

## Challenge (1) - Relativism

- During Darius's reign, he invited some Greeks and asked them how much money it would take for them to be prepared to eat the corpses of their fathers; they replied that they would not do that for any amount of money.
- Next, Darius summoned some members of a tribe known as Callatiae, who eat their parents' corpses, and asked them in the presence of the Greeks, with an interpreter, how much money it would take for them to be willing to cremate their fathers' corpses; they cried out in horror and told him not to say such appalling things. – *Herodotus, Histories, Book III (5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE)*



## Challenge (1) - Relativism...

- Relativism asserts that each society or community decides its own values and all individuals within a particular society are bound by it. Individuals from other societies cannot pronounce any judgment on it.
  - Agent Relativism - An action is wrong according to the society to which the agent belongs.
  - Appraiser Relativism – An action is wrong according to society to which the appraiser belongs.
- All moral statements we use colloquially have to be completed with ...”relative to X”
  - To be understood relevant to that particular moral code
  - It’s just law of the land!
    - Perhaps we could change it if we decided to...
    - It’s simply a matter of convention

# Relativism - Evaluations

- Different cultures have different moral codes ; There are no universal moral truths
- There is no *culture independent standard* of evaluating right or wrong actions

*But*

- Can two relativists really disagree? Or are they talking past each other?
- How does it matter what other people think about what is right/wrong?
- Is the relativist going to be relativist about relativism? Self-defeating?
- Would relativism also work in multicultural societies?
- Could the relativist criticise their own culture? Other cultures?
- Can there be a moral progress?
  - Human rights?
- When taken to its logical conclusions, could lead to subjectivism



## Relativism – Evaluations...

- It's nonetheless true that some of our customs are merely conventional and often are carried on in the name of morality
  - It helps to keep an open mind
- The larger lesson is that morality is what makes co-existence possible and convenient
  - Value universalism
    - Honesty/ Truthfulness
    - For example, people everywhere want clean water, leisure time, good health care, and the freedom to choose their own friends. Common goals will often yield common values.

## Subjectivism...

- “I like the taste of coffee,” doesn’t need to have a reason—it is a mere statement of preferences.
  - No “rational defense” required.
- Moral judgments are different from expressions of personal taste.
  - If someone says that something is morally wrong, then she does need reasons; and if her reasons are legitimate, then other people should agree with her.
  - If she has no good reason for what she says, then she is simply making noise and may be ignored.

# Response to the Challenge

- Mere disagreement doesn't imply lack of truths
  - Disagreement in the sciences
- While some values might be relative, others might not be
  - Truthfulness, Honesty
- The manner of acquisition of the belief is no indication of its truth
  - Learning maths/science
- “The reason ethics resists explanation by sociology or psychology... is that like mathematics it is a subject with its own integrity.”

## Challenge (2) - Egoism

- Psychological Egoism
  - view that there is only one thing that can motivate you to act as a human being: what you perceive to increase your well-being.
  - Describes generally what all of us are motivated to do all of the time.
  - Makes a claim about human nature, or about the way things are;
- Ethical egoism
  - On this view it is morally right for you to pursue your own well-being
  - It is, therefore morally wrong for you to promote the well-being of others if this diminishes your own well-being.
  - Makes a claim about morality, or about the way things should be.



# Psychological Egoism

- We are always driven by our desires
  - But we often feel the pull of morality and act in spite of our desires
  - The issue is not whether the action is based on a desire; the issue is what kind of desire it is based on.
  - If you want to help someone else, then your motive is altruistic, not self-interested
- We act unselfishly because it makes us feel good about ourselves
  - Altruistic desires can be stronger than 'self-interested' desires
  - Feeling good is not the object of our actions
  - By-product and not the goal



# Ethical Egoism

- The principle of self-interest accounts for *all* of one's obligations.
  - Benefiting others is not what makes the act right. Rather, an act is right because it benefits you.

(1) Everyone is aware of his or her own wants and needs.

- Each of us is uniquely placed to pursue those wants and needs effectively. At the same time, we understand other people only imperfectly, and we are not well-placed to advance their interests.
- For these reasons, if we try to help others, we might do more harm than good.
- Thus, we should accept Ethical Egoism.

## Ethical Egoism...

- (2) Ethical Egoism allows each person to view his or her own life as having supreme value and sacrificing one's life is violating that value.
  - Thus, we should accept Ethical Egoism.
- (3) Helping others is good for the self in the long run. Therefore, we should help others, keep our promises and fulfill our obligations
  - Altruism is just egoism in a different name
- Ethical Egoism violates the principle of fair treatment
  - It divides the world into two groups of people—one's self and everyone else—and urges us to favor the interests of those in the first group over the interests of those in the second group

# Role of Reason

- Reason has a place in ethics
  - Moral advice fails without reason in its support
  - Psychological influence ≠ relevance
  - Moral advice ≠ Propaganda
  - Arguments in favour and against moral judgments can be subjected to a critique.
- This is at bottom what is wrong with psychological egoism and cultural relativism
  - If we can produce good reasons for thinking that this practice is wrong, and show that the arguments in its support are unsound, then we have proven it wrong regardless of what belief one has been conditioned to have, or what one's cultural code might say.
  - Emotivism runs afoul of the same fact: if a stronger case can be made for euthanasia than against it, then mercy killing is permissible, no matter what one's attitude might be”.

# Hume's Emotivist Challenge

- Moral belief is inherently connected to conduct
  - The test of whether we sincerely believe that we should do something is whether in fact we are motivated to do it
  - Thus, having a moral belief involves being motivated to act, or, Hume put it, of having a sentiment.
  - On the other hand, a person's capacity to identify truth and falsehood (his reason) has no necessary connection with his conduct at all
- When one makes a moral judgment such as "It is wrong to x," one is actually saying no more than "Don't commit x"
- Reason sets out the facts; then sentiment takes over and the choice is made.
- One is doing nothing more in making these judgments than expressing one's attitude and urging others to adopt that attitude.
  - Even though they may be sincere or insincere, imperatives and expressions of attitude are neither true nor false-and thus moral judgments are neither true nor false.



# Direction of fit

- Humean Theory of Motivation
  - All our mental states can be divided into cognitive and non-cognitive mental states
    - Beliefs, suppositions are cognitive
      - They have a mind-to-world direction of fit
    - Desires, intentions, wishes, wants are non-cognitive
      - They have world-to-mind direction of fit
- Imagine that Mira goes to a grocery store with a shopping list that reads “milk, vegetable and chocolate.” Mira occasionally takes a look at her list and then puts the corresponding items – milk, vegetable, and chocolate – into her basket.
- Mira is also being followed by a reporter called Farid. As Mira is putting his items into her basket, Farid writes down on a piece of paper “milk, vegetables, and chocolate.”
- As a result, Farid’s list contains exactly the same words as Mira’s list. Mira’s and Farid’s lists are in one respect very different from one another.
- Using the terminology of directions of fit, Mira’s list has the basket-to-list direction of fit. The role of this list is satisfied when the items in Mira’s basket fit the list. Farid’s list has the opposite list-to-basket direction of fit. The purpose of this list is satisfied when the list fits what Mira puts in his basket.

## Direction of fit...

- Consider your own *intention* to listen to this lecture. The role of this state is satisfied when the world fits the content of your mental state: when you have finished listening to this lecture.
  - This is why non-cognitive desire-like states like intentions have the world-to-mind direction of fit.
- Cognitive belief-like states are different. Take the belief that IPL matches are held in April. The role of this state is fulfilled when the mental state fits how things are in the world.
  - This is why this state and other belief-like states have the mind-to-world direction of fit.
- A belief that  $p$  tends to go out of existence in the presence of a perception with the content not  $p$ , whereas a desire that  $p$  tends to endure, disposing the subject in that state to bring it about that  $p$

# Non-Cognitivism

- Only desire-like states with the world-to-mind direction of fit can move us to act, whereas beliefs are supposed to be motivationally inert.
  - Consider a situation in which you believe that you have the ingredients for making biryani in your kitchen.
  - Unless you *want* to have a biryani, this *belief* in itself will not get you cooking.
  - You will start preparing the meal only if you *want* to eat a biryani.

# Motivation for Non-cognitivism

- All mental states are either cognitive belief-like states with the mind-to-world direction of fit or non-cognitive desire-like states with the world-to-mind direction of fit.
- Only the non-cognitive desire-like states with the world-to-mind direction of fit can motivate us.
- Necessarily, if you make a genuine moral judgment that you morally ought to act in a certain way, then you have at least some motivation to act in that way.

From these three premises it follows that:

- Moral judgments are desire-like states with the world-to-mind direction of fit.



## Non-cognitivism – Core Claims

- When you make a genuine moral judgment, you do not form a belief, but rather, you are in a non-cognitive desire-like state.
- You can understand the meaning of moral words by considering what kind of mental states people are in when they use moral language.
- Science offers a complete description of the world and this description does not include any moral properties or facts. Instead, moral facts and properties are our attitudes projected onto the world.

# Non-Cognitivism

- Moral language is not fact-stating language
- It is mere an expression of one's attitudes
- It is used to influence or persuade people
- Utterances are more like commands than statements

*For example –*

1. Akshay is a good man *means* “Way to go Akshay!”
2. Hurting somebody is wrong *means* “Hurting---boo!”

## 1.7 Non-cognitivism - Evaluations

- Will arguments against simple Moral relativism work against Non-cognitivism?
  - Moral disagreement ??
    - Is it disagreement in belief or disagreement in attitudes??
  - Can moral judgments be wrong?
  - How can a non-cognitivist explain what sentences like “If abortion is wrong, then God is going to be upset” mean? (Similarly for all the others, like “It’s true that abortion is wrong”, “I believe abortion is wrong”, etc.) [This is often referred to as the Frege-Geach Problem]
    - Suppose you say that “Abortion is wrong” means something like “Boo on abortion!” (expressing a non-cognitive, emotional attitude about abortion). Then what could be meant by “I wonder whether abortion is wrong”? Does it mean “I wonder whether boo on abortion”? But that makes no sense.

# Dealing With Disagreements

- Many times different and divergent moral beliefs are grounded in ignorance
  - E.g. Human sacrifice
- Shared values among different cultures
  - E.g. Truth telling, Prohibition against Murder, respect for well-being & Happiness
- Perhaps, it is these kind of common values that provide some standard for moral progress



# So...

- So, hopefully, some of you would be convinced that whether something is right/wrong shouldn't depend on my opinion or my society's or even God's.
  - Recreational Genocide is wrong
  - Torturing babies for fun is wrong
  - Saving a drowning child is right
  - Abolishing untouchability is right
- The above statements might appear to you as true no matter what any individual or group says.
- For some such statements might appear to as Facts.
  - Denying these statements must be then called as lie/falsehoods

## 1.4 Moral Realism

- Certain acts are right in themselves
  - Not because we like them or that God approves of it.
- Right and wrong are mind-independent moral properties.
  - Rightness and Wrongness do not depend on what anyone thinks of the act
    - Just like other non-moral properties like weight, composition
- Two kinds of realism is often distinguished
  - Naturalism
  - Intuitionism

## 1.5 Moral Naturalism

- What is it for something to be natural?
  - Observed empirically
  - Studied scientifically
  - Causally effective
- Moral naturalists believe that moral properties like right and wrong are natural properties.
  - We can observe and study scientifically which acts are right and what it is for these acts to be right

## 1.5 Moral Naturalism

- Reality includes moral facts, and moral facts can be reduced to or made to fit within the facts that we regard as natural
- Moral knowledge could be then conceived as one with the knowledge of our natural world
- Morality evolved in response to the demands of the environment (natural and social).



## 1.6 Open Question Argument

- The biggest challenge to naturalism comes from the Open Question Argument(OQA)
- Open Question Argument suggests a test to check whether two words mean the same or not. Or in other words, it a test of definition of these terms.
  - For instance, let's say somebody wants to define 'Dessert' (term) as 'something sweet' (definition).
  - Take any object which satisfies this definition let's say – a banana. The OQA suggests we ask the question "A banana is sweet, but is it dessert?"
  - It appears a sensible question to ask and there it appears as an "open question". This tells us that dessert and something sweet cannot mean the same thing.
  - The words 'A' and 'B' mean something different if and only if the question 'X is A, but is it B?' is an open question. A question is open if you can begin to consider how to answer it and closed if you can't
  - What about 'brother' and 'male sibling'?