

Depending on your other metaphysical / ontological / logical / semantic / ethical commitments, you will likely have certain assumptions about the nature of morality and moral truths. The following are two attempts to catalogue most / all of the possible positions in *normative ethics*.

**Normative Ethics:** the search for, and justification of, moral standards or norms.

There are a variety of ways to carve up the many possible positions in normative ethics. In class, we discussed whether or not moral principles / truths are *absolute* or *relative*.

**Absolute:** A principle that applies without exception to all people at all times in all places.

**Relative:** A principle that does not apply without exception to all people at all times in all places.

One way to motivate this distinction is to ask yourself if you view morality as a set of rules to follow, no matter what, or do you view morality in the same way that you view etiquette (i.e. rules that one culture follows but another needn't). Despite which position you take, there is a secondary issue of whether or not such moral principles / rules actually exist (e.g. you could think humans typically use moral language in absolutist ways while denying any such principles exist). Thus, you could be a *realist* or an *anti-realist* about moral properties.

**Realist:** The view that moral properties exist independently of human minds and that such properties are, in some sense, in the world.

**Anti-realist:** The view that moral properties do not exist independent of human minds, and, since they don't exist, they are not in the world.

We will be looking at some theorists who fall into these categories (for a full survey you should take the intro to ethics class here at KSU 😊) The following table lists some of the authors most associated of the possible positions that we have sketched:

	<b>Absolutist</b>	<b>Relativist</b>
<b>Realist</b>	Immanuel Kant	John Stuart Mill
<b>Anti-realist</b>	J.L. Mackie	A.J. Ayer / Alan Gibbard (maybe)

While that way of carving up the various positions in normative ethics is helpful at an intuitive level, there is (I think) an even better way involving the *truth-aptness* of moral claims.

**Truth-apt:** A statement which, in at least some context, can be uttered and would express either a true or false *proposition* / *statement*.

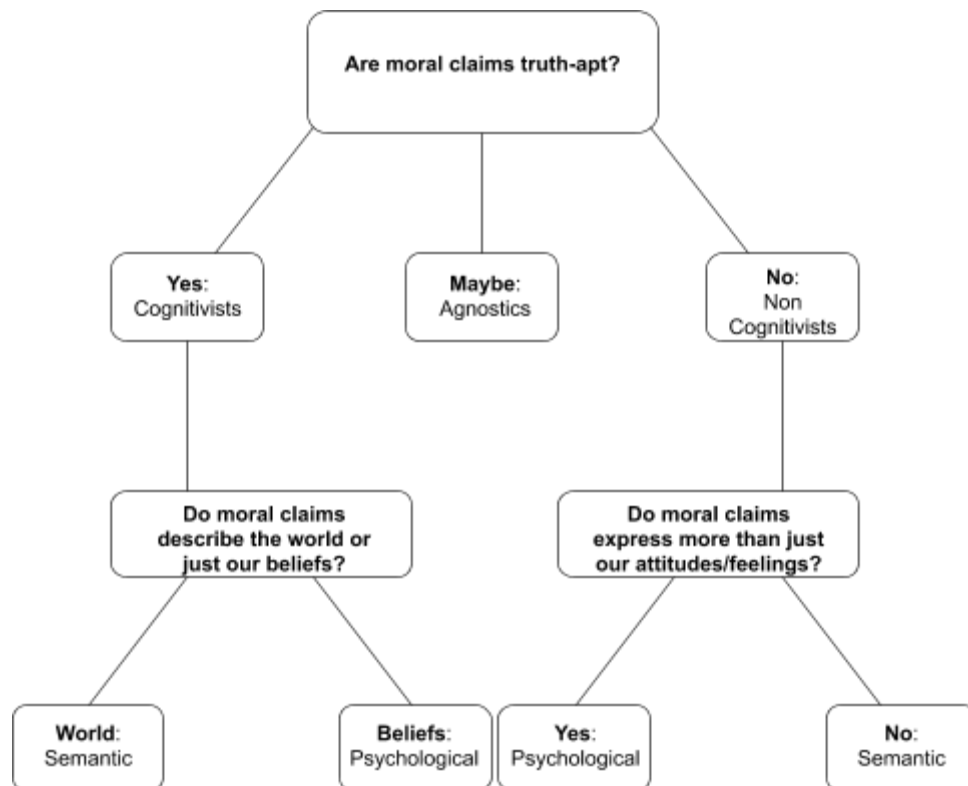
**Proposition / Statement:** A meaningful declarative sentence that is true or false.

In other words, are moral claims either true or false? Not all well formed sentences in language are truth-apt. Questions, exclamations, commands, and paradoxical sentences are such examples. So, are moral claims (i.e. murder is bad / giving to charity is good) truth-apt or not? Depending on your answer to this question, you will either be a *cognitivist* or a *non-cognitivist*.

**Cognitivist:** Moral claims are truth-apt.

**Non-cognitivist:** Moral claims are not truth-apt.

There remains one final way to chop up the logical possibilities. It remains to be determined if moral claims actually describe the world, or if they are mere reflection of some aspect of our own individual psychological state.



On the left-hand side of the tree are the terms *semantic* and *psychological*.

**Semantic Cognitivist:** Moral claims are either true or false depending on whether the moral claim picks out a moral property *in the world*.

**Psychological Cognitivist:** Moral claims are either true or false depending on whether the moral claims accurately represent our *beliefs about* the world.

These two uses of *cognitivist* and *psychological* are much different than the ways that they are applied to right-side of the tree.

**Semantic Non-cognitivist:** Moral claims are merely are expressions of attitudes or feelings we have about a circumstance.

**Psychological Non-cognitivist:** Moral claims are merely expressions of desires, preferences, emotions, or intentions that we have about a circumstance.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It's questionable whether there is a substantive distinction between these forms of non-cognitivism. Our book states that there is a distinction, so I have reflected it in the tree, but I'm not totally persuaded that the distinction is solid.