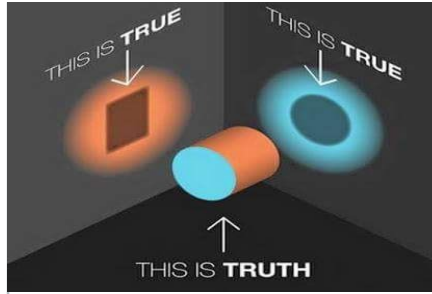


Emotivism

Maybe, as **A. J. Ayer** (1910-89) thought, moral judgments aren't the *sort of thing* that can be true or false. This is **Emotivism**, which is the view that moral claims are neither statements of objective fact nor statements whose truth is subjective or culturally relative. Instead, moral claims are **expressions of our emotional reactions**. To say, for example, that 'Murder is wrong' is not to put forward something as true, but rather to *express your disapproval* of murder. Similarly, if you say that polygamy is wrong, then on this view we should understand what you've just said as something like 'Boo to Polygamy!'—which is itself an expression that is neither true nor false. A main problem for emotivism involves explaining how moral disagreements are even *possible*.



Moral Relativism says that our moral judgments are in the realm of truth or falsity, but—and here's the catch—their truth or falsity is covertly relative to something like our subjective moral attitudes or our cultural norms. On this view, a given moral judgment can be true for you, but false for someone else—and there's no *further answer* to the question of whether that judgment is true or false, *period*.

PRO: This view purports to make sense of our intuitions about morally relevant practices that seem to differ between very different cultures or people—e.g., polygamy.

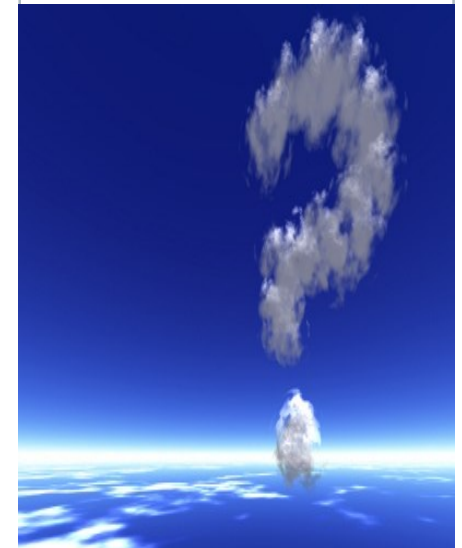
CON: If this view is correct, then we simply aren't in a position to say that some seemingly *terrible* and heinous actions are just wrong, period. This seems like a troubling consequence.

QUESTIONS

Come up with new examples of an *empirical* judgment and a *moral* judgment. Explain in your own words what makes the former empirical and the latter moral.

Consider the statement 'Kicking dogs for fun is not wrong.' Which of the three main approaches to the status of morality discussed here holds that this statement can be true or false?

It seems to be possible to make *moral progress*. Come up with your own example of this and explain why it might cause problems for moral relativism.





According to one popular view about morality, moral statements can be just as **objective** as scientific statements. The key idea is that our moral opinions are the sorts of things that can be true or false, and what makes them true or false are facts that are generally independent of who we are or what cultural groups we belong to—they are **objective moral facts**.

Granted, some moral statements are ones most people agree about. For example, the claim 'It's good to take care of your children' is not one we find many people contesting. Other kinds of statements put pressure on objectivism, though. Consider, for instance, the statement 'Polygamy is morally wrong.' Many apparently reasonable people disagree about this. According to objectivism, *there is an objective moral fact of the matter* and so in cases of moral disagreements—just as in science—contradicting viewpoints can't both be right. One difficult problem for objectivists is to account for *how it is* that moral facts are like scientific facts. After all, we can't very well see moral properties like we can see tables and chairs.

The status of moral judgments

Consider some examples of **empirical statements**:

The earth rotates around the sun. Electricity has positive and negative charges.
Plant traits can be genetically inherited.
The Higgs boson particle exists.

Now consider some examples of **moral statements**:

Giving to charity is morally praiseworthy.
It's good to take care of your children.
Cain's murdering Abel was morally wrong.
Protesting injustice is morally justifiable.

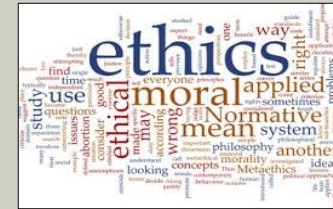
Now, consider three questions about the status of the statements on these two lists:

- (1) **Are they the sort of thing that can be true or false, or are they 'mere opinion'?**
- (2) **If they can be true or false, what makes them true when they are true?**
- (3) **If they are true, are they *objectively* true?**

These are questions about the *status* of moral and empirical judgments. Some philosophers think that we should answer these questions *differently* for the second list than for the first. Other philosophers think that questions like this should be answered the same for both lists.

What do you think?

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY MOOC



MORALITY: *Objective, Relative or Emotive?*

What is morality? Can there be objective moral facts? Or are moral truths implicitly relative to our own cultural situation? Might our moral judgements be nothing more than expressions of our attitudes?

