An Overview of our Metaethical Exploration PHIL 3100 — Ethical Theory

Do moral statements make claims (or assert propositions)?

YES: Cognitivism

Problem: Motivational Judgment Internalism

NO: Non-Cognitivism

Problems:

- Linguistic Evidence:
- Embedding Problem;
- Frege-Geach Problem

Do moral claims purport to attribute <u>objective</u> or <u>subjective</u> properties?

Subjectivism

(a.k.a. Constructivism)

<u>Problems</u>:

- Moore's Argument from Disagreement
- Euthyphro/Arbitrariness

Do moral claims purport to attribute <u>irreducible</u> or <u>reducible</u> properties?

Reductionism / Reductive Naturalism
Problem for Analytic/A Priori Reductionism:

- Open Question Argument (Moore, Ayer)1

Given that moral claims purport to attribute objective, irreducible, moral properties to things, does anything ever actually have these properties?

YES: Non-Naturalism

(a.k.a. Intuitionism)

Problems:

- Moral Knowledge
- Moral Supervenience
- Moral Disagreement²

NO: Nihilism

(a.k.a. the Error Theory)

Problems:

- Too implausible on its face?
- G.E. Moore shift (Huemer §5.5)

¹ Note: up until now, investigation is largely semantic, or about the meaning of moral terms, or what moral statements are saying or doing. It's not about the way extra-linguistic reality is.

² This overview contains important omissions: e.g., Synthetic/*A Posteriori* Reductionism (see Huemer §4.4); and Non-Reductive Naturalism

A Taxonomy of Metaethics

the theories \rightarrow	→ Moral Anti-Realism: there are no objective moral facts.			Moral Realism: there are objective moral facts.		
the questions	Constructivism Non-Cognitivism		Nihilism	(Objective) Naturalism		Non-Naturalism
•	(Huemer: "Subjectivism")	(cf. "Expressivism")	(or "The Error Theory")	Reductive Naturalism	Non-Reductive Naturalism	(Huemer: "Intuitionism")
Semantics (What do moral claims mean?)	 Moral claims mean the same as some claim about someone's attitudes or practices. E.g., 'What the teenagers did was wrong' might mean that the speaker disapproves of what they did, or that our social conventions forbid what they did. 	 Moral utterances aren't actually claiming anything. They are used instead to express "non-cognitive" attitudes, such as desires or states of disapproval, or to issue commands. They are neither true nor false (cf. "Boo Yankees!") 	 Moral terms cannot be defined in nonmoral terms. Moral claims attribute a sui generis, irreducibly evaluative, nonnatural property to something. 	• Moral claims mean the same as some naturalistic claim.***	Moral terms cannot be defined in non- moral terms.	 Moral terms cannot be defined in non-moral terms. Moral claims attribute a sui generis, irreducibly evaluative non-natural property to something.
Metaphysics (Are there moral facts / moral properties in the world? If so, what kind of facts are they?)	 There are moral facts. They are subjective facts (i.e., facts involving subjective properties). On most forms of constructivism, they are natural facts (e.g., about social conventions), but on some versions they are non-natural facts (e.g., about God).* 	There are no moral facts or properties (and moral statements aren't even trying to talk about them).	 The sui generis, irreducibly evaluative, non-natural property moral claims are talking about doesn't actually exist. Thus, there are no moral facts Thus all moral claims are false.*** 	 There are moral facts. They are objective facts (i.e., facts involving objective properties). They are natural facts (i.e., facts involving natural properties). 	 There are moral facts. They are objective facts. But there is no fact that can be expressed in nonmoral terms to which they are identical. They are natural facts (i.e., facts involving natural properties). 	 There are moral facts. They are objective facts. But there is no fact that can be expressed in nonmoral terms to which they are identical. They are nonmatural facts (i.e., facts involving nonmatural properties).
Epistemology (If there are moral facts, how do we know them?)	• We come to know moral facts however we come to know the facts about attitudes or practices to which they are identical.**	• Since there are no moral facts, there is no need to explain how we can know them.	• Since there are no moral facts, there is no need to explain how we can know them.	• We come to know moral facts however we come to know the natural facts to which they are identical.**	We come to know moral facts indirectly, by inferring their existence from non- moral facts that they help explain.	We come to know moral facts partly on the basis of rational intuition.
Psychology (What kind of mental state are moral judgments?)	 Moral judgments are beliefs (the same sort of attitude we have to non-moral propositions). This is called Cognitivism. 	• Moral judgments are non-cognitive attitudes (desires, emotions, states of approval/disapproval, or the like).	• Moral judgments are beliefs.	• Moral judgments are beliefs.	• Moral judgments are beliefs.	Moral judgments are beliefs.