

Meta-ethics is the branch of ethics that seeks to understand the nature of ethical properties, statements, attitudes, and judgments. Meta-ethics is one of the three branches of ethics generally studied by philosophers, the others being normative ethics and applied ethics.

Ross Poole Mon, 30 Sep When we advance moral considerations to others or to ourselves we assume 1 that they have a certain objectivity, i. A group may be constituted around a common interest or commitment. Within that group, this will provide all the objectivity and reason giving that is necessary. The group morality will consist of the working out of the common interest and commitment. What one ought to do is not so much a matter of what one wants to do or has committed oneself to do; it is a matter of giving expression to that identity. Insofar as the identity is non-reflective, the force of morality will be something like the force of nature. For many of us, family commitments are something like this. Not to respond to family commitments responsibilities to children is not merely not doing what one ought; but is a failure at a deeper level. Western modernity is corrosive of taken for granted identities of this kind. One of these is cultural diversity: This both makes us aware of the contingency of our own given identities some measure of reflectiveness is inescapable and the limitations of the moral perspective which expresses those identities. We are in the sphere of morality how ought we to act to others , but have left behind one of its sources. What kinds of moral considerations can we bring into play in this context? And can they satisfy requirements 1 and 2 above? The major difficulty of meeting this challenge is presented by fact that once we leave behind us the comfortable group commitments and taken for granted identities, we enter a conceptual space dominated by models of objectivity and rationality which are inimical to the enterprise of morality: A For many e. Mackie objectivity means being part of the fabric of the physical world. In itself this is not necessarily problematic, but it becomes so when we assume also a certain model of knowledge, based on the paradigms of the natural sciences. An objective morality becomes impossible. B For many e. But then the reason giving character of moral considerations has to justified in a situation where we cannot assume any common ends. Clearly, there are many ways of meeting these problems. My own suggestion with regard to A is that we resist the hegemony of naturalism Taylor in Sources of the Self has good things to say about this. We need to work with hermeneutic models of knowledge which have a place for objectivity, but to do not destroy value. With regard to B the situation is even more complex. The most influential move is to adopt some form of Kantianism, i. My own way forward is a quasi-Aristotelian one: But the theory of the good life will not be a narrowly focussed one: And the way in which the reason giving character of morality is related to this conception of the good life will not be that of means to end, but as a element in the idea of narrative unity or coherence. It will be clear from all this, that my approach to meta-ethics leads very quickly to questions of moral theory. To be sure, the point is familiar enough so that Ross probably has a reply to it. I would be interested to see what it is! Charles Ess Thu, 03 Oct But is this what we mean necessarily by "objectivity" and "reason"? In particular, if they are understood as entities whose scope is restricted to the boundaries of a specific group - these strike me as relatively impoverished notions of "objectivity" and "reason. I have two questions here: Perhaps Ross Poole has a way of avoid such relativism and its consequences? Or are relativism and such consequences not of concern in his viewpoint? One of these is cultural diversity I think more needs to be said here. This is in part because I find that "Western modernity" is a pretty complicated and multi-faceted beast. Once we turn up the magnification and begin to examine particular thinkers, various elements of cultural life, etc. Given this, I find that "Western modernity," especially as characterized by postmodernists and philosophers out of more analytic orientations i. I would quickly add that Ross Poole is admirable here for playing by the rules - i. So let me repeat: I think more needs to be said here - in part, just so as to avoid oversimplification and straw man. This false dilemma - and the positivist undergirding of it - seem to me clearly at work when Ross Poole claims that "An objective morality becomes impossible" given that "objectivity" can reside only in the physical world. Am I being overly critical here? Or missing something that would obviate this concern? A comment on each, however: Reflections on a Remark of Max Horkheimer," Habermas writes: However, it is altogether a different matter

to provide a motivating response to the question of why we should follow our moral insights or why we should be moral at all. Remarks on Discourse Ethics, Ciaran P. But the articulation of an adequate moral system may not be sufficient reason my words for doing the right thing though it may be a necessary condition? Rather, what Habermas seems to open the door to here is the problem Ross Poole has raised above - the problem of motive. And he seems to be suggesting that religion may in fact play a crucial role in morality, insofar as it may offer the motive for doing the right thing, where the right thing is articulated in the rational terms of philosophical ethics. I raise it here primarily as a way of pointing out that the question of motive that Ross Poole points to in "ii " above as a possible problem for Habermas is a problem that Habermas is aware of - and his response to it seems still very much "under construction. Cordially - Charles Ess
Meta-Ethics. Ross Poole rpoole Tue, 08 Oct So toleration will be a good, not a modus vivendi i. The good which will include the positive affirmation of diversity will be prior to the right the just. What hangs on this? My belief that unless we locate a theory of justice within a conception of the good, we will not be able to provide reasons why we should be just. The question of authoritarianism is a red herring. If autonomy is a component in the good life, then I will have good reasons not to impose my conception of the good on others - unless, of course, they are interfering with the conditions of autonomy in others. I think that liberals are too much under the sway of Rawls here. In Theory of Justice he implied that questions of good were subjective; later he retreats from this to the claim that they are inevitably controversial. But I cannot claim to have spelled this out here or anywhere else! Generalisation may be difficult, but not impossible, especially if we are prepared to critically use Marx, Weber, even Habermas, etc. Thanks for the Habermas reference: I had not read that essay before. But the link I'm closer and more important than H recognises: What must be true for this to be the case? One necessary certainly not sufficient move: This provides a place for teleology, even where we are not able to articulate a final goal. There are some parts that I will need to see more about before I know whether to like them or not. Does the idea that "unless we locate a theory of justice within a conception of the good, we will not be able to provide reasons why we should be just" presuppose some teleological conception of reason; i. If so, does this mean that we will, where the good is plural, have indeterminacy about the right? Does your approach imply that they are? One point of clarification. This seems the likelier interpretation, but I leave it to you to say whether it is the right one. On my model, we have this because there is, objectively a plurality of conceptions of the good AND a plurality of conception of reason. On your model, we seem to have this because THE conception of the good is internally complex Ross Poole rpoole Fri, 18 Oct
Even on my view there will be irreducible differences between valued ways of life. These will be analogous to the irreducible differences, e. But I want to argue that people also ought to value the social diversity and otherness which allows their chosen way of life as one amongst others. A consequence of this view is that social diversity is not simply a fact that we and others have to learn to live with, but something we ought to value as a constituent of the good life. Toleration is not the bare acceptance of others *faut de mieux* , but a liberal virtue constitutive of a good life. It proposes that a liberal society is one characterised by diversity but which is organized around a conception of the good, i. It is also a consequence of this view that there are limits to the extent to which a liberal society can recognise intolerant minorities which does not mean that a liberal society has the right to suppress them. I think of it as quasi-Aristotelian because it would need to say a lot about the virtues tolerance, civility, etc. Required by social life in a diverse society and also partially constitutive of the good life for members of such a society. There are many problems with this kind of view. For example, there are those who think it is incompatible with deep commitments, i. As far as I can see, the only place in a liberal society for commitments such as these is in the private realm as religion has been uncomfortably confined or as shared public values e. The importance of the latter places certain constraints on the diversity which is possible limits on multiculturalism. When I claimed that we can only have reasons to do something e.

Chapter 2 : Meta-ethics - Wikipedia

One state of affairs, A, is a sufficient condition for another state of affairs, B, if the occurrence of A ensures the occurrence of B. If a presidential candidate receives or more electoral votes (A), their election (B) is ensured.

History of Metaethics a. Many Medieval accounts of morality that ground values in religious texts, commands, or emulation may also be understood as defending certain metaethical positions see Divine Command Theory. In contrast, during the European Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant sought a foundation for ethics that was less prone to religious sectarian differences, by looking to what he believed to be universal capacities and requirements of human reason. Since metaethics is the study of the foundations, if any, of morality, it has flourished especially during historical periods of cultural diversity and flux. For example, responding to the cross-cultural contact engendered by the Greco-Persian Wars, the ancient Greek historian Herodotus reflected on the apparent challenge to cultural superiority posed by the fact that different cultures have seemingly divergent moral practices. A comparable interest in metaethics dominated seventeenth and eighteenth-century moral discourse in Western Europe, as theorists struggled to respond to the destabilization of traditional symbols of authority—for example, scientific revolutions, religious fragmentation, civil wars—and the grim pictures of human egoism that thinkers such as John Mandeville and Thomas Hobbes were presenting compare, Stephen Most famously, the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher David Hume may be understood as a forerunner of contemporary metaethics when he questioned the extent to which moral judgments might ultimately rest on human passions rather than reason, and whether certain virtues are ultimately natural or artificial compare, Darwall Metaethics in the Twentieth-Century Analytic metaethics in its modern form, however, is generally recognized as beginning with the moral writings of G. See below for a more specific description of these different metaethical trends. Then, in the s, largely inspired by the work of philosophers such as John Rawls and Peter Singer, analytic moral philosophy began to refocus on questions of applied ethics and normative theories. Today, metaethics remains a thriving branch of moral philosophy and contemporary metaethicists frequently adopt an interdisciplinary approach to the study of moral values, drawing on disciplines as diverse as social psychology, cultural anthropology, comparative politics, as well as other fields within philosophy itself, such as metaphysics , epistemology , action theory, and the philosophy of science. The Normative Relevance of Metaethics Since philosophical ethics is often conceived of as a practical branch of philosophy—aiming at providing concrete moral guidance and justifications—metaethics sits awkwardly as a largely abstract enterprise that says little or nothing about real-life moral issues. Indeed, the pressing nature of such issues was part of the general migration back to applied and normative ethics in the politically-galvanized intellectual climate of the s described above. And yet, moral experience seems to furnish myriad examples of disagreement concerning not merely specific applied issues, or even the interpretations or applications of particular theories, but sometimes about the very place of morality in general within multicultural, secular, and scientific accounts of the world. As a historical fact, metaethical positions have been combined with a variety of first-order moral positions, and vice versa: Moore , and R. Hare, for instance, were all committed to some form of Utilitarianism as a first-order moral framework, despite advocating radically different metaethical positions. Likewise, in his influential book *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, J. Mackie defends a form of second-order metaethical skepticism or relativism in the first chapter, only to devote the rest of the book to the articulation of a substantive theory of first-order Utilitarianism. Metaethical positions would appear then to underdetermine normative theories, perhaps in the same way that normative theories themselves underdetermine applied ethical stances for example, two equally committed Utilitarians can nonetheless disagree about the moral permissibility of eating meat. Yet, despite the logically possible combinations of second and first-order moral positions, Stephen Darwall Notable exceptions to this tendency—that is, metaethical naturalists who are also first-order deontologists —include Alan Gewirth and Michael Boylan ; For critical responses to these positions, see Beyleveld , Steigleder , Spence , and Gordon Other philosophers envision the connection between metaethics and more concrete moral theorizing in much more intimate ways. For example, Matthew Kramer Nicholas Sturgeon has claimed that the first-order belief

in moral fallibility must be grounded in some second-order metaethical view. And David Wiggins has suggested that metaethical questions about the ultimate foundation and justification of basic moral beliefs may have deep existential implications for how humans view the question of the meaning of life. The metaethical question of whether or not moral values are cross-culturally universal would seem to have important implications for how foreign practices are morally evaluated at the first-order level. In particular, metaethical relativism the view that there are no universal or objective moral values has been viewed as highly loaded politically and psychologically. Proponents of such relativism often appeal to the alleged open-mindedness and tolerance about first-order moral differences that their second-order metaethical view would seem to support. See sections five and eight below for a more detailed discussion of the psychological and political dimensions of metaethics, respectively.

Semantic Issues in Metaethics

a. The metaethical view that moral statements similarly express truth-apt beliefs about the world is known as cognitivism. Cognitivism would seem to be the default view of our moral discourse given the apparent structure that such discourse appears to have. Indeed, if cognitivism were not true—such that moral sentences were expressing something other than truth-apt propositions—then it would seem to be difficult to account for why we nonetheless are able to make logical inferences from one moral sentence to another. For instance, consider the following argument: It is wrong to lie. This argument seems to be a valid application of the logical rule known as *modus ponens*. Yet, logical rules such as *modus ponens* operate only on truth-apt propositions. Thus, because we seem to be able to legitimately apply such a rule in the example above, such moral sentences must be truth-apt. Since this homonymy would seem to threaten to undermine the grammatical structure of moral discourse, non-cognitivism must be rejected. Despite this argument about the surface appearance of cognitivism, however, numerous metaethicists have rejected the view that moral sentences ultimately express beliefs about the world. A historically influential forerunner of the alternate theory of non-cognitivism can be found in the moral writings of David Hume, who famously argued that moral distinctions are not derived from reason, but instead represent emotional responses. As such, moral sentences express not beliefs which may be true or false, but desires or feelings which are neither true nor false. This Humean position was renewed in twentieth-century metaethics by the observation that not only are moral disputes often heavily affect-laden in a way many other factual disputes are not, but also that the kind of facts which would apparently be necessary to accommodate true moral beliefs would have to be very strange sorts of entities. Specifically, the worry is that, whereas we can appeal to standards of empirical verification or falsification to adjudicate when our non-moral beliefs are true or false, no such standards seem applicable in the moral sphere, since we cannot literally point to moral goodness in the way we can literally point to cats on mats. In response to this apparent disanalogy between moral and non-moral statements, many metaethicists embraced a sort of neo-Humean non-cognitivism, according to which moral statements express non-truth-apt desires or feelings. Hare similarly analyzed moral utterances as containing both descriptive truth-apt as well as ineliminably prescriptive elements, such that genuinely asserting, for instance, that murder is wrong involves a concomitant emotional endorsement of not murdering. Drawing on the work of ordinary-language philosophers such as J. L. Austin, Alan Gibbard defends norm-expressivism, according to which moral statements express commitments not to idiosyncratic personal feelings, but instead to the particular and, for Gibbard, evolutionarily adaptive cultural mores that enable communication and social coordination. Non-cognitivists have also attempted to address the Frege-Geach Problem discussed above, by specifying how the expression of attitudes functions in moral discourse. Simon Blackburn, for instance, has famously argued that non-cognitivism is a claim only about the moral, not the logical parts of discourse. For an accessible survey of the history of the debate surrounding the Frege-Geach Problem, see Schroeder, and for attempts to articulate new hybrid theories that combine elements of both cognitivism as well as non-cognitivism, see Ridge and Boisvert. One complication in the ongoing debate between cognitivist versus non-cognitivist accounts of moral language is the growing realization of the difficulty in conceptually distinguishing beliefs from desires in the first place. Much contemporary metaethical debate between cognitivists and non-cognitivists thus concerns the extent to which beliefs alone, desires alone, or some compound of the two—what J. L. Austin called the correspondence theory of truth—regards a proposition as true just in case it accurately describes

the way the world really is independent of the proposition. According to this understanding, moral expressions would similarly have to correspond to external features about the world in order to be true: However, there are several obvious challenges to this traditional correspondence account of moral truth. Wilful murder, for instance. Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or real existence, which you call vice. In which-ever way you take it, you find only certain passions, motives, volitions and thoughts. There is no other matter of fact in the case. Many of these new theories of moral truth hearken to a suggestion by Ludwig Wittgenstein in the early twentieth-century that the meaning of any term is determined by how that term is actually used in discourse. Building on this insight about meaning, Frank Ramsey extended the account to truth itself. Saying that truth is thus stripped of metaphysics is not to say that it is determined by usage in an arbitrary or unprincipled way. The grammar of a language thus constrains what can be properly expressed in that language, and therefore on the deflationary theory what can be true. Hilary Putnam has articulated an influential challenge to the deflationary account. He argues that deflationary truth is unable to accommodate the fact that we normally think of truth as eternal and stable. Based on these problems, philosophers like Putnam refine the deflationary theory by substituting a condition of ideal warrant or justification, that is, where warranted assertibility is not relative to what specific information a speaker may have at a specific moment, but to what information would be accessible to an ideal epistemic agent. What kind of information would such an ideal speaker have? Putnam characterizes the ideal epistemic situation as involving information that is both complete that is, involving everything relevant and consistent that is, not logically contradictory. However, Wright disagrees with Putnam that truth is constrained by the convergence of information that would be available to an epistemically ideal agent. This is because Wright thinks that it is apparent to speakers of a language that something may be true even if it is not justified in ideal epistemic conditions.

Ontological Issues in Metaethics a. Moral Realisms If moral truth is understood in the traditional sense of corresponding to reality, what sort of features of reality could suffice to accommodate this correspondence? Proponents of the former view are called realists or objectivists; proponents of the latter view are called relativists or subjectivists. Realist positions, however, disagree about what precisely moral values are if they are causally independent from human belief or culture. According to such realists, moral values are real without being reducible to any other kinds of properties or facts: Proponents of this type of Platonist or sui generis version of moral realism include G. Moore , W. Ross , W. Other moral realists, though, conceive of the ontology of moral properties in much more concrete terms. These moral realists often draw analogies between moral properties and scientific properties such as gravity, velocity, mass, and so forth. These scientific concepts are commonly thought to exist independent of what we think about them, and yet they are not part of an ontologically distinct world of pure, abstract ideas in the way that Plato envisioned. So too might moral properties ultimately be reducible to scientific features of the world in a way that preserves their objectivity. An early proponent of such a naturalistic view is arguably Aristotle himself, who anchored his ethics to an understanding of what biologically makes human life flourish. For a later Aristotelian moral realism, see Paul Bloomfield However, for questions about the extent to which Aristotelianism can truly pair with moral realism, see Robert Heinaman Note also that several other metaethicists who share broadly Aristotelian conceptions of human needs and human flourishing nonetheless reject realism, arguing that even a shared human nature still essentially locates moral values in human sensibility rather than in some trans-human moral reality. For examples of such naturalistic moral relativism, see Philippa Foot and David B. Other notable theorists who have advanced Wittgensteinian accounts of the constitutive role that language and context play in our understanding of morality include G. Anscombe and Alasdair MacIntyre , although both are explicitly agnostic about whether this commits them to moral realism or relativism. The naturalistic tradition of moral realism is continued by contemporary theorists such as Alan Gewirth , Deryck Beyleveld , and Michael Boylan who similarly seek to ground moral objectivity in certain universal features of humans. For commentary and discussion of such theories, see in particular Steigleder , Boylan , Spence , and Gordon Other naturalistic theories have looked to scientific models of property reductionism as a way of understanding moral realism. And, since these non-moral properties are real entities, the resultant view about the values that reduce to them can be considered a form of moral realism—without any need to posit

trans-scientific, other-worldly Platonic entities. Several other notable examples of scientifically-minded naturalistic moral realism have been defended. Nicholas Sturgeon has similarly argued in favor of a reduction of moral to non-moral properties, while emphasizing that a reduction at the level of the denotation or extension of our moral terms need not entail a corresponding reduction at the level of the connotation or intension of how we talk about morality.

Chapter 3 : Ethics - Wikipedia

Metaethics. Metaethics is a branch of analytic philosophy that explores the status, foundations, and scope of moral values, properties, and words. Whereas the fields of applied ethics and normative theory focus on what is moral, metaethics focuses on what morality itself is.

They reflect the fact that metaethics involves an attempt to step back from particular substantive debates within morality to ask about the views, assumptions, and commitments that are shared by those who engage in the debate. By and large, the metaethical issues that emerge as a result of this process of stepping back can be addressed without taking a particular stand on substantive moral issues that started the process. In fact, metaethics has seemed to many to offer a crucial neutral background against which competing moral views need to be seen if they are to be assessed properly. Some metaethicists early in the twentieth century went so far as to hold that their own work made no substantive moral assumptions at all and had no practical implications. Such reflection quickly reveals the extent to which various aspects of morality might reasonably be seen as both intellectually and practically problematic. On the intellectual side, many have worried that there is no good way to vindicate the assumptions and commitments of morality. A careful and clear-eyed study of morality will reveal, some argue, that morality is a myth; others argue that the various principles that are presented as authoritative standards for all are actually merely expressions of emotion or projections of the idiosyncratic attitudes of those advocating the principles; still others argue that in some other way morality is not what it pretends to be and not what it needs to be if it is to be legitimate. On the practical side, many have pressed the difficulty of getting people to judge themselves and others impartially; others have worried that, while we have an interest in convincing others to conform to morality, we ourselves rarely have any reason, really, to conform; still others have thought that the sort of freedom morality assumes is not available to humans as they actually are. Of course these worries and arguments regularly find counterparts on the other side, with people maintaining that, properly understood, morality is no myth, that its pretensions can be vindicated, that we have all the reason we need to embrace morality and meet its demands, and that people, at least some people under some circumstances, have whatever sort of freedom it is that morality might require. None of the arguments, on either side, can go quickly or easily. They all depend, first, on identifying and defending the presuppositions and commitments one takes to be at issue and then, second, on showing that they either cannot, or can, be defended. For then, not only will our understanding of that part of our lives be compromised, our sense that it is important may well disappear as well. Early in Book I, for instance, Thrasymachus defends the idea that justice is whatever is in the interest of the stronger, arguing that morality is a human creation designed by the rich and powerful to control and exploit others. A myth for the weak-minded, arranged for the advantage of a few, justice imposes burdens most have reason to set aside. Glaucon follows up, in Book II, with an alternative, and less cynical, proposal. While he too sees morality as a human creation, he sees it as a salutary solution to the serious problems we would otherwise face. He argues that people naturally find themselves unable successfully to ensure that their own wills will rule while, simultaneously, being subject regularly to the will of others. The principles of justice are, he thinks, reasonably introduced and enforced by all as a good way to ensure peace and stability in society. Socrates, in contrast, rejects the idea that justice is a human invention and argues instead that justice provides independent and eternal standards against which human practices, conventions, and institutions can be judged. These different views will likely have implications for what value justice might have. At the same time, though, accepting one or the other view of the nature of justice is compatible with a range of substantive views about what, specifically, justice consists in and about its value. It fits well also with the thought that whatever standards humans might put in place are, one and all, liable to moral criticism. What is their origin and from where do they derive their authority? Many have thought the right answers to these questions are found in an appeal to God. In important ways, though, this merely shifts the puzzles back a step. Whatever problems one might have making sense of eternal transcendent standards re-emerge when trying to make sense of an eternal transcendent being who might issue commands. But that leaves in place the puzzle concerning the authority of

moral principles. But neither consideration seems to establish legitimate authority on its own. Similarly, in general, the mere fact that one created something does not establish that one properly has absolute control over what one has created. What is needed is an account of what is special. Moreover, if appealing to God is to solve the metaethical puzzle posed by Euthyphro, the account offered must not itself rely on, or presuppose, the sort of transcendent standards we have been attempting to explain. Moral facts, on this sort of view, emerge as no more puzzling than facts about what is legal or polite. In each case, the standing of some behavior as moral, or legal, or polite depends on its conforming to, or conflicting with, various standards that have been put in place. Conventions, after all, are contingent creations that differ from place to place and come in to, and go out of, existence. Moreover, conventions seem liable to arbitrariness in ways that threaten to undermine their claim to authority unless they are recognized at least implicitly as satisfying some convention-independent standard. That some convention demands something seems to provide reason to conform to the demand only when the convention is, itself, just or reasonable, or in some other way good. And this suggests that, to whatever extent specific moral rules and principles are products of convention, their claim to authority relies on some standards that are not products of convention. Needless to say, these considerations are not decisive, and those who see morality as a kind of convention have a variety of plausible ways to address the worries mentioned above. As a result, the view remains attractive. Some, for instance, argue that what makes a convention good, and so serves to justify its demands, is its contribution to overall happiness, while others see the measure of conventions in their ability to advance the interests of each considered singly, and still others maintain that the value of conventions is found in their capacity to secure the approval of those who consider them impartially. On all such accounts, value is convention-independent, but it is nonetheless metaphysically non-mysterious. Each of these accounts portrays value as, at bottom, a familiar, completely natural, feature of the world. Moreover, while on these accounts particular claims concerning value will prove hard to establish and controversial, there is no special puzzle about what we would be trying to discover or what would count as relevant evidence. All of these views, conventionalist and not, identify various moral properties with non-problematic natural features of the world. As a result, they are commonly characterized as versions of naturalism and are contrasted with non-naturalist views that see morality as presupposing, or being committed to, properties over and above those that would be countenanced by natural science. Non-naturalism comes with two distinctive burdens: Naturalism, in contrast, avoids these metaphysical and epistemological burdens. Despite its advantages, naturalism has difficulty capturing well what people take to be the true nature of morality. In saying something is good or right or virtuous we seem to be saying something more than, or at least different from, what we would be saying in describing it as having certain natural features. Correspondingly, no amount of empirical investigation seems by itself, without some moral assumptions in play, sufficient to settle a moral question. That is, he seems to have thought, that one can infer the latter from the former only if, in addition to premises concerning plain matters of fact, one has on hand as well at least one evaluative premise. If, for instance, one infers from the fact that someone is feeling pain that something bad is happening, one is at least presupposing that pain is bad. And that presupposition, in turn, is not entailed by any claims concerned solely with plain matters of fact. If Hume is right, every valid argument for an evaluative conclusion either includes or presupposes some evaluative premise. And, as a result, there is no value neutral argument for an evaluative conclusion. Coming at the same issues from a different direction, G. Moore argued at the beginning of the twentieth century that no naturalist account of morality could do justice to what we are actually thinking and claiming when we make moral judgments. While these views differed among themselves as to what goodness, rightness, virtue and justice might consist in, they shared a commitment to seeing morality as a wholly natural phenomenon and they all saw moral judgment as a matter of thinking that actions, institutions, or characters had some particular natural property or other. According to these views, moral properties were to be identified with some natural property or other. Considering specifically views that identified goodness either with pleasure or with being the object of a desire one desires to have, Moore maintained that such views confused the property goodness with some other property that good things might happen to have. In support of his claim, Moore offered a simple test. Take whichever account you will say, one according to which to be good is to be pleasant and then consider

whether a person who understands the terms involved might nonetheless intelligibly ask whether something she acknowledges to be pleasant is good. It seems she could. And it seems too that in asking the question she would not then be revealing any kind of conceptual confusion or incompetence. The question is, as Moore put it, a genuinely open one. But then we must grant that to think something is pleasant is not identical to thinking it good. Otherwise, wondering whether something that is, admittedly, pleasant, is good would be as senseless as wondering whether a given pleasant thing was pleasant. If, though, to think something good is different than thinking it pleasant, such thoughts Moore assumed must involve attributing distinct properties. Moore was quick to point out that granting that the question is open, in the sense his argument supposes, is compatible with discovering that, as a matter of fact, everything that is pleasant is also good. Because analogous questions remain open for all the candidate naturalist proposals, Moore argued that no such proposal could legitimately be defended as a conceptual truth and that they all failed to capture accurately what we are thinking in thinking of something that it is good. As a result, non-naturalism got a new lease on life with a number of people working in metaethics trying to articulate, systematize, and defend accounts of morality that resisted the temptation to identify moral properties with natural properties. Much of the work in metaethics pursued a strategy of finding companions in guilt, of showing that the status of moral properties as non-natural and the attendant implications for what we must suppose about the nature of moral evidence, if we are to take ourselves as having any, did not leave morality any worse off than other respected fields of knowledge. As Moore saw things, to make a moral claim is to express a distinctive belief that might be true or false about how things are. Specifically, it is to express the belief that some course of action, or institution, or character trait had the property of being right, or good, or virtuous. The challenge Moore assumed is to figure out what property it is that we are taking a thing to have, in thinking of it as right, or good, or virtuous. And the place to look, he thought, is at the content of our beliefs. The Open Question is always open, they argue, not because we are, in making a moral judgment, attributing some non-natural property to things, but because we are not attributing any property at all. We are not saying anything that might be true or false, nor are we expressing a belief. We are doing something altogether different: On these views, moral judgments express some attitude other than belief and lack the sort of cognitive content that would allow them to be true or false. From the start non-cognitivists have had an eye on both i the non-cognitive attitudes that are expressed in making a moral claim and ii what people are doing in making such claims. When focusing on the first, they emphasize that moral terms get their meaning not by their link to beliefs that represent the world as being a certain way, but by their connection to non-cognitive attitudes e. Of course people can use such a term without actually having the corresponding attitudes, but understanding the term is a matter of seeing that it is a linguistically appropriate way to express the attitude. Here their attention is on in claiming that something is, say, wrong, people are consistently not just expressing their opposition to it but telling others not to do it, or working to persuade them not to, or in some other way working to direct action. The two ideas go together naturally, since if the first is right, then it would help explain why people can and do use moral language in the way the second suggests. But the ideas are separable. And many think that the expressivist idea advanced by the first goes to the heart of the matter, while thinking that concentrating on the directive or prescriptive use of moral language can at best be secondary. Whatever the details, the non-cognitivists share the idea that one can admit that something is pleasant, or the object of a desire, or such that it conforms to some rule in force, and nonetheless not take a stand regarding it, or not have any particular emotion concerning it, or not have any interest in prescribing anything relating to it. The Open Question is open, they hold, precisely because the attitudes expressed by a moral judgment all involve something other than merely believing of something that it has certain features whether natural or not. Between the beliefs we might have and the other attitudes we might form, no entailment relations hold at all. Non-cognitivists, of course, need to explain why it seems so plausible to see moral judgment as an expression of belief and as a matter of attributing properties to actions, institutions and characters. And they need to explain why moral thought seems appropriately subject to the rules of logic, whereas the various attitudes that play central roles in the non-cognitivist accounts all seem to fall outside of that realm. These views start with a picture of the world as having neither moral properties nor people believing in moral properties though they have other beliefs , and then explain how a practice of

thinking and talking about moral properties, moral beliefs, moral truth, and moral facts, might naturally and properly emerge. The central idea is that we can see our thought and talk as fundamentally a matter of our expressing our affective attitudes or commitments which gives rise to legitimate thought and talk about corresponding properties, beliefs, truths and facts. Two moves underwrite this idea. One is to hold that talk of properties, beliefs, truths and facts comes cheap: After all, they point out, thinking that some liquid is H₂O is different from thinking it is water and one might intelligibly wonder whether what one grants to be water really is H₂O. Yet that does not show that being water is anything other than being H₂O. A difference between the thoughts does not establish a difference in the properties.

Chapter 4 : Kant: Meta-Ethics - Bibliography - PhilPapers

Metaethics is the attempt to understand the metaphysical, epistemological, semantic, and psychological, presuppositions and commitments of moral thought, talk, and practice.

Under deontology, an act may be considered right even if the act produces a bad consequence, [35] if it follows the rule or moral law. According to the deontological view, people have a duty to act in a way that does those things that are inherently good as acts "truth-telling" for example , or follow an objectively obligatory rule as in rule utilitarianism. Kant then argues that those things that are usually thought to be good, such as intelligence , perseverance and pleasure , fail to be either intrinsically good or good without qualification. Pleasure, for example, appears to not be good without qualification, because when people take pleasure in watching someone suffer, they make the situation ethically worse. He concludes that there is only one thing that is truly good: Nothing in the worldâ€”indeed nothing even beyond the worldâ€”can possibly be conceived which could be called good without qualification except a good will. Pragmatic ethics Associated with the pragmatists , Charles Sanders Peirce , William James , and especially John Dewey , pragmatic ethics holds that moral correctness evolves similarly to scientific knowledge: Thus, we should prioritize social reform over attempts to account for consequences, individual virtue or duty although these may be worthwhile attempts, if social reform is provided for. Ethics of care Care ethics contrasts with more well-known ethical models, such as consequentialist theories e. These values include the importance of empathetic relationships and compassion. Care-focused feminism is a branch of feminist thought, informed primarily by ethics of care as developed by Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings. Noddings proposes that ethical caring has the potential to be a more concrete evaluative model of moral dilemma than an ethic of justice. Role ethics Role ethics is an ethical theory based on family roles. Confucian roles are not rational , and originate through the xin, or human emotions. Anarchism Anarchist ethics is an ethical theory based on the studies of anarchist thinkers. The biggest contributor to the anarchist ethics is the Russian zoologist, geographer, economist, and political activist Peter Kropotkin. Kropotkin argues that ethics itself is evolutionary, and is inherited as a sort of a social instinct through cultural history, and by so, he rejects any religious and transcendental explanation of morality. The origin of ethical feeling in both animals and humans can be found, he claims, in the natural fact of "sociality" mutualistic symbiosis , which humans can then combine with the instinct for justice i. This principle of treating others as one wishes to be treated oneself, what is it but the very same principle as equality, the fundamental principle of anarchism? And how can any one manage to believe himself an anarchist unless he practices it? We do not wish to be ruled. And by this very fact, do we not declare that we ourselves wish to rule nobody? We do not wish to be deceived, we wish always to be told nothing but the truth. And by this very fact, do we not declare that we ourselves do not wish to deceive anybody, that we promise to always tell the truth, nothing but the truth, the whole truth? We do not wish to have the fruits of our labor stolen from us. By what right indeed can we demand that we should be treated in one fashion, reserving it to ourselves to treat others in a fashion entirely different? Our sense of equality revolts at such an idea. Postmodernism This article or section possibly contains synthesis of material which does not verifiably mention or relate to the main topic. Relevant discussion may be found on the talk page. July Learn how and when to remove this template message The 20th century saw a remarkable expansion and evolution of critical theory, following on earlier Marxist Theory efforts to locate individuals within larger structural frameworks of ideology and action. This was on the basis that personal identity was, at least in part, a social construction. Post-structuralism and postmodernism argue that ethics must study the complex and relational conditions of actions. A simple alignment of ideas of right and particular acts is not possible. There will always be an ethical remainder that cannot be taken into account or often even recognized. Such theorists find narrative or, following Nietzsche and Foucault, genealogy to be a helpful tool for understanding ethics because narrative is always about particular lived experiences in all their complexity rather than the assignment of an idea or norm to separate and individual actions. Zygmunt Bauman says postmodernity is best described as modernity without illusion, the illusion being the belief that humanity can be repaired by some ethic principle.

Postmodernity can be seen in this light as accepting the messy nature of humanity as unchangeable. Hoy describes post-critique ethics as the "obligations that present themselves as necessarily to be fulfilled but are neither forced on one or are enforceable" , p. Hoy concludes that The ethical resistance of the powerless others to our capacity to exert power over them is therefore what imposes unenforceable obligations on us. That actions are at once obligatory and at the same time unenforceable is what put them in the category of the ethical. Obligations that were enforced would, by the virtue of the force behind them, not be freely undertaken and would not be in the realm of the ethical. Applied ethics Applied ethics is a discipline of philosophy that attempts to apply ethical theory to real-life situations. The discipline has many specialized fields, such as engineering ethics , bioethics , geoethics , public service ethics and business ethics. Specific questions[edit] Applied ethics is used in some aspects of determining public policy, as well as by individuals facing difficult decisions. The sort of questions addressed by applied ethics include: But not all questions studied in applied ethics concern public policy. For example, making ethical judgments regarding questions such as, "Is lying always wrong? People, in general, are more comfortable with dichotomies two opposites. However, in ethics, the issues are most often multifaceted and the best-proposed actions address many different areas concurrently. In ethical decisions, the answer is almost never a "yes or no", "right or wrong" statement. Many buttons are pushed so that the overall condition is improved and not to the benefit of any particular faction. Particular fields of application[edit].

Chapter 5 : Meta-ethics vs. Normative Ethics: What's the difference? : askphilosophy

Emotivism is a non-cognitive meta-ethical theory which states quite simply that ethical language are only used in expressions of feeling. When we say 'murder is wrong', we're not saying that it is immoral, we're saying that we don't like the idea.

Meta-ethical questions[edit] According to Richard Garner and Bernard Rosen, [1] there are three kinds of meta-ethical problems, or three general questions: What is the meaning of moral terms or judgments? The second category includes questions of whether moral judgments are universal or relative , of one kind or many kinds , etc. Questions of the third kind ask, for example, how we can know if something is right or wrong, if at all. Garner and Rosen say that answers to the three basic questions "are not unrelated, and sometimes an answer to one will strongly suggest, or perhaps even entail, an answer to another. An answer to any of the three example questions above would not itself be a normative ethical statement. Semantic theories[edit] These theories mainly put forward a position on the first of the three questions above, "What is the meaning of moral terms or judgments? Cognitivist theories hold that evaluative moral sentences express propositions that is, they are "truth apt" or "truth bearers", capable of being true or false , as opposed to non-cognitivism. Most forms of cognitivism hold that some such propositions are true, as opposed to error theory , which asserts that all are erroneous. Meta-ethical theories are commonly categorized as either a form of realism or as one of three forms of " anti-realism " regarding moral facts: Realism comes in two main varieties: Ethical naturalism holds that there are objective moral properties and that these properties are reducible or stand in some metaphysical relation such as supervenience to entirely non-ethical properties. Most ethical naturalists hold that we have empirical knowledge of moral truths. Ethical naturalism was implicitly assumed by many modern ethical theorists, particularly utilitarians. Ethical non-naturalism , as put forward by G. Ethical subjectivism is one form of moral anti-realism. Most forms of ethical subjectivism are relativist , but there are notable forms that are universalist: Ideal observer theory holds that what is right is determined by the attitudes that a hypothetical ideal observer would have. An ideal observer is usually characterized as a being who is perfectly rational, imaginative, and informed, among other things. Though a subjectivist theory due to its reference to a particular albeit hypothetical subject, Ideal Observer Theory still purports to provide universal answers to moral questions. Divine command theory holds that for a thing to be right is for a unique being, God, to approve of it, and that what is right for non-God beings is obedience to the divine will. This view was criticized by Plato in the Euthyphro see the Euthyphro problem but retains some modern defenders Robert Adams , Philip Quinn, and others. Like ideal observer theory, divine command theory purports to be universalist despite its subjectivism. Error theory , another form of moral anti-realism, holds that although ethical claims do express propositions, all such propositions are false. Thus, both the statement "Murder is morally wrong" and the statement "Murder is morally permissible" are false, according to error theory. Mackie is probably the best-known proponent of this view. Since error theory denies that there are moral truths, error theory entails moral nihilism and, thus, moral skepticism ; however, neither moral nihilism nor moral skepticism conversely entail error theory. Non-cognitivist theories hold that ethical sentences are neither true nor false because they do not express genuine propositions. Non-cognitivism is another form of moral anti-realism. Most forms of non-cognitivism are also forms of expressivism , however some such as Mark Timmons and Terrence Horgan distinguish the two and allow the possibility of cognitivist forms of expressivism. Emotivism , defended by A. Ayer and Charles Stevenson , holds that ethical sentences serve merely to express emotions. Ayer argues that ethical sentences are expressions of approval or disapproval, not assertions. So "Killing is wrong" means something like "Boo on killing! Quasi-realism , defended by Simon Blackburn , holds that ethical statements behave linguistically like factual claims and can be appropriately called "true" or "false", even though there are no ethical facts for them to correspond to. Projectivism and moral fictionalism are related theories. Universal prescriptivism , defended by R. Hare , holds that moral statements function like universalized imperative sentences. Centralism and non-centralism[edit] Yet another way of categorizing meta-ethical theories is to distinguish between centralist and non-centralist theories. The

debate between centralism and non-centralism revolves around the relationship between the so-called "thin" and "thick" concepts of morality. Thin moral concepts are those such as good, bad, right, and wrong; thick moral concepts are those such as courageous, inequitable, just, or dishonest. That is, centralists argue that one must understand words like "right" and "ought" before understanding words like "just" and "unkind. Allan Gibbard , R. Moral universalism or universal morality is the meta-ethical position that some system of ethics, or a universal ethic , applies universally, that is to all people regardless of culture , race , sex , religion , nationality , sexuality , or other distinguishing feature. The source or justification of this system may be thought to be, for instance, human nature , shared vulnerability to suffering, the demands of universal reason , what is common among existing moral codes, or the common mandates of religion although it can be argued that the latter is not in fact moral universalism because it may distinguish between Gods and mortals. Moral universalism is the opposing position to various forms of moral relativism. Universalist theories are generally forms of moral realism , though exceptions exists, such as the subjectivist ideal observer and divine command theories, and the non-cognitivist universal prescriptivism of R. Value monism is the common form of universalism, which holds that all goods are commensurable on a single value scale. Value pluralism contends that there are two or more genuine scales of value, knowable as such, yet incommensurable, so that any prioritization of these values is either non-cognitive or subjective. A value pluralist might, for example, contend that both a life as a nun and a life as a mother realize genuine values in a universalist sense , yet they are incompatible nuns may not have children , and there is no purely rational way to measure which is preferable. A notable proponent of this view is Isaiah Berlin. Moral relativism maintains that all moral judgments have their origins either in societal or in individual standards, and that no single objective standard exists by which one can assess the truth of a moral proposition. Meta-ethical relativists, in general, believe that the descriptive properties of terms such as "good", "bad", "right", and "wrong" do not stand subject to universal truth conditions, but only to societal convention and personal preference. Given the same set of verifiable facts, some societies or individuals will have a fundamental disagreement about what one ought to do based on societal or individual norms , and one cannot adjudicate these using some independent standard of evaluation. The latter standard will always be societal or personal and not universal, unlike, for example, the scientific standards for assessing temperature or for determining mathematical truths. Some philosophers maintain that moral relativism entails non-cognitivism. Some but not all relativist theories are forms of moral subjectivism , although not all subjectivist theories are relativistic. Moral nihilism , also known as ethical nihilism, is the meta-ethical view that nothing has intrinsic moral value. For example, a moral nihilist would say that killing someone, for whatever reason, is intrinsically neither morally right nor morally wrong. Moral nihilism must be distinguished from moral relativism , which does allow for moral statements to be intrinsically true or false in a non-universal sense, but does not assign any static truth-values to moral statements. Insofar as only true statements can be known, moral nihilists are moral skeptics. Most forms of moral nihilism are non-cognitivist and vice versa, though there are notable exceptions such as universal prescriptivism which is semantically non-cognitive but substantially universal. Justification theories[edit] These are theories that attempt to answer questions like, "How may moral judgments be supported or defended? Most moral epistemologies posit that moral knowledge is somehow possible, as opposed to moral skepticism. Amongst them, there are those who hold that moral knowledge is gained inferentially on the basis of some sort of non-moral epistemic process, as opposed to ethical intuitionism. Empiricism is the doctrine that knowledge is gained primarily through observation and experience. Meta-ethical theories that imply an empirical epistemology include ethical naturalism , which holds moral facts to be reducible to non-moral facts and thus knowable in the same ways; and most common forms of ethical subjectivism , which hold that moral facts reduce to facts about individual opinions or cultural conventions and thus are knowable by observation of those conventions. There are exceptions within subjectivism however, such as ideal observer theory , which implies that moral facts may be known through a rational process, and individualist ethical subjectivism , which holds that moral facts are merely personal opinions and so may be known only through introspection. Empirical arguments for ethics run into the is-ought problem, which asserts that the way the world is cannot alone instruct people how they ought to act. Moral rationalism , also called ethical rationalism, is the view

according to which moral truths or at least general moral principles are knowable a priori, by reason alone. Some prominent figures in the history of philosophy who have defended moral rationalism are Plato and Immanuel Kant. Perhaps the most prominent figures in the history of philosophy who have rejected moral rationalism are David Hume and Friedrich Nietzsche. Recent philosophers who defended moral rationalism include R. A moral rationalist may adhere to any number of different semantic theories as well; moral realism is compatible with rationalism, and the subjectivist ideal observer theory and noncognitivist universal prescriptivism both entail it. Ethical intuitionism, on the other hand, is the view according to which some moral truths can be known without inference. That is, the view is at its core a foundationalism about moral beliefs. Such an epistemological view implies that there are moral beliefs with propositional contents; so it implies cognitivism. Ethical intuitionism commonly suggests moral realism, the view that there are objective facts of morality and, to be more specific, ethical non-naturalism, the view that these evaluative facts cannot be reduced to natural fact. However, neither moral realism nor ethical non-naturalism are essential to the view; most ethical intuitionists simply happen to hold those views as well. Ethical intuitionism comes in both a "rationalist" variety, and a more "empiricist" variety known as moral sense theory. Moral skepticism is the class of meta-ethical theories all members of which entail that no one has any moral knowledge. Many moral skeptics also make the stronger, modal, claim that moral knowledge is impossible. Forms of moral skepticism include, but are not limited to, error theory and most but not all forms of non-cognitivism.

Chapter 6 : ETHICS- PHY META-ETHICS AND ITS THEORIES

The author contends that classifying theories in the field of meta-ethics along a single dimension misses important nuances in each theory. With the increased sophistication and complexity of meta-ethical analyses in the modern era, the traditional cognitivist-non-cognitivist and realist-anti.

Chapter 7 : Metaethics (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

Essay on Meta-Ethical Cultural Relativism - Meta-Ethical Cultural Relativism The thesis of meta-ethical cultural relativism is the philosophical viewpoint that there are no absolute moral truths, only truths relative to the cultural context in which they exist.

Chapter 8 : Meta-Ethics.2 - A quasi-Aristotelian Approach

Ethical relativism is, as the name implies, relative. Meta-ethical relativism is more so. PS I'm surprised the spell check did not kick in.

Chapter 9 : Metaethics | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy

METAETHICS THEORIES Warning: this handout is very simplified. Fuller details of the theories are found on the other handouts (and in the original texts!). Religious metaethics God's will.