Metaethics: Cognitivism

Metaethics: What is morality, or "right"?

Normative (prescriptive) ethics: How should people act? Descriptive ethics: What do people think is right? Applied ethics: Putting moral ideas into practice

Thin moral concepts more general: good, bad, right, and wrong

Thick moral concepts more specific: courageous, inequitable, just, or dishonest

Centralism- thin concepts are antecedent to the thick ones

Non-centralism- thick concepts are a sufficient starting point for understanding thin ones because thin and thick concepts are equal. Normativity is a non-excisable aspect of language and there is no way of analyzing thick moral concepts into a purely descriptive element attached to a thin moral evaluation, thus undermining any fundamental division between facts and norms.

Cognitivism

ethical propositions are truth-apt (can be true or false), unlike questions or commands

Ethical subjectivism/moral anti-realism

True ethical propositions are a function of subjective features

Ethical realism/moral realism

Ethical propositions that refer to objective features may be true if they are free of subjectivism

Moral relativism

nobody is objectively right or wrong in regards to diagreements about moral questions

Cultural relativism

norms should be understood in terms of culture

Moral universalism/ moral objectivism/ universal morality

a system of ethics, or a universal ethic, applies universally to "all"

not all forms of moral universalism are absolutist, nor are they necessarily value monist, and may be value pluralist

can include non-cognitivist universal prescriptivism

Robust and Minimal

- 1. Semantic thesis: moral predicates are to refer to moral properties so moral statements represent moral facts, and express propositions that are true or false
- 2. Alethic thesis: Some moral propositions are true

Robust

3. Metaphysical thesis: the facts and properties of #1 are robust-their metaphysical status is not relevantly different from ordinary non-moral facts and properties

Ethical non-naturalism (non-definism)

Ethical propositions are not reducible to any set of natural properties, or non-moral features

Ethical intuitionism

intuitive awareness and knowledge of value and evaluative facts (known without logical inference or systematic thought) Ethical naturalism moral naturalism (definism)

Ethical propositions are reducible to some set of natural properties, or non-moral features via empiricism

inquiry into the natural world can increase moral knowledge the same way it increases scientific knowledge

rejects the fact-value distinction of is/positivism and ought/norms

Sentimentalism (Moral sense theory in epistemology)

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Value pluralism

there are two or more scales of value, so any prioritization of values is either non-cognitive or subjective the nature of moral beliefs is discovered by emotional responses to experience

Value monism

all goods are commensurable on a single value scale

Divine command theory

moral good is equivalent to whether it is commanded by a god Ideal observer theory

Some ethical propositions are true, and are the attitudes of a hypothetical ideal (neutral and fully informed) observer

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Metaethics: Moral Skepticism

Moral skepticism

a) moral knowledge is impossible b) we are justified in doubting moral claims are true

Pyrrhonian moral skepticism- doubt is justified because moral claims are unkowable and thus irrational, so the truth of error theory (i) is unknown, and (ii) is denied

Dogmatic moral skepticism- affirms (ii) and cites (ii)'s truth as a reason for doubt

Non-cognitivism

moral knowledge is impossiblebecause ethical sentences are not truth-apt (true or false)

moral claims are imperatives, expressions of emotion, or expressions of "pro-attitudes"

Emotivism

ethical sentences do not express propositions but emotional attitudes (hurrah/boo)

Quasi-realism

Ethical sentences do not express propositions

ethical sentences project emotional attitudes as though they were real properties

Blackburn's Challenge:

How can two situations not demand different ethical responses without referring to a difference in the situations themselves?
The challenge is unmeetable, so there must be a realist component in our notions of ethics, but ehics cannot be entirely realist either, as ethical positions have changed over time.

Universal prescriptivism/prescriptivism

non-cognitivist form of moral universalism

rather than expressing propositions, ethical sentences function similarly to imperatives which are universalizable

a moral judge is committed to the same judgment in any situation given the same relevant facts Moral nihilism/ethical nihilism

nothing is intrinsically moral or immoral

morality is a complex set of rules and recommendations that may give psychological, social, or economical advantages, but is otherwise without universal or even relative truth

Expressivism

propositions that employ moral terms are not descriptive or fact-stating

they do not refer to real world properties or have any truth value

moral sentences do not to assert facts, they express an evaluative attitudes toward an object of evaluation

avoids the error theory

Moral error theory

(i) all moral claims are false, nothing is right or wrong (ii) we have reason to believe that all moral claims are false, and so, (iii) we are justified in doubting any claim we have reason to deny

combines the cognitivist thesis that moral language consists of truth-apt statements with the nihilist thesis that there are no moral facts

Global falsity

moral beliefs and assertions are false in that they claim that certain moral facts that do not exist in fact do exist

moral assertions are only true if there are moral properties that are intrinsically motivating, but there is good reason to believe that there are no such intrinsically motivating properties Presupposition failure/fictionalism

moral beliefs and assertions are not true because they are neither true nor false

not a form of non-cognitivism, for moral assertions are still thought to be truth-apt

this form claims that moral beliefs and assertions presuppose so they suffer from "presupposition failure" because moral facts do not exist



Normative Ethics

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Pragmatic ethics

societies can progress or evolve morally so future generations can refine, improve, or replace accepted hypotheses, norms, principles, and moral criteria through inquiry

Deontological ethics

judges the morality of an action based on the action's adherence to a rule

duty-" or "obligation-" or "rule-" based ethics, because rules "bind you to a duty"

action is more important than the consequences Role ethics

morality is derived from a person's relationship with their community or family

Consequentialism/Teleology

the consequences of conduct are the basis for the judgment of the rightness of conduct

a right act will produce a good outcome

if a goal is morally important any method of achieving it is acceptable Virtue ethics/ aretaic ethics

evaluate ethical behavior based on the virtue and character of the actor

Care ethics/EoC

contextualizing to meet the needs or interests of dependence and interdependence, and the importance of response/outcome, and vulnerability

deontological and consequentialist ethics tend to view persons as having independent interests and interactions

moral action should maximize utility

Utilitarianism

Act utilitarianism

moral acts are right if and only if it produces at least as much happiness as any other act that the person could perform at that time Rule utilitarianism

an action is right if it conforms to a rule that leads to the greatest good

the correctness of a rule is determined by the amount of good it brings about if followed

Preference utilitarianism

promotes actions that fulfill the immediate preferences of the beings involved

ethical altruism

moral agents have an obligation to help others

Intellectualism

the best action fosters and develops the intellect

Welfarism

measure goodness in terms of subjective utility and consequence impact

Situational ethics

the context/situation of an act is judged on love, rather than judging it on absolute moral standards

Mohist consequentialism state consequentialism

the moral worth of an action is based on how it contributes to the basic goods of a state through social order, material wealth, and population growth

Ethical egoism

moral agents ought to do what is in their own self-interest

psychological egoism claims that people can only act in self-interest

rational egoism holds that it is rational to act in self-interest

Two-level utilitarianism

moral decisions should be based on a set of 'intuitive' moral rules, except in certain rare situations where it is more appropriate to engage in a 'critical' level of moral reasoning

a synthesis of act utilitarianism and rule utilitarianism