

Arguments and Problems for Non-Cognitivism

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- 2 The Humean argument for non-cognitivism
- 3 Outline of Internalism
- 4 The Exceptions Objection to Internalism
- 5 Summary: Non-cognitivism and the best form of internalism
- 6 Challenge for Non-cognitivism: Identifying a relevant attitude
- 7 The Embedding Problem for Expressivism
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Non-Cognitivism

Moral psychology

Moral judgements are not beliefs. They are non-cognitive mental states, like desires, intentions, approval and disapproval.

Moral semantics

Moral sentences *express* the above attitudes, and do not have descriptive meaning. They cannot be true or false.

Moral metaphysics

There are no moral facts or properties.

Moral epistemology

We can not have moral knowledge or justified moral beliefs.

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Hume's argument

“Since morals, therefore, have an influence on the actions and affections, it follows, that they cannot be derived from reason; and that because reason alone, as we have already proved, can never have any such influence. Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason of itself is utterly impotent in this particular. The rules of morality therefore, are not conclusions of our reason.” David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book III, Part I, Section I.

Motivational Internalism

Internalism: Moral judgments necessarily motivate.

- 1 “I ought to send money to charity.”
 - 2 “So, why are you not doing it. I know that you have money to spare.”
 - 3 “I could not care less. I have no motivation at all to do it.”
- 3) suggests that you do not really think that you ought to send money to the charity.

The Humean theory of motivation

Humean theory of motivation: No belief necessarily motivates.

- 1** Beliefs without desires do not motivate:
 - You believe that the house is on fire.
 - You will be motivated to leave only if you care about / “desire” not to be harmed.
- 2** Beliefs cannot also be desires at the same time. The two mental states are of different kinds, have a different “direction of fit”:
 - Beliefs are about representing the world: we want our beliefs to conform to the world.
 - Desires are about changing the world: we want the world to conform to our desires.

The Humean argument for non-cognitivism

Internalism:

Moral judgments necessarily motivate.

Humean theory of motivation:

No belief necessarily motivates.

Hence: Non-Cognitivism:

Moral judgments are not beliefs.

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Internalism and the phenomenon of moral motivation

- Any metaethical view needs to account for the phenomenon of moral motivation:
 - When we judge that we ought to do something, we are typically at least somewhat motivated to do it.
 - When we change our moral judgments, our motivations typically change accordingly.
- The internalist answer:

Internalism

Moral judgments, by nature of what they are, necessarily motivate.

- Judgment that you ought to ϕ directly causes motivation to ϕ .
- Change to judgment that you ought to not ϕ directly causes motivation to not ϕ .

Weak and Strong Internalism

- Strong internalism: Necessarily, if you judge that you ought to ϕ , then you have *overriding* motivation to ϕ .
 - Obviously false: I can judge that I ought to apologize to someone I offended, but am weak-willed and cowardly dare not do it.
- Weak internalism: Necessarily, if you judge that you ought to ϕ , then you have *some* motivation to ϕ .
 - This motivation can be overridden by other motivations, and hence does not always translate into action.

Sometimes internalism is stated in terms of reasons

- “Necessarily, if you judge that you ought to ϕ , then you have some reason to ϕ .”
- Warning: “reason” is ambiguous. It means either
 - 1 Motivating reasons: explain why you did something.
 - 2 Normative (justifying) reasons: explain why something isought to be done.
- Internalism about motivation is about motivating reasons.
- Better stick with talk of necessarily motivating.

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Example: Moral judgments without motivation?

- Conversation:
 - 1 “I ought to send money to charity.”
 - 2 “So, why are you not doing it. I know that you have money to spare.”
 - 3 “I could not care less. I have no motivation at all to do it.”
- Who would say that?
 - A depressed person: does not have any motivation to do anything.
 - An amoral person: does not care at all about morality and is never motivated by it.
 - An evil person: is actively motivated to do what is wrong.
- Internalism seems to get the phenomenon of moral motivation wrong here: The link between moral judgment and moral motivation seems to allow for exceptions.

An internalist reply

- Given that you really are not motivated to give, you do not really judge that you ought to give. Instead,
 - You are only paying lip-service to a moral view. You are not being sincere.
 - You are talking about “ought” in an “inverted commas” sense.
 - Cf. “Lukashenkow (the Belarusian dictator) won the recent ‘election’”.
 - You acknowledge that others in your society think that you ought to give.
- But: Had you sincerely judged that you ought to give, then you would have been motivated.

Evaluating the internalist reply

- Main objection:
 - The internalist reply entails people lose their moral judgments when they get depressed, and regain them when they recover.
 - This does not seem to be the case. The moral beliefs are the same, but they seem not to matter when one is depressed.

A better reply: Modify internalism

- Unqualified internalism gets the phenomenon of moral motivation wrong: There are exceptions where genuine moral judgments do not motivate.
- Internalism': Necessarily, if you judge that you ought to ϕ , **and your motivational capacities are intact** (i.e. you are not depressed), then you are motivated to ϕ .
- But: amoral and evil people need not be depressed: They are motivated by other considerations (self-interest, reverse moral motivation).
- Internalism'': Necessarily, if you judge that you ought to ϕ , **and you are practically rational**, then you are motivated to ϕ . (practical rationality here also includes absence of depression).

What does “practically rational” mean?

- “Practically rational” does not just *mean*: “If you judge that you ought to ϕ , you are motivated to ϕ .”
 - Then Internalism” would say: “Necessarily, if you judge that you ought to ϕ , and you are such that if you judge that you ought to ϕ , you would be motivated to ϕ , you are motivated to ϕ .”
 - This is trivially true.
- Better: “you comply with all the true principles of rationality”.
- One of these principles may turn out to be: “If you judge that you ought to ϕ , be motivated to ϕ .”
 - This principle needs to be defended independent from internalism to avoid circular reasoning.

The new internalism

Internalism''

- Not: Moral judgments necessarily motivate.
- Instead: In practically rational agents, moral judgments, all by themselves, directly cause motivation.

A new Non-Cognitivist Argument

- Internalism'': In practically rational people, moral judgements all by themselves cause motivation.
- Humean Theory of Motivation': No belief can cause motivation all by itself.
- Hence moral judgements are not beliefs.

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- Strong internalism is implausible.
- Moral judgments do not always motivate, hence they do not necessarily motivate.
- Best internalist claim: In practically rational agents, moral judgments directly cause motivation.
- This claim, plus the Humean theory of motivation, can still provide a promising argument for non-cognitivism.

Remaining challenge for the Humean argument

Can non-cognitivists explain exceptions to internalism? They need an analysis of moral judgment that makes sense of:

- Evil agents, who judge that something is wrong, and yet desire it because of its wrongness.
- Amoralists, who judge that something is wrong, and yet do not desire not to do it.
- Depressed people, who judge that something is wrong, but do not desire anything, nor are (at present) disposed to any emotional reactions.

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The attitude problem

- Non-cognitivism: Moral judgments are non-cognitive evaluative attitudes.
- Question: Which attitudes are they?

Answer 1: Moral feelings

- Claim: To think that you ought to ϕ is to have a certain moral feeling about you ϕ -ing.
- Problems:
 - What is a moral feeling?
 - We can think that something is right or wrong without feeling in any particular way at the time of that judgment.

Answer 2: Dispositions to feel good or bad

- Claim: To think that ϕ -ing is right is to be *disposed to* feel good/bad if one does/does not ϕ
- This disposition is not always triggered, so it is no problem that we can judge that ϕ -ing is right without feeling anything.
- Problem: “Feeling good/bad” is too unspecific.
 - I am disposed to feel good/bad when I win/lose a game.
 - But that does not mean that I think it is morally right to win a game.

Dispositions to feel good or bad (2)

- “Feeling guilty” as feeling morally bad will not do:
 - There is no corresponding concept for feeling morally good.
 - To feel guilty is to feel bad about doing wrong/to feel bad because one thinks that one did wrong.
 - To say that thinking that ϕ -ing is wrong is to be disposed to feel bad because one thinks that ϕ -ing is wrong is a circular analysis.

Answer 3: Intentions

- To think that ϕ -ing is right is to intend to ϕ .
- Problems:
 - I can intend to ϕ without having any moral thoughts about it.
 - I can think that something is right but, because of weak will or depression, fail to intend to do it.

Answer 4: Desires

- To think that ϕ -ing is right is to desire ϕ -ing.
 - Problem: I can desire ϕ -ing without thinking it to be morally right. I can desire smoking a cigarette without thinking that it is morally right to smoke cigarettes.
- To think that ϕ -ing is right is to desire that one desires ϕ -ing.
 - Problem: I can desire to desire to smoke a cigarette without thinking it to be morally right to smoke a cigarette.
 - E.g. it may be advantageous in my social circles to smoke, and if I could get myself to desire smoking, that would be very helpful.

Answer 4: Desires (2)

- To think that ϕ -ing is right is to desire ϕ -ing and desire that others desire ϕ -ing.
 - Problem: I may desire that others share my taste for music, food or drink without thinking that it is morally right to indulge in these things.
 - E.g. I may desire it for their sake (they don't know what they are missing!), or for my own sake (if more people desire it, it will be more readily available to me).
- To think that ϕ -ing is right is to have a *special sort of desire* for ϕ -ing.
 - Problem: What is that special sort of desire?

Answer 4: Complex desires and dispositions

- To think that ϕ -ing is right is
 - to have a desire to ϕ
 - to have a desire that others ϕ
 - to desire punishment for people who do not ϕ
 - to be disposed to feel bad if one does not ϕ
 - to be disposed to feel resentment if others do not ϕ
- Think for yourself if this or a similar complex analysis does the job!

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Unembedded contexts

- Unembedded contexts: Moral sentences standing on their own
 - “Lying is wrong.”
 - “You ought to tell the truth.”
- Unembedded moral sentences are used to endorse a moral position.
 - Cognitivism: These sentences *assert* a moral *proposition*.
 - Expressivism: These sentences *express* a moral *attitude*.

Embedded contexts

- Embedded contexts: Moral sentences as part of larger sentences
 - Negation: “It is not the case that *lying is wrong*.”
 - Conditionals: “If *lying is wrong*, then telling half-truths is wrong as well.”
 - Questions: “I wonder whether *lying is wrong*.”
 - Belief reports: “She believes that *lying is wrong*.”
- Embedded moral sentences are *not* used to endorse a moral position.

Cognitivist take on embedded contexts

- Cognitivist explanation:
 - Embedded sentences do not assert a moral proposition, but negate it, assert something about its consequences, ask whether it is true, report that someone believes in it.
 - The proposition remains the same, so the meaning of the sentence is the same:
 - p
 - If p then q .
 - I wonder whether p .
 - She believes that p .

Embedded contexts and imperatives

- Natural move: “Lying is wrong.” \rightarrow “Don’t lie!”
- Prescriptivist non-cognitivists hold that moral sentences are not only used to express commands, but that their meaning just *is* the command:
 - “Lying is wrong” just means “Don’t lie!”
- Problem in embedded contexts: Substituting the two phrases makes no sense:
 - “It is not the case that *lying is wrong.*” \nrightarrow “It is not the case that *Don’t lie!*”
 - “I wonder whether *lying is wrong.*” \nrightarrow “I wonder whether *Don’t lie!*”
 - “If *lying is wrong,* then telling half-truths is wrong.” \nrightarrow “If *Don’t lie!,* then don’t tell half truths!”
 - “She believes that *lying is wrong.*” \nrightarrow “She believes that *Don’t lie!*”

General expressivist problem with embedded contexts

- When I say “I wonder whether lying is wrong”, I am not expressing any attitude towards lying: condemnation, command, or disapproval.
- Expressivists claim that the sentence “Lying is wrong” expresses such an attitude, and that its meaning just *is* the attitude.
- So “Lying is wrong” does not have the same meaning in the embedded context, where there is no such attitude to express.
- Hence expressivists have a hard time explaining what “Lying is wrong” and “I wonder whether lying is wrong” have in common.

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Discussion seminar

- Question for week 3: “If expressivists manage to create a logic of attitudes that precisely mimicks the logic of assertions, then expressivism ceases to be distinct from cognitivism.’ Do you agree?”

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