**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 disagreements 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

---

**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

---

**Value pluralism**

there are two or more scales of value, so any prioritization of values is either non-cognitive or subjective

---

**Sentimentalism**

(Moral sense theory in epistemology)

the nature of moral beliefs is discovered by emotional responses to experience

Creative Commons 4.0
libertarianous.com
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

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

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

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 assert facts, they express an evaluative attitudes toward an object of evaluation
avoids the error theory

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 ethics cannot be entirely realist either, as ethical positions have changed over time.

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

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

Non-cognitivism
moral knowledge is impossible because ethical sentences are not truth-apt (true or false)
moral claims are imperatives, expressions of emotion, or expressions of "pro-attitudes"

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

Non-cognitive form of moral universalism

Pyrhonian 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

Metaethics: Moral Skepticism

Creative Commons 4.0
libertarianous.com
**Normative Ethics**

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

---

### 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

### Utilitarianism

- Moral action should maximize utility
- 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
- Preference utilitarianism: Promotes actions that fulfill the immediate preferences of the beings involved

### 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

### 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/Artaic 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

### Ethical altruism

- Moral agents have an obligation to help others

### Intellectualism

- The best action fosters and develops the intellect

### Welfare

- 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

---

*Creative Commons 4.0 libertarianous.com*