

## Lecture notes, Phil 4830, spr 03.

### Anti-Realism

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#### Important background concepts/distinctions:

- “evaluative” vs. “descriptive” sentences/predicates
- “Ethics”: studies philosophical questions pertaining to or arising from evaluative sentences. Two sub-branches:
  1. *Normative Ethics* is devoted to *advancing* (endorsing) evaluative claims.
  2. *Meta-Ethics* does not advance evaluative claims. It studies *the nature of* evaluative claims.

#### Important questions of meta-ethics:

- “Are some evaluative sentences *objectively true*?”
- “What does the word ‘good’ mean? Can it be defined?”
- “How, if at all, does one *know* what is right or wrong?”
- “How do moral values *motivate* people to act in certain ways? How, if at all, do they give us *good reasons* to act in certain ways?”
- We will discuss all of these questions. Notice that these include:
  - (i) *ontological/metaphysical*,
  - (ii) *semantic*,
  - (iii) *epistemological*,
  - and (iv) *psychological* questions.

#### The question of objectivity:

- First, we need to ask:
  - What is meant by “objective truth”?

A sentence is *objectively true* if it is true, and whether it is true does not depend upon observer attitudes towards it.
  - What is meant by an “objective property”?

P is an *objective property* if P is a property (roughly, it may be predicated of things), and whether *x* has P does not depend upon observer attitudes towards *x*.
- Examples
  - Is “*funniness*” an objective property? Is “David Letterman is funny” objectively true?
  - Is *monetary value* an objective property?
  - *Tastiness*?
  - *Redness*?
  - *Squareness*?

#### Moral Realism vs. Anti-Realism:

- Realism:

Some moral (/evaluative) statements are objectively true.

Or: There are objective moral properties.

Varieties of realism will be discussed later.

- Anti-realism: Two ways of stating it:
  - No moral statements are objectively true. 3 varieties:
    1. *Subjectivism/relativism*: Some moral statements are 'subjectively true'/true relative to some person/group.  
*Why*: Evaluative sentences say that some individual or group takes some attitude toward the object of evaluation.
    2. *Non-cognitivism*: Evaluative sentences are neither true nor false.  
*Why*: Evaluative sentences are non-assertive / do not assert propositions / are emotive or imperative, etc.
    3. *Nihilism*: Evaluative sentences are false.  
*Why*: Evaluative sentences say that the object of evaluation has a certain sort of objective, irreducible, non-natural 'evaluative property,' but there are no such properties.
  - There are no objective moral properties. The 3 varieties again:
    1. *Subjectivism/relativism*: Moral properties are subjective. They consist in being the object of some attitude of an observer.
    2. *Non-cognitivism*: Evaluative predicates do not (even purport to) attribute properties to objects.
    3. *Nihilism*: Evaluative predicates purport to refer to evaluative properties, but no such properties exist.
- Important: These are the only logically possible positions.

## Examination of Subjectivism/Relativism:

- **Cultural relativism:** “X is good” means that the speaker’s society approves of X.  
Consequences:
  - Why should I care about what is ‘good’?
  - Society is always right. Slavery was good (at the time). Oskar Schindler was evil.
    - *Reply:* No; “good” refers to the value system of the *speaker’s* society—in this case, the person giving the objection.
  - “Most people in our society approve of abortion, but abortion is not good.” is necessarily false, and self-contradictory.
  - “If society approved of torturing babies, then I should torture babies” is true, and tautological.
- **Individualistic relativism:** “X is good” means that the speaker approves of X.  
Consequences:
  - People don’t really disagree about ethics.
  - The individual is always right. You can never be mistaken in your moral beliefs.
  - “I approve of abortion, but abortion is wrong.” is self-contradictory.
  - “If I approved of torturing babies, then I should torture babies.” is true and tautological.
    - *Reply:* It is possible to “rigidify” the reference of “good” (fix it to the present speaker’s actual, present attitudes).
    - *Counter-reply:* Change to: “If I approve of torturing babies, then I should torture babies”

### Arguments for relativism?

- Some cite the extent of *cultural differences* in moral beliefs. Does this strongly support relativism?
- It seems contradictory (or something) to say, “I approve of x, but x is wrong.” Is relativism the only/best explanation for this?

### Dishonest relativism?

- Postow says: it is ‘dishonest’ (or inconsistent?) to (a) profess a moral value system, and (b) profess that an alternative value system is equally valid. Why?
  - (a) means you think people should do act A (say).
  - (b) means that you admit that someone else (with an alternative value system) has no good reason to do A—or no *better* reason to do A than to do some incompatible action.

## Examination of Non-Cognitivism:

### Two varieties:

- *Emotivism*: Evaluative sentences express speakers' feelings. (Ayer)
- *Prescriptivism*: Evaluative sentences serve to endorse or command courses of action. (Hare)
- Stevenson says: Evaluative sentences function as tools for influencing people's interests. (They do not *describe* people's interests.)

### Why people held this:

- In Ayer's case: logical positivism.
- Psychologically, evaluative judgements are associated with emotions.
- General sympathy for anti-realism, + better than subjectivism. Advantages:
  1. Explains the nature of moral disagreement. (To discuss: the role of empirical evidence, arguments in ethics.)
  2. Explains the "magnetism" of the good.
  3. Subjectivism implied that evaluative judgements actually *report facts*, that could be verified purely empirically.

### The 'Frege-Geach Problem':

- Deals with "embedded" evaluative sentences. Ex.:
  1. In compound sentences, with logical connectives:
    - "If [*lying is wrong*], then God will punish people for lying."
    - "Either Simpson didn't kill his wife, or [*the verdict was unjust*]."
  2. In propositional-attitude contexts:
    - "John believes that [*war is bad*]."
    - "I hope that [*I haven't done something wrong*]."
    - "Everyone says that [*you should take care of your children*]."
- Why do these create a problem?
  - a. It seems that such sentences would not make sense on the non-cognitivist view. But they make good sense in English.
  - b. Hard to see how the non-cognitivist can give a *systematic semantics* for such sentences, and one in which the meanings of the embedding contexts are constant (i.e., "believes" doesn't shift its meaning, etc.).
  - c. *Evidence* that evaluative sentences are assertive--they go in contexts where propositions normally go.

### Problem:

- Evaluative sentences pass every test for assertiveness that works in uncontroversial

cases.

- Take the grammatical form of assertions. Can appear in that-clauses.
- Embedding: Go into any contexts that normally call for proposition-denoting expressions (see above)
- We think we can: *believe, deny, assert, doubt, wonder whether*, etc., an evaluative proposition. We call them “true” and “false”. Any propositional attitude can be applied to an evaluative ‘proposition’.
- They stand in logical relations.
- We argue for/against them.
- We think we may be ‘wrong’ about them. We take time to try to make sure.
- Evaluative *predicates* can be put into any context that calls for a property. E.g., “(x) (Ax → Bx)”
- None of these things works on paradigmatically non-assertive utterances.

## Examination of Nihilism/Moral Error Theory

### Basic idea:

- All positive evaluations are false. (“x has moral property F”)
- *Why*: Moral language is committed to objective values. There are no objective values. Hence, (positive) moral claims are false.

### Main argument for:

1. There are no objective values.
  - a. The argument from ‘queerness.’ The ‘magnetism’ of value. The non-physical, non-natural nature of value.
  - b. The argument from ‘relativity.’
    - 1’. There is almost no cross-cultural agreement on values.
    - 2’. “A judgement about objective fact should be everywhere the same.”
    - 3’. So, probably, there are no objective evaluative facts.
  - c. The epistemological argument.
2. Evaluative sentences assert/presuppose that there are objective values.
  - a. The problems with relativism.
  - b. The problems with non-cognitivism.
3. So, moral evaluations are false.

### Where moral language comes from:

- People have feelings of approval/disapproval.
- People ‘project’ feelings onto objects.
- Helps to motivate people to conform to social norms.
- Evidence for this: the way moral facts are supposed to be connected with motivation; the magnetism of the good.

### Problem:

- This position is radically counter-intuitive. The following seem to be implications of Mackie’s position:
  1. It is not wrong to torture people just for the fun of it.
  2. Torturing is permissible.
  3. Pleasure isn’t better than suffering.
  4. In general: nothing matters. Nothing is better than anything else. There’s no reason to do or not do anything.
- Mackie says:
  - We can skeptically explain why people might have moral beliefs.
  - There is no need to preserve common sense beliefs or intuitions, if we can provide a

skeptical explanation instead:

“Nor are there ... any non-logical difficulties in the way of our accepting this view, except the persistence of the belief that moral facts are objective. [Note the misstatement.] . . . However firm the belief may be, ... it is not valid evidence for the existence of moral facts.” (85)

- Methodological issues:
  - Should one attempt to preserve common sense beliefs at all, in philosophical theories?
  - If yes, *how serious* of an objection is this?

**Phil. 4830**  
**Notes on Ethical naturalism & 'Objectivism'**

**Ethical naturalism:** Any theory that claims that evaluative properties ('good', 'right', etc.) can be reduced to objective, non-evaluative (or 'natural') properties.

- Rand puts forward one form of ethical naturalism.

**Rand's theory:**

Central thesis:  $x$  is good (for me) =  $x$  furthers my life. (The rest explains and/or defends this idea.)

**Basic concepts:**

- *Morality*: A code of values to guide one's choices.
- *Value*: Something one acts to gain/keep. (Distinguish: "benefit" vs. "value".)

**Source of 'value' and 'morality':**

Premise: *Life is a process of self-sustaining and self-generated actions.* Comments:

- Life depends upon the actions of the living things themselves. Failure to act leads to death.
- All organisms (normally) take these required actions, to sustain themselves.

Premise: Human beings do not *automatically* take the self-sustaining actions, and most *possible* actions are *not* life-sustaining.

Conclusions:

- a. Life is a value for all organisms. (See def. of "value".)
- b. In order to survive, humans must learn what sorts of actions are life-promoting.

Hypothesis: the purpose of evaluative concepts:

- Concept of value: arises from need to distinguish life-promoting things from life-destroying things.
- Morality: arises from the need for a set of general rules about what's good. It tells us what sorts of actions are life-promoting.
- The meaning of "good": things are good or bad for the organism depending on whether they promote the organism's life.
  - Some plausibility in this: consider what is "good for" your plants, what is "bad for" your cat, and so on.

Consequence of the theory: An immortal being could have no values.

- It wouldn't matter what you did, because no opportunity costs. In real life, we have to choose carefully because we have limited time & opportunities.
- Immortal beings could not be sick or healthy.
- Immortal beings could not experience pleasure or pain. Pleasure/pain are just mechanisms for detecting things that further or inhibit our lives.

**How the theory applies to normative ethics:**

- Things we think of as good: health, wealth, friendship, pleasure.



These things can all be tied to life.

- Things we think are virtues: courage, honesty, and justice are virtues. Similarly, these things are tied to promoting life.
- The most important virtue (for Rand): rationality. Reason is our basic tool of survival.

***Why this is a form of realism/objectivism:***

- Value is agent-relative, but:
- Human needs are objective, factual. Requirements of survival exist independent of our recognition of them.
- Hence, the correct values are objective.

**Questions/problems about this theory:**

1. Does “value” mean “something one acts to gain and/or keep,” or “something one *ought to* act to gain and/or keep”?
2. What shows that life itself is valuable? And what shows that nothing else is valuable?
3. Notice that this theory is *egoistic*: Everyone should do what promotes his own life. (Does this mean “maximize life expectancy”?) Does this mean it would be morally correct to murder 4 million people, if doing so increased your life expectancy by 5 minutes?
4. Recall G. E. Moore’s ‘open question argument.’

**Phil. 4830**  
**Notes on Alan Gewirth**

**What kind of theory is it?**

- Realist
- Not really intuitionist or naturalist, but some things in common with each:
  - Apparently non-reductionist
  - But claims to bridge the is-ought gap
  - Claims that immoral actions are inconsistent; hence, morality derives from logic.
- **Central thesis:** All rational agents, just by virtue of their being rational agents, are logically committed to accepting that all rational agents have general rights to freedom and well-being.

**A central idea: *The Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC):***

- Apply to your recipient the same generic features of action that you apply to yourself. (“The Is-Ought Problem Resolved,” 57)

or:

- Act in accordance with the generic rights of your recipient as well as yourself. (“The Golden Rule Rationalized,” 140)
- Gewirth wants to show what this means and how you are logically committed to it by being a purposive agent.

**The derivation:**

1. Assume S is a rational agent. Then S performs some action X for purpose E.

*Comment:* This is what it is to be a rational agent.

2. Then S is committed to holding: X and E are good.

*Comment:* The agent must value both the action and the purpose. But this need not be a moral sense of “good.”

3. So S is committed to holding: S’s freedom and well-being as good.

*Comment:* Because freedom and well-being are necessary conditions for all purposive actions.

4. S is, further, committed to holding: S has rights to freedom & well-being.

*Comment:* Because S holds himself to be justified in taking action X, he must also hold himself to be justified in having the necessary conditions for all action.

5. S is committed to holding: All purposive agents have rights to freedom & well-being. For:

(a) In the light of (4), S must answer the question: what is it about you that gives you such rights?

“[E]very right-claim is made on behalf of some person or group with an at least implicit recognition of the description or sufficient reason which is held to ground the right.” (“The Is-Ought Problem Resolved,” 54)

(b) The only answer S can give is: because I am a purposive agent.

*Why?* Suppose S adduces some other, more specific property of himself. This implies that, if he did not have that property, while still being a purposive agent, he would *not* claim rights to freedom & well-being. But this is false.

(c) This commits S to: All purposive agents have such rights.

“[I]f some predicate P belongs to some subject S because S has the property Q ..., then P must also belong to all other subjects ... which have Q.” (“The Is-Ought Problem Resolved,” 54)

6. S is committed to: I ought to refrain from coercing or inflicting basic harm on other agents.

*Comment:* This follows from (5).

***In summary:***

“Because actions are conative and value-pursuing, they commit the agent to advocate or endorse for himself the rights of freedom and basic well-being which are the proximate necessary prerequisites of all his acting .... Because the agent must advocate these rights for general reasons stemming from his simply being a prospective purposive agent, his advocacy must logically be extended to all other persons....” (“The Is-Ought Problem Resolved,” 61)

**Some issues:**

- a. In (2): the agent must value E before he takes the action. How does he know X and E to be good? (Not by means of this argument.)
- b. In (3): perhaps S is only committed to holding as good the *minimal* amounts of freedom and well-being necessary for him to perform action X.
- c. A Humean would reject the inference from (1) to (2).
- d. I don't see how you get to (4).

- e. In (5b): (Perhaps) S must agree that, as long as he was a purposive agent, he would claim rights, etc. It does not follow that S must agree that, as long as he was a purposive agent, he would *have* rights, etc.

## Phil 4830: Criticisms of intuitionism

### I. The argument from relativity.

- a. There is fundamental moral disagreement.
- b. If objectivism were true, there would not be fundamental moral disagreement.
- c. Objectivism is not true.

*Problems:*

- Is (a) true?
  - Many disagreements are not fundamental.
  - Intuitions may concern 'mid-level' moral principles
- Is (b) true?
  - If people disagree about  $x$ , then there are no facts about  $x$ ?
  - What if people disagree about the argument from relativity?

### II. The argument from queerness.

Is this the argument?

- a. Moral properties are weird.
- b. Weird things (probably) don't exist.
- c. Therefore, moral properties don't exist.

*Problems:*

Is (a) true? Most people don't seem to find moral properties weird.

What is weirdness? Is it a real property?

Are the properties of modern science less weird than moral properties?

The magnetism of moral properties:

- a. If moral properties exist, they are intrinsically motivating.
- b. But no properties are intrinsically motivating.
- c. So moral properties don't exist.

*Problem:*

Is (a) true?

If (a) is true, (b) begs the question.

### III. What is intuition?

- Is 'intuition' just strong belief?
- Do intuitions exist?

### IV. Intuition cannot be checked by other sources.

*Problem:* all means of knowledge can be checked by other sources--really?

- Memory?
- Introspection?

- Reason?
- Perception?
- Induction?

## V. Not all moral truths are self-evident.

- “What should we make of the proposal that moral truths are self-evident? Let us test it by a few examples of claims that many regard as true: It is wrong to cheat; it is wrong to engage in extramarital affairs; it is wrong to have an abortion, to murder, to engage in homosexual acts, to be dishonest or disloyal, to be unjust or ungrateful, to be proud or refuse to forgive. Are these self-evident truths?” (Smith, 25)
- “[E]ven those moral beliefs winning the widest consensus are not self-evident ... Rather, their purported truth is built on more basic propositions, such as the belief that dishonesty thwarts another person’s ability to achieve his goals or that marital infidelity causes pain or corrodes trust.” (Smith, 25)
- “Intuitionists’ assertion of the irrelevance of argument is plausible only as long as the examples invoked are carefully selected...” (Smith, 26)
- *Problems:*
  - 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> quotations: No one ever said all moral truths are self-evident.
  - Second quotation: assumes that (a) thwarting people’s ability to achieve their goals is bad, (b) pain is bad, and (c) corroding trust is bad. Why?

## VI. Intuitionists fail to produce an algorithm for resolving all moral issues.

“When two individuals’ intuitions about what is right in a given case stand directly at odds or when a person’s own intuitions pull in opposing directions...what is an Intuitionist to do? ... *How* should one study the situation more fully?...” (Smith, 27)

- Q: What is the argument here?

*Formulation 1:*

1. Any true meta-ethical theory would provide an algorithm for resolving all disputes.
2. Intuitionism fails to do so.
3. So intuitionism is not true.

*Objections:*

- a. Why is (1) true?
- b. Ethical non-cognitivism fails to provide an algorithm for resolving all disputes.  
Ethical subjectivism fails . . .  
Etc.  
Does this show that all meta-ethical theories are false?

*Formulation 2:*

1. Any true, *realist* meta-ethical theory would provide an algorithm, etc.
2. Intuitionism is a realist theory, but it fails to do so.
3. So intuitionism is not true.

*Objections:*

- a. Why is (1) true?
- b. Ethical naturalism (incl. Smith's own theory) fails to provide an algorithm, etc. Why doesn't Smith think this refutes her theory?
- c. *Metaphysical* realists have failed to provide an algorithm for resolving all factual disputes. Does this refute metaphysical realism?

*Formulation 3:*

1. Intuitionism implies that there is no algorithm, etc.
2. But there is one.
3. So intuitionism is not true.

*Objection:* Why believe (2)?

*Formulation 4:*

1. Intuitionism implies that ethical disagreements can *never* be resolved.
2. But *sometimes* they can be.
3. So intuitionism is false.

*Objection:* (1) is false.

*Formulation 5:*

1. If there is a legitimate means of knowledge about subject X, then there must be an algorithm for resolving all disputes about X.
2. Intuitionism implies that there is no algorithm for resolving all disputes about ethics.
3. So, if intuitionism is true, then we lack a legitimate means of moral knowledge.

*Objections:*

- a. Why is (1) true?
- b. Ethical naturalism (incl. Smith's own theory) fails to provide an algorithm, etc.
- c. There is no algorithm for resolving all factual disputes. Does this refute that there is knowledge of descriptive facts?

## **VII. Sociobiology undermines ethical realism.** (E.O. Wilson)

- Evolution created our intuitive faculty. It might deceive us, for true beliefs might not increase fitness.

*Objection:*

- All our other mental faculties are also created by evolution. Why wouldn't

sociobiology also undermine science (and all knowledge)?

- If it is argued that ethical beliefs are too changeable: Science is much more changeable.
- If it is argued that people disagree about ethics: There is at least as much consensus about ethics as about the theory of evolution.
- If it is said that this shows that all (purported) knowledge really is uncertain: perhaps, but ethical knowledge would be no *worse* off than scientific knowledge.



## Phil 4830: Moral motivation

### I. Two views about moral motivation:

#### A. Humean view:

1. 'Sentiment' determines ends.
  - Sympathy: when we see others having an experience, we have a similar, fainter idea in our minds.
  - This causes us to approve of actions that promote utility. (Hume is a utilitarian)
2. Reason determines appropriate means to our ends (e.g., whether an action promotes utility).
3. Hence, rational action =
  - Action that is likely to achieve agent's ultimate ends, given agent's beliefs.
  - Ultimate ends cannot be rationally criticized [except possibly for consistency & achievability]

#### B. Rationalist view:

1. Some beliefs are motivational, incl. moral beliefs.
2. Ends are subject to evaluation by reason.
3. Rational action =  
Action that is likely to achieve *rational* goals.

### II. A Humean argument against moral realism:

1. All motivation depends upon desires. No action can be motivated solely by belief. (the Humean Theory of Motivation)
2. Moral values (i.e., the attitude of accepting a norm) are inherently motivating. (Motivational Internalism)
3. Therefore, (a) moral values are *not* just beliefs; (b) moral values involve desires.
4. If realism is true, the moral values are just beliefs.
5. So, realism is not true.

### III. Against the rationalist view: Hume's five arguments?

- I. When you look at actions, you don't see any moral properties.
  - Example: ingratitude. Where is the moral property?
- II. We make moral judgements *after* all the facts are already known.
  - Also: we excuse people for ignorance of non-moral facts, but not for having incorrect moral values.
- III. Moral value is a lot like beauty, which is subjective.
- IV. Inanimate objects can stand in the same relations as humans can. Thus:

- If a tree over-tops and destroys its parent, this is not wrong.
  - But if a person kills his parent, it is.
  - If morality is objective, then both cases should be equally wrong.
  - This is explained by Hume's theory, b/c people don't feel emotions towards trees.
- V. All moral values depend upon some ends-in-themselves.
- One cannot prove the ends-in-themselves to be good.
  - Therefore, moral values can't be justified by reason.

#### IV. Butchvarov says:

Q: *Why be moral?* Why should I do what I should do?

- 3 bad interpretations of this:
  1. Why should I sacrifice my good for the sake of others? (the egoist's challenge)  
This is not the question. [Why? Because this is a question as to the content of morality?]
  2. When what I know I ought to do conflicts with my inclinations: demanding a reason for doing what I know I ought to do.  
This is not a reasonable question. All reasons have already been given. Not the job of ethics to force people to actually act on good reasons. Compare: not the job of logic to force people to be logical.
  3. There are two senses of "should".
    - a) Second "should" is moral; first "should" is prudential. (dealt with in (1))
    - b) Second "should" is moral; first has something to do with what I am motivated to do. (dealt with under (2))
    - c) "what I should do" means "what it is generally believed that I should do".  
This is "irrelevant". [Because it is a question as to the content of morality?]
- Correct interpretation: it is questioning a tautology. "Should" is used morally both times.
  - We have free will: after recognizing what we should do, we don't have to do it. Maybe this gives point to the question.
  - No: this is confusing "what should I do" with "what will I do". People need not always do as they (know they) should.
  - But moral knowledge always produces some motivation. But this is not because of anti-realism.  
Analogy: People are disposed towards true beliefs. Some propositions compel belief (for all rational beings). Similarly, some ends compel desire.
- Interpretation Butchvarov does not consider: Why is it rational to be moral?

## Phil 4830:

### Against Humean theories of moral motivation

- Does morality derive from *all* desires, or only some particular kind of desire?
  - All desires: Not a plausible theory. Consider: hate, jealousy, lust, vengeance
  - Some kinds of desires: There is nothing particularly interesting about morality; no reason to focus on just this one kind of desire.
- Humean theory has two aspects:
  - a) Normative (theory of rationality)
  - b) Psychological (theory of intentional action)Both are objectionable. 3 objections:

#### A. The uninterestingness of morality. (against Humean theory of rationality)

- Nothing special about moral reasons as opposed to other desires.
- No reason to act morally if morality conflicts with other (strong) desires.
  - Ex.: Peter Singer's claims about morality
  - So, being moral is often irrational.
- Ethics per se is uninteresting. Makes as much sense to devote a field of study to figuring out how to satisfy our desire for vengeance, power, etc.

#### B. We distinguish moral requirements from personal preferences. (against Humean psychology)

1. *Moral praise/blame*: is not like sharing/not sharing personal preferences.
  - Is it because moral values are *stronger* than (other) personal preferences?
2. *Punishment*: We only punish people for immoral actions (not actions we merely don't prefer).
3. *Guilt*: We don't feel guilty for merely failing to satisfy our own personal preferences.
4. *Inclination and duty*: We feel conflicts between inclination and duty. We distinguish these from conflicts among inclinations. Why?

#### C. Hume can't account for prudence, or *any* rational criticism of action.

- In Humean theory of rationality, what desires give reasons for action:
  - 1) Desires the agent has at the time?
  - 2) Desires the agent doesn't have but will have later?Answer: (1).
- Desires have degrees of strength. Strength of desires  $\propto$  strength of reasons.
- What strength-of-desire determines the strength of the reasons for action:
  - 1) The present strengths of the agent's desires?

2) The strength of the agent's desires at a later time?

Answer: (1).

- So, the rational action is whatever you *now* most want to do.
  - Imprudent/weak-willed action is rational. What's supposed to be wrong with imprudent acts is that the subject's desires *later* are less well-satisfied. But later desires are irrelevant.
  - Nor should you think it is irrational because it is against the agent's *interests*. Why: this is not the Humean theory of rationality.
  - All action is rational (with the possible exception of strong-willed actions--which, however, might be impossible).

#### **D. Humean view implies determinism?**

- B/c we always do whatever our desires most push us towards. Can't do something we have no motive to do; also can't act on a weaker desire instead of a stronger one.
- Corollary: can't blame anyone for anything.
- Corollary: all actions are rational.
- *But*: Hume is a compatibilist, so this is all ok. (*Enquiry VIII*)

**Phil 4830:**

**Sterling's motivational rationalism**

*Sterling's Thesis:* There are no non-moral reasons for action. One ought rationally to pursue E iff one is justified in believing that E is good.

*Two main premises:*

1. S's desiring E synthetically entails that S quasi-believes that E is good.
  - What is a quasi-belief?
  - Other, similar mental states uncontroversially synthetically entail quasi-beliefs. *Examples:* Fear, anger, hope
3. It is irrational to intentionally act on a quasi-belief that one is justified in believing is false.<sup>1</sup>
  - Compare to irrationality of acting on *beliefs*.
  - Compare cases of non-moral quasi-beliefs.

*Consider 8 possible cases:*

S desire situation	S moral belief situation	Rational action
1. desires E	justified in believing E is good	Pursue E
2. desires E	justified in believing E is bad	Do not pursue E
3. desires E	justified in believing E is neutral	Optional
4. desires E	no justified belief	Optional
5. does <i>not</i> desire E	justified in believing E is good	Pursue E
6. does <i>not</i> desire E	justified in believing E is bad	Do not pursue E
7. does <i>not</i> desire E	justified in believing E is neutral	Optional
8. does <i>not</i> desire E	no justified belief	Optional

- Note that the third column is filled in in accordance with Sterling's Thesis. ST is true iff the third column is correct.
- Think about each of these cases to judge what seems rational. Cases of particular interest:

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<sup>1</sup>Sterling also lists (2. Good and bad exist, and we know of them through intuition.), but this is inessential to the argument.

*Case 2: Why is it irrational to pursue E?*

- See premises (1) and (3).

*Case 3: Why not pursue E?*

- See premises (1) and (3) again.
- Further defense:
  - Pleasure/desire-satisfaction is good.
  - Hence, in order for S to be justified in believing E is value-neutral, S must know of some disadvantage that counter-balances this good.
  - In such a case, it seems S is not rationally required to pursue E.

*Case 5: Why should he pursue E?*

- In not desiring E, S has a quasi-belief that E isn't good. But he is justified in believing that this quasi-belief is false. Refraining from pursuing E would be acting on this quasi-belief, and he should not act on a quasi-belief that he is justified in thinking is false.

## Phil 4830

### The Argument from Weakness of the Will

#### What is weakness of the will?

- Conflict between morality and inclination, agent acts against what he thinks he should do.
- Also: Conflict between prudence and inclination, agent acts against prudence.

#### Questions:

1. Why is weakness of will irrational?
  2. Why is it a form of “weakness”?
  3. Does the agent have free will? Can he be blamed for his choice?
- Claim: Humeans cannot answer these questions plausibly.

*The Humean Account:* Must hold that weakness of will is rational, or impossible.

#### A. The conflict between morality and inclination:

- There are 3 possibilities: (a) The agent does not desire the (putative) moral good. (b) The agent desires the moral good, but *less* than he desires the other end. (c) The agent desires the moral good *more* than he desires the other end.
- In case (a), the agent would be irrational to act morally.
- In case (b), the agent would be irrational to act morally.
- In case (c), the agent would have to act morally.

#### B. The conflict between prudence and inclination:

- What counts is the agent's *present desires*.
- Again, 3 possibilities: (a) The agent does not now desire his future good. (b) The agent now desires the future good, but *less* than he desires the immediate good. (c) The agent now desires the future good *more* than he desires the immediate good.
- In case (a), the agent would be irrational to pursue the future good.
- In case (b), the agent would be irrational to pursue the future good.
- In case (c), the agent would have to pursue the future good.

#### C. General point: on the Humean account, the agent's intentional acts are determined. He has to act on his strongest desires.

- It seems that no one can be blamed for anything, since (a) he lacks free will, and (b) anyway, his action was rational.

- D. No sense to calling it a form of 'weakness.' Agents always choose what they want. How is that "weak"?
- The Humean also has no account of what it is for one person to be "more strong-willed" than another. (He's less disposed to do what he wants??)

***The Rationalist-Intuitionist Account:***

- In moral motivation, reason becomes motivational. Reason endorses certain ends.
- A. In the conflict between morality and inclination:
- Weakness of will is irrational, since it puts ends *not* endorsed by reason before ends endorsed by reason.
- B. In the conflict between prudence and inclination:
- Reason judges a certain future good or satisfaction to be greater than some immediate good.
  - But the agent *desires* the immediate good more.
  - Weakness of will is irrational, since the agent acts on the desire, against reason. (Compare Sterling's view: the agent acts on a quasi-belief that he is justified in believing is false.)
- C. Why is it a form of "weakness"?
- Physical weakness manifests when an agent has difficulty performing the physical actions he wants to perform.
  - (Somewhat) analogously, weakness *of will* manifests when the agent has difficulty *willing* the actions that he most fundamentally evaluates as choiceworthy.
  - This analogy requires the notion that the weakwilled actions are irrational.
  - Also seems to require that the agent is somehow 'more identified' with the moral/prudential end than with the present inclination. Contrast: the 'evil' agent.
- D. How is it that both the 'weak-willed' and the 'strong-willed' action are possible?
- This requires the 'incommensurability' of the motivations. If motivations merely differ in strength, you have the Humean's problem.
  - On the rationalist-intuitionist view, motivations differ *in kind*, not (merely) in strength. (Belief vs. desire.)
  - Hence, the nature of the motivations does not causally determine the agent's choice.
  - One can make sense of the idea of having *more* or *less* strength of will: To have more strength of will is to be disposed to override stronger desires.



**Phil 4830**

## **Moral Psychology**

### **Lawrence Kohlberg's Theory:**

#### **The stages of moral development:**

Level 1: Egoistic orientation

Type 1: Oriented toward avoiding punishment

Type 2: Naively egoistic

Level 2: Oriented to conventional order and others' expectations

Type 3: Orientation to approval of others

Type 4: Respect for authority & social order

Level 3: Oriented towards general rules

Type 5: Contractual, legalistic orientation

Type 6: Conscience or principle orientation

#### **Kohlberg's methods:**

- Uses moral dilemmas, in which two moral principles/values conflict.  
Ex.: A man's wife needs a medicine to save his life. He doesn't have enough money to buy it, and the doctor won't give it to him. Should he break into the office and steal it?
- Interviews different-age children, adolescents, and adults.
- Kohlberg interprets responses, looking for patterns, selecting out parts of responses that seem to fit with patterns. He classifies different subjects as belonging to different types.
- The levels above roughly correspond to what people say at different ages.

#### **From Self Psychology to Moral Philosophy:**

Hypothesis about moral motivation (from Prescott Lecky): People motivated by self-consistency / to construct a coherent conception of one's own personality.

- Why Johnny can't spell
- Why be moral

Cognitive dissonance experiment.

Rival explanations:

- Cognitive dissonance
- Self-perception
- Self-enhancement
- Self-verification
  - Some evidence: self-attribution of emotion

### Velleman's theory

- Structure of intentional action: motive -> intention -> action
- Agent forms belief about his emotions/attitudes.
- Then thinks of what action would be consistent with these emotions/attitudes. This thought is the 'intention.'
- Moral motivation: if the agent thinks of himself as 'honest', etc., then he is motivated to act in the way honest people act. Follows Lecky's theory.