

The Challenge of Skepticism

US275 Scientific Ethics
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Moral Skepticism

- no objective moral facts
 - no reason to believe that objective moral facts exist
- moral statements have meaning
 - but reflect subjective preferences
- error theory
 - it is a mistake to claim that there are objective moral facts



J.L. Mackie
Proponent of Moral Skepticism
Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong

Mackie's Argument from Relativity

- There is no universal moral code accepted by all people
 - therefore, morality is culturally dependent
- but acknowledged
 - one ought to conform to the specific rules of life in which one takes part



ETHICS
INVENTING
RIGHT AND WRONG



J. L. MACKIE



Mackie's Argument from Queerness

- if objective moral facts were to exist
 - what is it's form?
 - what is it made of?
 - where does it exist?
- if they did exist,
 - then they would be very strange



Strange Rock
Chou Y'ang, 19th century

Mackie's Argument from Projection

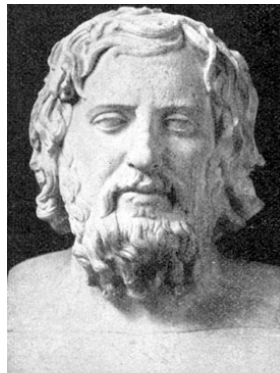
- belief in objective values
 - is the result of psychological tendencies to project subjective beliefs to the outside world.
- Hume - our minds try to spread itself on external objects
- Mackie - pathetic fallacy
 - our tendency to read our feelings into their objects.



Patriotic Pampered Pocket Pooch Posing Proudly
Randy Robertson, 2008
Wikimedia Commons

A Skeptic feels that morality is a human invention

- practical role of morality
 - need to know right and wrong
 - to regulate behavior
 - not metaphysical or special, but creations of man
- Greek philosopher Xenophon
 - religion is an invention
 - making of God in the image of one's own group



Xenophon

Moral Nihilism

- extreme form of skepticism
- There are no moral facts
 - no moral truths
 - no moral knowledge
- Morality is an illusion
- Morality may be a superstitious remnant of religion



Gilbert Harman
The Nature of Reality

Disanalogy thesis against moral realism

- moral principles cannot be tested by observation in the same way the scientific theories can
 - because moral facts do not exist in the same way that scientific facts do
- Therefore, moral nihilism is true

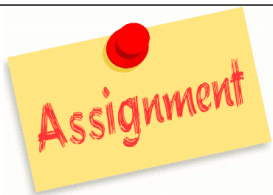


Defense of Moral Realism

- not all truths or facts about the universe can be determined empirically
- supervenient properties
 - color is based on relationship between light and our perceptions
 - moral properties may emerge from natural ones
 - bad supervenient property of pain



Water Torture
J. Damhoudere, 1556



Assignment

Your personal ethical philosophy?

We have covered a wide range of different philosophies over the first few weeks of the course. Review the basic concepts of the major ethical philosophies and then consider your own personal views.

Individually:

In a MS Word document that will be submitted via email to the course instructor at hoffmanj@arcadia.edu. This assignment should be a minimum of 250 words.

- 1. Identify the ethical philosophy/philosophies that are the closest fit with your personal view. Explain why you chose this/these ethical philosophies.*
- 2. Identify which of ethical philosophies that you would never find yourself considering in making decisions.*

Readings

Chapter 12 Moral Realism and the Challenge of Skepticism

Pojman & Fieser, (2009) Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong. pp. 209-223



*The Abbé Jean-Jacques Huber Reading (1699 –1747)
Maurice Quentin de La Tour, c.1742*

Any Questions?

Email me at:
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<http://www.vipitbullkennels.com/images/animated-question-mark.gif>