



ВЫСШАЯ ШКОЛА ЭКОНОМИКИ  
НАЦИОНАЛЬНЫЙ ИССЛЕДОВАТЕЛЬСКИЙ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ  
САНКТ-ПЕТЕРБУРГ

# Moral Philosophy Metaethics

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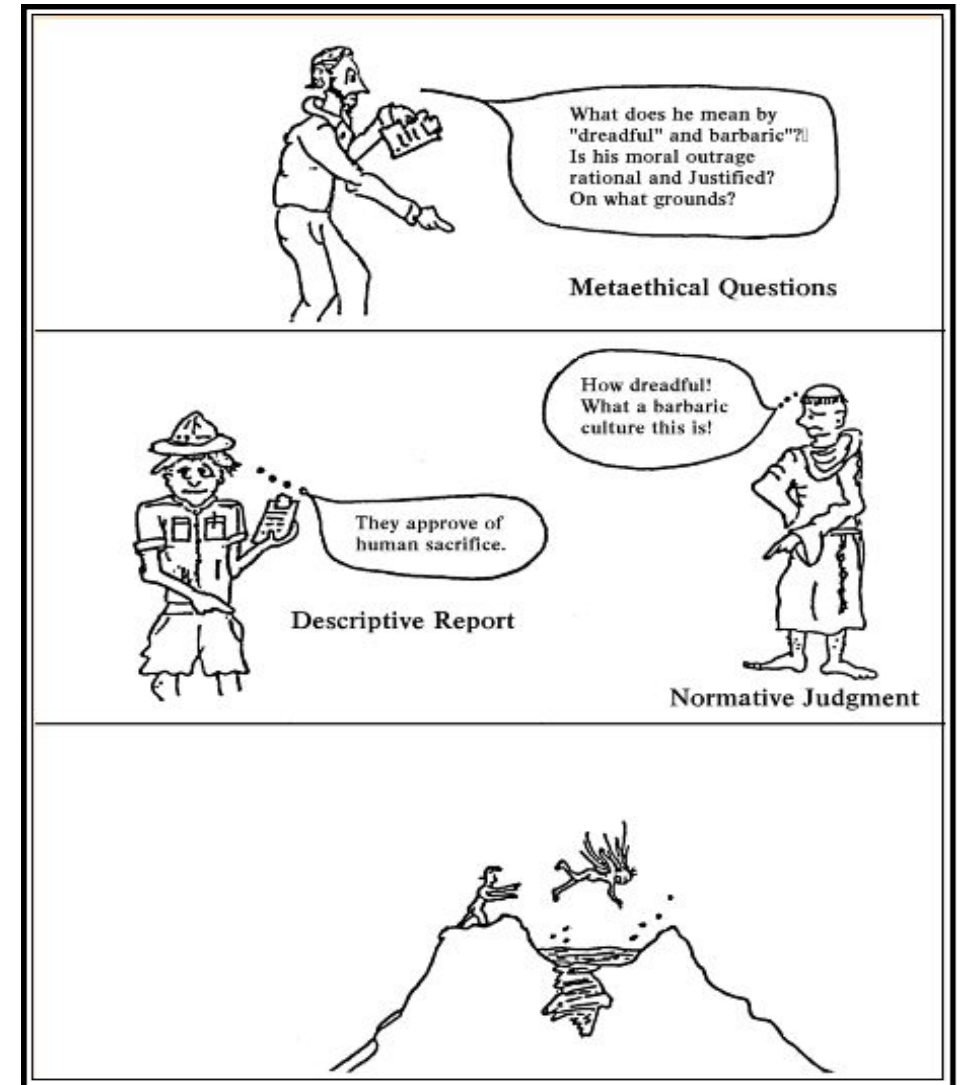
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Introduction to Philosophy

\* Presentation is for educational purposes only. I do not claim authorship for all texts and pictures in the presentation.

# Some branches of moral philosophy

- Normative ethics - [often called philosophical ethics] search for norms, not in the sense of what is average, but in the sense of authoritative standards of what it “ought” to be.
- Descriptive ethics - empirically based, aims to discover and describe the moral beliefs of a specific culture
- Metaethics - the study of the discipline of ethics. It attempts to determine meanings of normative terms, e.g. right, wrong, good, bad, ought, etc.



# What is meta-ethics?

Whereas the fields of **applied ethics** and **normative ethics** focus on what is moral, **metaethics** focuses on what morality itself is.

One of the central questions for metaethics:  
What makes moral judgments **true**?

There are more of them:

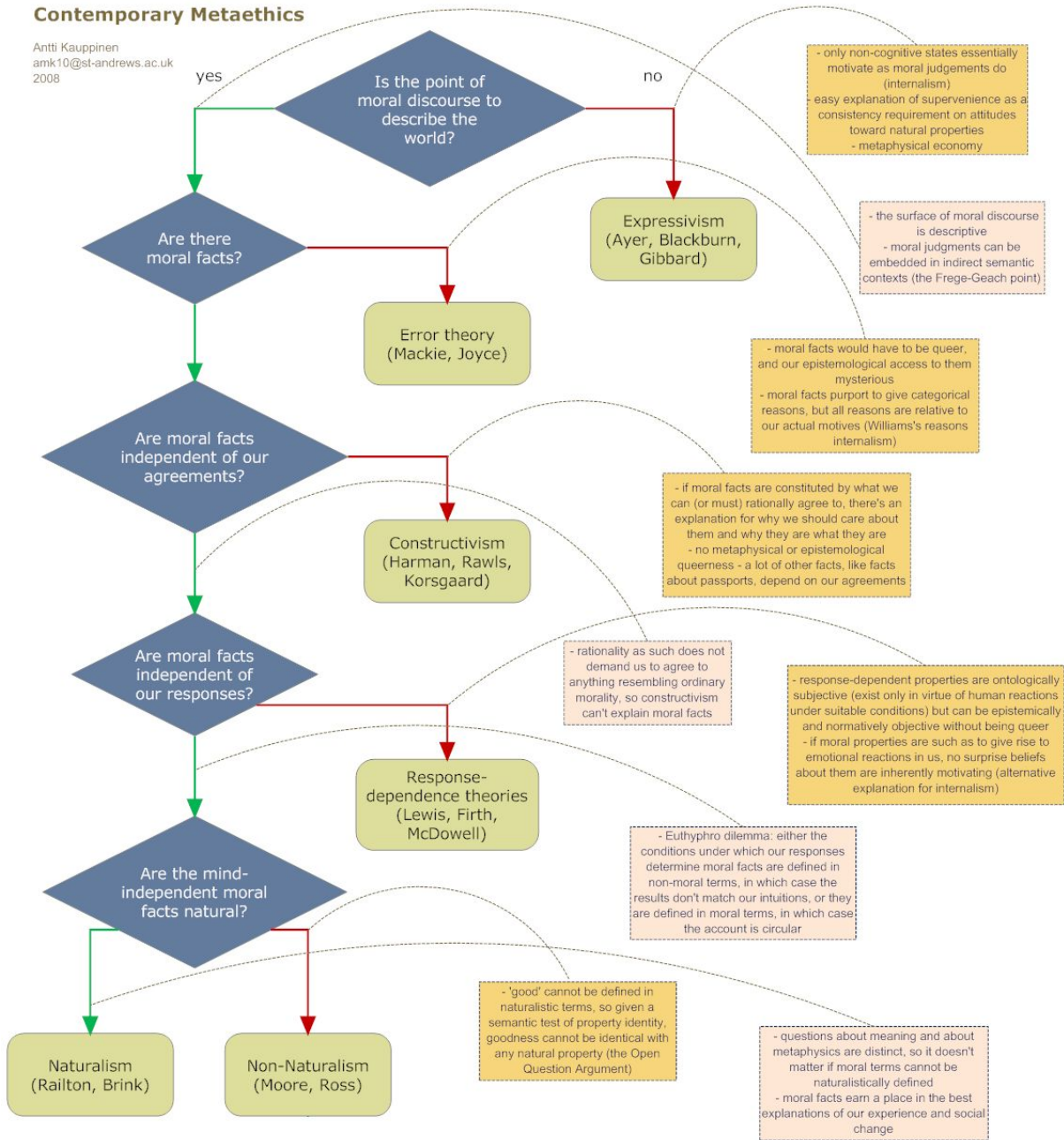
Psychology: What sort of mental state is involved in accepting a moral claim? A belief? An emotion? What role do they play in our behaviour?

Metaphysics: Is there any moral reality, moral properties or moral facts? If so, what are they like?

Epistemology: What sort of reason, if any, can be adduced in favour of moral claims? Is moral knowledge obtainable? If so how?

## Contemporary Metaethics

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# Contemporary Metaethics

# Theories

## A. Objectivism / Moral Realism

- a) Naturalistic
- b) Non-naturalistic

## B. Relativism

- a) Subjectivism
- b) Cultural relativism

## C. Emotivism

# Objectivism /Moral Realism

1. Ethical sentences express propositions.
2. Some such propositions are true.
3. Those propositions are made true by objective features of the world, independent of subjective opinion.

Moral claims do purport to report facts and are true if they get the facts right.

Moral realists hold that some moral claims actually are true.

What kinds of facts?

# Arguments in favour realism1

1. We think we can make mistakes about morality. Children frequently do, and have to be taught what is right and wrong. If there were no facts about moral right and wrong, it wouldn't be possible to make mistakes.
2. Morality feels like a demand from 'outside' us. We feel answerable to a standard of behaviour which is independent of what we want or feel. Morality isn't determined by what we think about it.
3. Many people believe in moral progress. But how is moral progress possible, unless some views about morality are better than others? And how is that possible unless there are facts about morality?

# Naturalistic Moral Realists

- Moral values exist within the natural world and are connected with specific properties such as pleasure or satisfaction.
  - Pleasure and satisfaction are facts within the universe
1. Ethical sentences express propositions.
  2. Some such propositions are true.
  3. Those propositions are made true by objective features of the world, independent of human opinion.
  4. These moral features of the world can be reduced to some set of non-moral features.

Bentham, Mill, Sam Harris, Brink



Category Level

Moral Defect

Illness/Disease



Properties



Choice    Autonomy

Addiction    Helplessness

Weakness of the will

Chemical Dependency

# The Open Question Argument and the Naturalistic Fallacy



- Cannot deduce an **OUGHT** from an **IS**.
- Cannot move from **FACTS** to **VALUES**

Moore demonstrates the unanalyzability of “good” by what has come to be known as “the open question argument”: for any definition of “good” — “good(ness) is X” — it makes sense to ask whether goodness *really is* X, and whether X *really is* good. For instance, if we say “goodness is pleasure,” it makes sense to ask, “is goodness really pleasure?” and “is pleasure truly good?” Moore’s point is that every attempt at definition leaves it an open question as to what good really is. But this could be the case only if the definition failed to capture all of what is meant by “good.” Consider the case: “a bachelor is an unmarried man.” Here it makes no sense to respond “yes, but is a bachelor really an unmarried man?” or “but is every unmarried man really a bachelor?” The reason it doesn’t is that the full meaning of “bachelor” is captured by “unmarried man.” On the other hand, the reason it makes sense to ask these kinds of questions about purported definitions of “good” is that they fail to capture its full meaning. Since this is true of every purported definition of “good,” “good” cannot be defined; it can only be recognized in particular cases through acts of intuitive apprehension.

# Non-naturalism

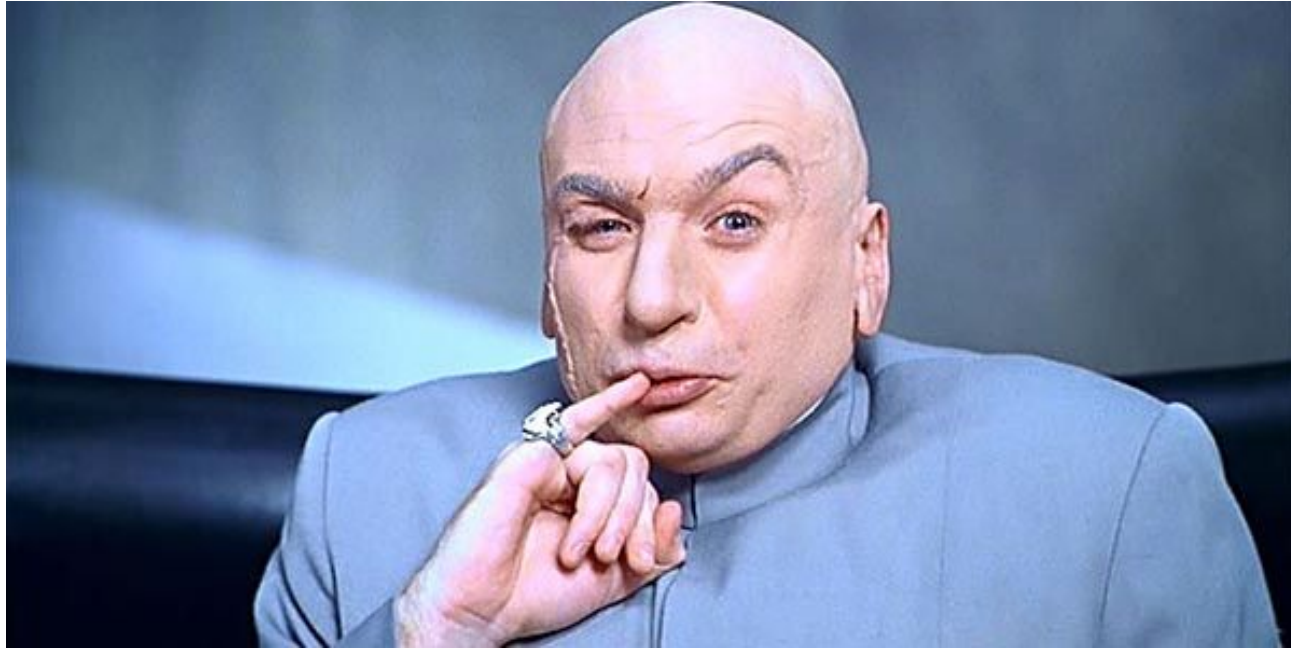
If moral properties are not natural properties, then how do we discover them? How do we know what is good? In Mill's 'proof' of utilitarianism, he claims that we cannot prove what is good or not. To prove a claim is to deduce it from some other claim that we have already established. Moore agrees. But unlike Mill, he does not think that we can argue inductively from evidence either. All we can do is consider the truth of the claim, such as 'pleasure is good', itself. Moore calls such claims 'intuitions'.

G.E. Moore

# The argument from queerness

- Objective moral qualities would be “qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe”
- These properties would require “some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else”
- Objective moral qualities are also strange in that they are not perceived by the senses and are not part of the scientific description of the world

# Relativism Subjectivism



Sartre, Protagoras

# Cultural relativism



Moral relativism is the view that [moral judgments](#) are true or false only relative to some particular standpoint (for instance, that of a culture or a historical period) and that no standpoint is uniquely privileged over all others.



# Emotivism

- Emotivism says that moral judgments express positive or negative feelings. "X is good" means "Hurrah for X!" -- and "X is bad" means "Boo on X!"
- Since moral judgments are exclamations, they can't be true or false. So there can't be moral truths or moral knowledge. We can reason about moral issues if we assume a system of norms. But we can't reason about basic moral principles.

# Euthyphro dilemma

