Cognitivism and non-cognitivism: developments
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Cognitivism is the view that we can have moral *knowledge*. One main cognitivist theory, moral realism, claims that good and bad are properties of situations and people, right and wrong are properties of actions. The moral realist believes that statements like 'Euthanasia is not wrong' are expressions of beliefs, which can be true or false. Whether such statements are true or false depends on the way that the world is, by what properties an action, person, or situation – such as euthanasia – actually has. They must 'fit the facts'.

Facts, values and moral debate
What sort of facts? Moore's argument for the naturalistic fallacy tries to draw a distinction between natural facts, which we know through our senses, and moral values, which we know through intuition. But Moore still believed there were 'facts' about these values, i.e. he believed that moral properties existed as part of reality, and that beliefs about moral properties could be true or false. Moore rejected the idea that facts about moral values could be deduced from any other kind of facts.

The puzzle is how a value can be *any* type of fact. Values are related to evaluations. If no one valued anything, would there be any values? Facts are part of the world. The fact the dinosaurs roamed the Earth millions of years ago would be true whether anyone had found out about it or not. But it is more difficult to believe that values 'exist' quite independently of us and our talk about values.

Ayer, arguing for emotivism, claimed that when two people disagree over a matter of fact, we normally know how we could prove the matter one way or the other, even if we cannot supply the proof. Facts are things that can be shown to be true. But if two people agree over all the facts about abortion, say, but still disagree about whether it is right, we cannot appeal to any more 'facts' in the same way. What we would call 'the facts' seem to be *all* agreed, but the dispute about values remains. Value judgements always go beyond the facts.

Ayer argued that ethical judgements express feelings: 'If I say to someone, "You acted wrongly in stealing that money"…I am simply evincing my moral disapproval of it. It is as if I had said, "You stole that money," in a peculiar tone of horror' (142). The feelings they expression are feelings of approval or disapproval. Feelings are not cognitions of value, and value does not exist independently of our feelings. But then, this seems to entail a very unsatisfactory view of ethical discussion, viz. that there is no *reasoning* about ethical judgments.

Stevenson replied that in such ethical debate, there is a disagreement in attitude. Simon Blackburn has developed the implications of this: People do not have feelings or make choices in isolation. The attitudes we adopt have implications for other attitudes and mental states. If I disapprove of an action, I must also have certain beliefs about it (my reasons for disapproving, such as that it causes pain) and certain desires towards it (such as wanting to

prevent it), and to be consistent, I must have similar feelings about similar actions. Moral disagreement and moral reasoning, then, can be about the relations between different feelings that we have. For example, deciding whether abortion is right or wrong is complicated because there are many feelings involved, sympathy towards the mother, sympathy towards the foetus, feelings about human life, death, and parenthood. It is difficult to work out how these feelings can all be acted upon, and that is why people disagree.

Furthermore, Blackburn adds, while we might expect that any number of systems of moral attitudes are internally coherent, it turns out that, psychologically, human beings can adopt and live by only a very few. 'Valuing' is an activity of the will, but the will is guided by its nature. We are all set up, by evolution perhaps, to value actions and people in particular, familiar sorts of ways.

Moral facts are reasons
Realists respond by pointing out that there is more of a connection between facts and values than this argument suggests. Notice that we always appeal to the facts when we are trying to justify a moral judgement. If there were no connection, this would seem silly. But we can give *reasons* that support our moral claims, for example that eating meat is wrong, because of the suffering it causes to animals. This reason – that our practice of eating meat causes animal suffering – is a factual claim, about a way that the world is. It is either true or false that the practice of eating meat causes suffering to animals. This may be hard to prove, but we know roughly *how* to prove it. Moore is right to think that no natural fact can *logically entail* a moral value. But that doesn't mean there is no relation between natural facts and moral judgments.

The model is this: '"Eating meat causes animal suffering" is a reason to believe "Eating meat is wrong".' In general terms, '"Fact x" is a reason to believe "Moral judgement y".' The moral realist claims that this relation 'is a reason to believe' is true or false. Either fact x is a reason to believe moral judgement y or it is not. Compare reasons for other types of belief. If isotopic-dating indicates that the dinosaur bones are 65 million years old, this is a reason to believe that dinosaurs lived on Earth 65 million years ago. It is not *proof*, perhaps, but it is a reason. (Reasons can come in different strengths – there can be good reasons, really good reasons, and proof. Bad reasons are not actually reasons at all.) The result of isotopic-dating dinosaur bones is a reason to think dinosaurs lived on Earth 65 million years ago, whether you think it is a reason or not. Facts about reasons are objective, just like facts about the natural world. But facts about reasons are another *type* of fact.

What type? Well, it is not a fact that science can discover. There is no scientific investigation into what reasons there are. But this doesn't mean it is not part of reality. Philosophers would say facts about reasons are *normative* facts. They are facts about justification and reasoning. Are these very 'strange'? There are different philosophical theories of what reasons are, but it looks like we need them, and that there are going to be facts about them.

Moral realists claim there are facts about the reasons we give for our moral judgements. Like all facts, these facts about reasons are part of the way the world is. How does this help moral realism? Let's go back to the example of abortion. We said that the two people agree on all the 'facts' about abortion, but disagree on whether it is wrong. What we meant, says the realist, is that they agree on all the natural facts, but we forgot about the facts about reasons.

For example, is the fact that the foetus will become a human being a (strong) reason for thinking abortion is wrong? The answer to this question, claims realism, is factual, a fact about a reason. So the two people don't agree on all the facts, because they don't agree on the normative facts. One of them is making a mistake, because they are not seeing certain natural facts as reasons at all or, at least, not seeing them as strong reasons, when they are reasons or strong reasons. If two people agree on all the natural facts and all the normative facts, then they will also agree on the value. So we can understand values as a type of fact.

Moral realism accepts that it can be very difficult to establish whether a natural fact constitutes a reason for believing something is right or wrong, and how strong this reason is. But this is the case in all types of investigation into reality. We must always 'weigh up the facts' when making judgements about what to believe. This 'weighing up' is an attempt to discover the facts about reasons. Moral judgements are judgements about normative facts.

Judgment-sensitive attitudes

Blackburn argues that our 'judgments' about reasons are *reflections* of our evaluative attitudes. Cognitivists argue that our evaluative attitudes are (or should be!) based on our judgments about reasons. Indeed, cognitivists may allow that our judgments about reasons *are* our evaluative attitudes – it is through our emotional responses that we gain 'insight' into what practical reasons there are. So which is the right account?

This is a chicken-and-egg puzzle. Oversimplifying considerably, is something good because you desire it (non-cognitivism), or do you desire it because (you *believe*) it is good (cognitivism)? A first thought supporting cognitivism is this: whenever you desire something, you can answer the question 'why do you want it?'. Your answer says what is good about it, e.g. that it is pleasurable. So desire seems to respond to what we judge to be good.

This is Scanlon's theory: our evaluative attitudes are 'judgment-sensitive attitudes', i.e. attitudes formed on the basis of our judgments that there is good reason to have such an attitude. To be a rational creature is to have "the capacity to recognize, assess, and be moved by reasons, and hence to have judgment-sensitive attitudes… every action that we take with even a minimum of deliberation about what to do reflects a judgment that a certain reason is worth acting on" (*What We Owe to Each Other*, 23). So, for example, in his analysis of desire, Scanlon identifies three components. The first two are familiar, non-cognitive attributes, viz. a sensation of unpleasantness or lack and an urge to act. But to this he adds the cognitivist condition, an evaluation that the object of desire is good. Without the evaluation, we are not left with desire as usually understood, but some peculiar state (a mere unpleasant urge). Our desires (or many of them) are susceptible to rational interaction with other mental states.

Perhaps the strongest challenge to cognitivism about reasons is this: what is it to judge reasons 'correctly'? Suppose a selfish man disagrees that there is any reason not to be selfish – by whose lights do we decide upon 'deficiencies' in sensitivity to reason? The non-cognitivists (Blackburn and Bernard Williams) argue that these judgments are themselves reflections of our evaluative attitudes. Of course, there are, as a matter of fact, many motivations that we will share with the selfish man, and we will appeal to these to try to demonstrate that there are reasons to be unselfish. But it is empty rhetoric to argue that, in addition, we have 'reality' on our side.

If one is not convinced by Kant that the operations of pure a priori reason can fix the reasons we have to act, then cognitivism is left with some form of intuitionism, often something like John Rawls' 'reflective equilibrium – where theory and case-intuitions are tested against each other in pursuit of coherence. Scanlon, for example, appeals to testing our intuitions by clarification and reflection – there is no other methodology for establishing what reasons there are. (Arguably, intuitions about what counts as a reason in scientific endeavour is no better off, though there is more agreement in that field.) But this kind of reasoning is precisely what Blackburn identified as available to non-cognitivism as well.

What can settle the issue? Non-cognitivists argue that their metaphysics is simpler: cognitivism must claim that 'nature' contains a normative order of reasons, to which we are sensitive. Far simpler to say that we have naturally evolved a set of evaluative dispositions which are then projected onto the world. Cognitivists reply that non-cognitivism falsifies the nature of normative explanation, e.g. why we act on desires or why we should. If reasons are dependent on desires, then it seems that, ultimately, why act so as to fulfil our desires. But this is actually a very poor *reason* to act – it is not fulfilling the desire which provides the reason (a reason that does not discriminate between desires), it is what the action secures, e.g. the pleasure, the achievement – therefore, it is what is *good* that provides reasons to act, not to desires. The debate continues.