

Williams on Subjectivism: First Thoughts

3 Statements of Subjectivism

Linguistic

"Moral judgements merely state or express a person's attitudes"

Epistemological

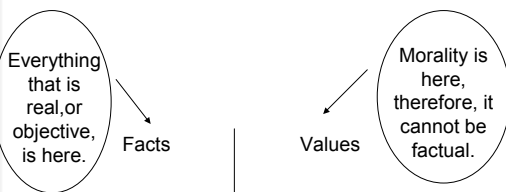
"Moral judgements can't be proved; they are matters of individual opinion."

Metaphysical

"There are no moral facts"

Metaphysical View as Primary

There are no moral facts (Metaphysical)
Therefore, we cannot possibly discover them (Epistemological)
And we could not be stating them (Linguistic)



The Linguistic View: Descriptivism

Descriptivism: A person's MJ's merely state or *describe* that person's attitudes.

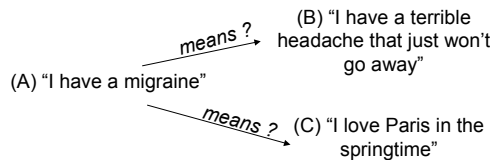
D: "x is good" *means* "I approve of x"

So, according to D:

"Murder is wrong" *means* "I disapprove of murder"

"Charity work is good" *means* "I approve of charity work"

Meaning



Does A *mean* B or C? If they mean the same thing, they will be substitutable for each other in any context. We will observe the same things when someone says A as when that person says B.

For A & B, the person will be in PAIN, and offering an ASPIRIN will be relevant. For C, neither will be appropriate.

An Objection to Descriptivism

Descriptivism: A person's MJ's merely state or *describe* that person's attitudes.

D: "x is good" *means* "I approve of x"

Person 1: "x is good."

Person 2: "x is not good."

Disagreement about x

But, if D is true:

Person 1 *means*: Person 1 approves of x

Person 2 *means*: Person 2 disapproves of x

No disagreement

Therefore, "x is good" does not *mean* "I approve of x" and D is false.

The Linguistic View: Expressivism

Expressivism: A person's MJ's merely *express* that person's attitudes.

EX: "x is good" *means* "yea x!"

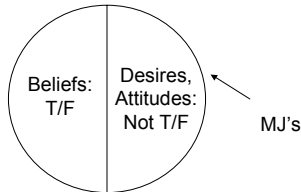
1. Only statements can be true or false, right or wrong (i.e., rationally evaluable).
2. MJ's are not statements, but expressions.
3. Therefore, MJ's cannot be true or false, right or wrong (i.e., they are not rationally evaluable).

Strategy to Contest Expressivism: accept (1) and show that (3) has counter-intuitive results, thereby arguing that (2) (and therefore EX) is false.

MJ's and Rational Evaluability

1. If MJ's weren't rationally evaluable, then:
 - a. People could not change their minds on the basis of reasons; they could not be persuaded by the facts.
 - b. People could not even offer rationalizations (reasons that they were not motivated by but would justify their actions).
2. But we do argue with people, trying to change their minds, we offer reasons for what we do, we offer rationalizations, and we feel compelled to do all of these things; they seem *necessary* in moral discourse.
3. So, (a) and (b) are false, and therefore MJ's ARE rationally evaluable.

Humean Psychology



Belief + Desire = Action

Basic Desire: You just find yourself having it.

Derived Desire: At least partially based on a belief; It will change if your belief upon which it is based is changed.

Upshot: Actions and Derived Desires can be rationally evaluated to the extent that the beliefs involved are true/false.