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0521007739 - Ethics and the A Priori: Selected Essays on Moral Psychology and Meta-Ethics

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*Ethics and the A Priori*

Over the last fifteen years, Michael Smith has written a series of essays about the nature of belief and desire, the status of normative judgement, and the relevance of the views we take on both these topics to the accounts we give of our nature as free and responsible agents.

This long-awaited collection comprises some of the most influential of Smith's essays. Among the topics covered are: the Humean theory of motivating reasons, the nature of normative reasons, Williams and Korsgaard on internal and external reasons, the nature of self-control, weakness of will, compulsion, freedom, responsibility, the analysis of our rational capacities, moral realism, the dispositional theory of value, the supervenience of the normative on the non-normative, the error theory, rationalist treatments of moral judgement, the practicality requirement on moral judgement, and cognitivist versus non-cognitivist accounts of moral judgement.

Collected for the first time in a single volume, the essays will be of interest to students in philosophy and psychology.

Michael Smith is Professor of Philosophy at Princeton University.

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*For Jeremy, Julian, and Samuel*

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SELECTED ESSAYS ON MORAL PSYCHOLOGY  
AND META-ETHICS

MICHAEL SMITH

*Princeton University*



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## *Preface*

The essays reprinted in this collection were written over a fifteen-year period (1987–2002). During this time I had the great privilege and pleasure of working in the Department of Philosophy at Princeton University, the Department of Philosophy at Monash University, and the Philosophy Program at the Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University. I have also had the good fortune to spend time as a visitor at the University of Arizona at Tucson, Bristol University, the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of Otago, Princeton University, Uppsala University, and Victoria University Wellington. I would like to thank the faculty and students of these institutions for their generous input when my ideas were given their first trial in a colloquium or graduate class or reading group, or over a cup of coffee or a drink down at the local pub.

Though I have corrected the occasional typographical error and put the references in uniform style, I decided that I would not substantially revise any of the essays for this reprinting. Since many of the essays have been responded to in print, it seemed best to reprint them warts and all. Having said that, however, let me immediately admit that there are places where I definitely regret having said what I said; but no matter how much I would like to, I see no real point in pretending that I didn't say what I said in the first place. There is, as a result, a good deal of repetition in the essays. This originally came about because I have been so keen on enabling readers to understand my work without having to have knowledge of anything else I have written. One good upshot of this is that the essays reprinted here can (hopefully) be read and understood in isolation from each other, and, indeed, in isolation from everything else I have written.



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Since each essay contains a footnote thanking those who gave me comments, I will not repeat my words of thanks to those who helped give my thoughts their specific shape. Special thanks are, however, due to Jennie Louise, who did a splendid job of preparing the index; to Jeanette Kennett for allowing me to reprint two of our jointly authored papers; and to Frank Jackson and Philip Pettit, not just for their input into my work, but also for their encouragement and support and friendship over the years. I still cannot believe that I had good luck to meet Frank and Philip when I did, or to become their colleague at RSSS. Finally, I am grateful to Ernie Sosa for inviting me to contribute a collection of essays to the Cambridge Studies in Philosophy series.

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