The Fact-Value Problem

US275 Scientific Ethics
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Fact-Value Problem

- Are values essentially different from facts?

- Can moral assessments be derived from facts?

- Can moral statements be true or false like factual statements?

HILARY PUTNAM

THE COLLAPSE OF THE

FACT/VALUE DICHOTOMY

AND OTHER ESSAYS
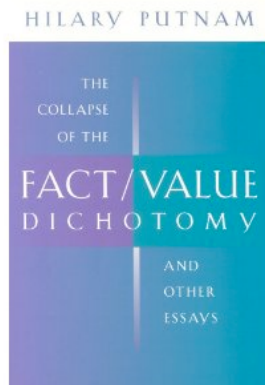
How do facts connect to values?

- Fallacy of deriving ought from is

- naturalistic fallacy

- verification principle

Value Judgment

Inference
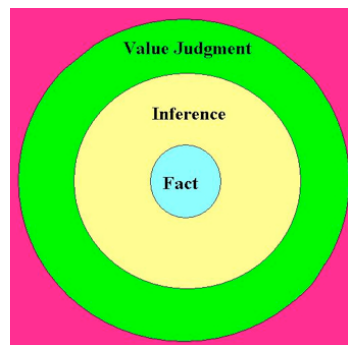
Fact

Fallacy of transition from "is" to "Ought"

- Fundamental mistake

    - observations of specific facts

        - from statement of "what is"

    - used to conclude statements about moral obligations

        - to statements of "You ought to..."

What Is → What Ought To Be

"That's just your opinion."

Hume's solution to "fallacy of deriving ought from is"

- value judgments

    - not rational deductions

- emotivism:

    - moral assessments

    - emotional reaction to specific facts

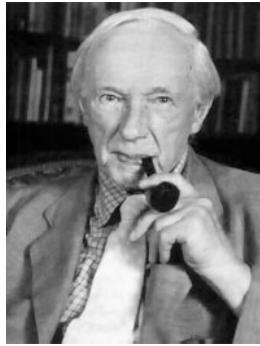*Portrait of David Hume*
Allan Ramsay, 1766

What is the definition of "good?"

- Pleasure

    - (utilitarians)

- Rational will

    - (Kant/Deontology)

- God's commandments

    - (Divine Command Theory)

What is good?

Naturalistic Fallacy

- "good" cannot be defined

  - "good" is a simple property

    - similar to "yellow"

- value judgments involve intuitively recognizing value (good)

  - within observed facts

George Edward Moore
author of *Principia Ethica,* 1903

Verification Principle

- statement is meaningful

  - if and only if,

    - it is verifiable

    - (i.e. can be found to be true or false)

- moral statements

  - only expressions of emotion

Alfred Jules Ayers
author of Language, Truth, and Logic, 1936

Logical Positivism

- Tautological

  - statements true by definition

  - example "Arcadia University is an educational institution"

- empirically verifiable

  - statements based on observations

  - example "Arcadia University has a castle on campus"

logical positivism

Cognitive statements

- statements that have factual content

  - statements can be verified

 - can determine objectively if statement is true or false

Noncognitive Statements

- Fact-value problem

  - value statements cannot pass a critical test of meaning.

  - therefore, fail the verification principle

- Emotivism

  - value and moral statements lack factual content

  - Value and moral statements are expressions of feelings

Problems with Emotivism

- verification principle

  - is neither tautological or empirically verifiable

- moral statements are emotional expressions and attitudes

  - more than isolated views

  - moral judgements are universalizable
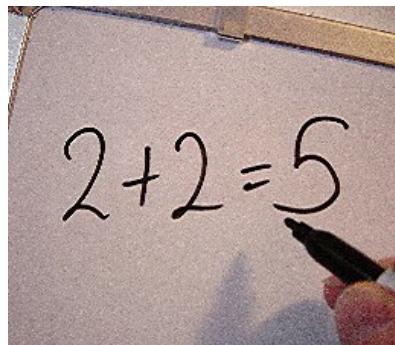
Problems with Emotivism

- Emotivist view

  - ethical disagreements the result of differences in attitude

- However, there is a distinction

  - having <u>reasons</u> for changing views

    - cognitive decision to change

  - external <u>causes</u> result in a change our view

    - change in situation

Prescriptivism

- Moral statements

  - accept noncognitivist element

  - prescriptive function

    - recommend that others adopt an attitude

Richard Mervyn Hare

Moral judgements are prescriptive

- Moral judgments contain both

  - descriptive elements

    - factual statement

    - underlying facts about an action

  - prescriptive elements

    - value statement

    - guides behavior

Moral judgements are logical

- Moral judgements contain
    - is statements
        - descriptive facts
    - ought statements
        - prescriptive imperative
    - returns to Hume's fallacy of deriving ought from is

Moral judgements are universalizable

- provides formal structure to a moral code

- similar to Kant

- universalizability is a necessary and sufficient condition of a moral judgement
    - necessary condition - if principle is more, then it applies universally.
    - sufficient condition - if a principle applies universally, then it is a moral one.

MORALITY AND UNIVERSALITY

kluwer

Moral judgements are centered on principles

- principles
    - not rigid absolutes
    - reasons for informing deliberation
- principles necessary
    - in order to apply moral code to new situations

principles
principles
principles
principles

Problems with Prescriptivism

- statements that are prescriptive, logical, and universalizable

    - open-ended

    - too broad

    - can be applied beyond traditional moral questions

- no limitations on altering one's principles

Naturalism

- moral terms linked to some natural property

    - utilitarians: pleasure

    - egoists: self-interest

    - virtue theory: human flourishing

- promote human betterment

    - avoid natural tendency of society to get worse

The Treaty of Penn with the Indians
Benjamin West, 1772

Assignment

The God Particle and morality?

The Fact-Value problem examines the attempt to define and describe moral statements using an objective and quantifiable (i.e. a scientific) approach. Religion assigns moral views in a relationship through faith to their God. In the movie "Angels and Demons," scientists isolate the God Particle in an attempt to understand the origins of the universe (the moment of creation). There is much in the natural world that is not currently understood using a scientific approach and scientists have "faith" that they can learn the answers with additional observations of things such as subatomic particles or antimatter.

In your discussion group: In your small group, discuss whether or not it is possible to combine religious faith with scientific laws to provide the basis for morality.

Readings

Chapter 11 The Fact-Value Problem

Pojman & Fieser, (2009) Ethics:
Discovering Right and Wrong. pp.
188 - 208.

The Reading Statue
Mississippi Agriculture and Forestry Museum

Any Questions?

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