselves in their actual circumstances that they be obedient to their creator.

IX. Fully Rational Versus the Path of Reason

Either Holton removes all reason-giving practices from his Muggletonians, or he doesn't. If he does remove all reason-giving practices, then he explodes his own First Lemma: he leaves himself no ground for saying that the Muggletonians *normatively* valued obedience to the creator. Yet if he does not remove all reason-giving practices from them, then (we say) he has undermined his Second Lemma.

Muggleton did say some very rude things about Reason and about the consequences which reasoning would necessarily have, at least for human beings. Yet it would be an equivocation to infer from what he said about 'Reason' or 'reasoning', to a conclusion about what he believed about 'full rationality' in the sense relevant to Smith's analysis of

value. Muggleton's hostility to Reason was, we gather from Holton, primarily a hostility to people's arrogant presumption that they can achieve any worthwhile results by *thinking things through for themselves*. That is contrasted with believing what you are told, at least when what you are told happens to be something about what your creator wants you to do, and when you are told this by some relevant authority like Muggleton or Reeve. For the Muggletonians, the only reliable route to truth and value, at least for human beings, is through trust in Christ. According to the Muggletonians, the only, or almost the only, things anyone has any *real reason* to do are the things which they know that the creator wishes them to do.

Something counts as a normative reason, for Smith, if it would be taken to be a reason by someone who was being 'fully rational', or at least, as fully rational as it is logically possible for that person to be. To be 'fully rational', in the sense relevant to Smith's analysis of value, is then to be understood as entailing that one has a systematically justifiable set of desires: that is, a set of desires that is rendered maximally coherent and unified after exposure to all of the relevant facts [8, pp. 155-161]. Smith does not pretend that we can define the concepts of maximal coherence and unity completely independently of our concept of a reason: indeed, he goes to some length to argue against the idea that we can provide a reductionist analysis of the concept of full rationality [8, pp. 161-164; 10, pp. 299-302]. His arguments here echo his arguments against analytic reductions more generally [8, pp. 44-56].

In deciding which desires we would have if we had a maximally coherent and unified set of desires, then, we may have no alternative but to say that they are desires for the things that we would believe valuable if we carried on an argument about the value of things to its ultimate conclusion in the light of all of the information that there is. This has a whiff of circularity about it, it must be conceded. This concession, however, does not undermine the claim to have given an analysis of value, in one perfectly legitimate sense of 'analysis'. We can restate the analysis in the following terms [see 10, pp. 300-301.]:

> Being valuable is the feature that something possesses when that thing is the object of one of the desires that we would have when we have reached a stable stopping point in arguing about which things possess that very feature, by means of argumentation which has the character of attempting to achieve a wide Rawlsian reflective equilibrium, and which therefore takes our antecedent convictions about which things possess that very feature as its starting point.

Note the benign circularity emerging explicitly in the words 'that very feature'.

Note also how little is presupposed, in this context, about what the imagined 'stable stopping point' will be like. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, it is not necessary to suppose that a maximally coherent desire set, for a given person, will be completely free of internal conflicts, and nor is it necessary for the purposes of this paper – though Smith does argue for this elsewhere – to suppose that different people would all converge on exactly the same maximally coherent and unified set. It may be worth enlarging on these points a little before moving on with the reply to Holton.

Smith does argue for an optimistic empirical claim: that under honest and sustained

attempts to achieve a wide Rawlsian reflective equilibrium, people *will* converge. And behind that empirical claim, there also lies an analytic claim: that *if* honest and sustained attempts to achieve a wide Rawlsian reflective equilibrium *were not* to result in convergence, then there would after all be nothing which actually has any normative value, properly so-called. These two claims, both the analytic one and the optimistic empirical one, are important ingredients in Smith's ethics. But neither of them is essential for the argument of this paper. All that is required for this paper is that a person who normatively values something believes that if *they* were to reach their own Rawlsian reflective equilibrium, then the thing which they value is the thing which they would desire, from that vantage point, for their actual self.

An obvious question now presents itself. What would the *Muggletonians* believe it takes to be fully rational, in the sense relevant to Smith's analysis? We can only think of two answers that the Muggletonians could give to this question.

One obvious answer is that to be fully rational, in the sense relevant to Smith's analysis, the Muggletonians should think that we would have to become exactly like the creator. We would have to become exactly like the creator because he is the only one who can really appreciate the force of all of the arguments that there are for and against the claim that this is valuable as opposed to that, and so it is his desires alone that could form a maximally coherent and unified set. But if this is the answer the Muggletonians give, then, since we know that they believe the creator wants us to obey his wishes, it follows that they do indeed believe that they would desire that they be obedient to the creator, if they too were fully rational – just as Smith's analysis of value requires.

Now it might be thought that this first answer does not take seriously enough the Muggletonians' view that, *necessarily*, when human beings engage in reasoning they end up wanting something that is not valuable. The first answer assumes that there is a possible world in which human beings are exactly like the creator, and so presupposes that it is at best a contingent feature of humans that their reasoning powers are limited in the way the Muggletonians think that they are. With the first answer in place, however, an obvious alternative answer suggests itself, an answer that dispenses with this unfortunate assumption. According to the alternative answer the Muggletonians believe that for us to be fully rational, in the sense relevant to Smith's analysis – that is, for us to be as truly fully rational as we could conceivably be – we must be correctly informed about what the creator wants us to do – these are the relevant facts, and these are *all* the relevant facts – and then, in the light of that information, we must form desires to act accordingly (no lethargy, weakness of will, compulsions, perverse whims, or whatever). This is what it is for us to be 'fully rational' in Smith's sense, because this is the only way in which we humans can come to appreciate, as best we can appreciate, the only reasons we ever have for doing anything: that is, the facts about what the creator wants us to do. But, once again, if the Muggletonians believe this then they do believe that, if they were fully rational, in the sense relevant to Smith's analysis, they would desire that everyone, including themselves in their actual circumstances, be obedient to the creator.

Of course, the Muggletonians did not thereby believe that this is what they would desire if they were 'fully rational' in the quite different sense which involves trying to think things through for themselves logically. That is an entirely different matter! The Muggletonians did not think that they would have any reason to do something (in the

Smith-relevant sense of 'reason'), just on the basis of the fact that this is something that they would want if they followed through a process of what seemed to them to be logically valid reasoning, on the basis of what seemed to them to be the facts. In the sense relevant to Smith's analysis, they do not believe they have any *reason* at all to trust whatever seems to their poor intellects to be good logical reasoning, not unless this is endorsed by an assurance, from a source other than their reasoning, that this course of action would also conform to the desires of the creator. So according to the Muggletonians, the best we human beings could ever hope for, as a process of working toward a Rawlsian reflective equilibrium, is to short-circuit all processes of logical *reasoning*, and all activities of *arguing* about things with one another. Each Muggletonian should just ignore the superficially persuasive arguments of others – we have no real reason for trusting anything of that sort – each should just muster information about what the creator wants us to do, acknowledge it as self-evident that they have good reason to do whatever the creator wants them to do – and do it.

This, of course, is a very extreme and perhaps limiting case of the kind of procedure which most philosophers have in mind when they envisage the process of moving towards a Rawlsian reflective equilibrium. Nevertheless, it can be seen as a limiting case of that kind. So the Muggletonians can be seen as *normatively valuing* obedience to their creator – they do fall just barely within the bounds of what Smith could possibly count as 'normative'. Yet it must be admitted that their case is so extreme that there is only a hair's breadth of difference between them and imaginable people whose practices do not embody any *normative* values at all, but only conventional or legalistic or decision-theoretic or some other kind of values. Push the imagined case just barely over that borderline, and we no longer have even a limiting case of a collective process of approaching a Rawlsian reflective equilibrium. But then we no longer have any normative values, Holton's First Lemma fails, and for that reason the case is no counter-example to Smith. Pull the imagined case just back over the borderline, and Holton's First Lemma is restored – but then the Muggletonian practices do constitute a limiting case of an attempt to reach Rawlsian reflective equilibrium, and these practices do then embody exactly the tacit beliefs which Smith's theory requires of those who possess normative values. And again, we have no counter-example to Smith.

Surprisingly perhaps, it thus turns out that on any construal which grants that the Muggletonians did normatively value obedience to their creator, they can after all be seen as believing that they would desire that their actual selves in their actual circumstances be obedient to the creator, if they were 'fully rational' in the sense relevant to Smith's analysis of value. The Second Lemma therefore fails. To be sure, the mere fact that the Muggletonians *can* in this way be construed as normatively valuing obedience does not suffice to show that they *should* be so construed, historically speaking. But remember that they do *need* to be so construed if their beliefs are to bear upon Smith's analysis of normative value in the way Holton intends. If, in reality, the Muggletonians were so hostile to reason that that they cannot be construed as having beliefs about what they would want if they were fully rational in Smith's sense, then we say that the First Lemma fails, and that they did not normatively value anything at all. Muggleton and his followers would then fail for that reason to furnish a counter-example to Smith's analysis of normative value. Thus, we do not need to check the historical details. Whatever the

Muggletonians were actually like, we can be sure in advance that they constituted no counter-example to Smith's analysis of value.

X. Conclusion

When properly understood Smith's analysis of value thus stands unscathed by Holton's attempted counter-example. The fact that Smith's analysis of value can accommodate even the case of the extreme, apparently anti-rationalist, Muggletonians may strike some as surprising. But it should not. It simply provides a dramatic demonstration of the fact that Smith does not in fact tie values to 'reasoning' in the narrow intellectualistic sense which you might think infects all theories in the broadly analytic tradition. This illustrates, strikingly, the significance of the fact that Smith does not offer to give a reductive characterization of the concepts of maximal coherence and unity as they apply to our desires. Rather, Smith's account is predicated on the idea that our desires will exhibit maximal coherence and unity when they are desires for the various things that we would believe valuable at the limit of rational inquiry. This is not a reductive definition of what is of value. But it is claimed to be true that we would believe these things to be valuable at the limit of rational inquiry – or, rather, Smith makes the conditional claim: that *if* anything is of value, *then* it would be believed to be·of value at the limit of rational inquiry. And this truth can cast light on the nature of value even if it is not construed as part of a reductive definition of value.

Holton, we acknowledge, has given a good counter-example to a theory, and that theory is interesting and worth refuting. The theory we have in mind is like Smith's, but is more reductionist in spirit. It is a theory that ties value to Reason and to processes of *reasoning*, or *inference* – not to the recognition of *reasons* and *acting on reasons*. Such a theory overestimates the importance of logic, truth, inference, and thinking things through for yourself independently of any ideas about where you might end up. Now it might well be thought that any Kantian theory of value would need to be tied to just such a conception of Reason. But while the theory behind *The Moral Problem* is Kantian in some very salient respects, the survival of Smith's analysis of value in the face of Holton's argument is very instructive. It teaches us a memorable moral: that a Kantian theory like Smith's does not need to be tied – even loosely – to an overly intellectualised, logocentric conception of Reason.

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