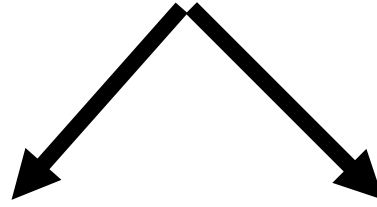


Companions in Guilt

Mathematics and Ethics

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Is there knowable objective moral truth?



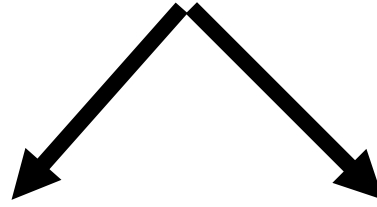
Yes

No

(Optimism)

(Pessimism)

Is there knowable objective moral truth?



Yes

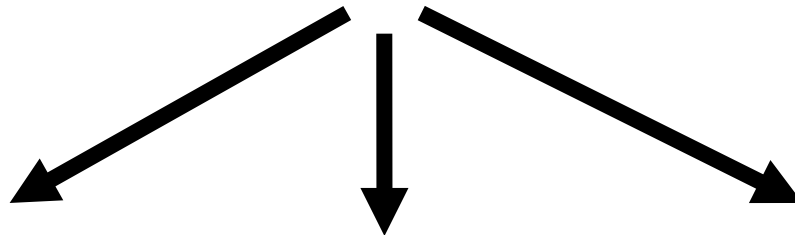
No

(Optimism)

(Pessimism)



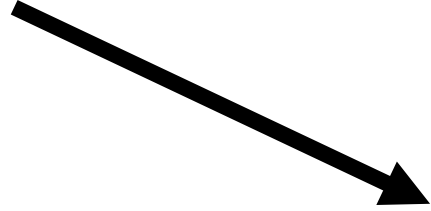
What kind of facts do moral truths state?



Supernatural

Natural

Non-natural



Non-naturalism

Epistemological problem

If moral facts are non-natural, how can we discover them?

Ontological problem

If moral facts are non-natural, in what way moral values exist?

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If morality is problematic because of features F, G, etc., then find a discipline that shares F, G, etc. ... and is ***respectable***.

Mathematics to the rescue!

- There is knowable objective mathematical truth.
- Mathematical knowledge is a priori.
- Numbers, sets, and other math. objects are not natural objects, but exist ***somehow***.

So why not a priori knowable objective **moral** truth?

“[F]rom self-evident propositions, by necessary consequences, as incontestable as those in mathematics, the measures of right and wrong might be made out,…”

(Locke, 1690)

“... I should preserve the Life of an innocent Man, that happens at any time to be in my Power ... than that I should suffer him to perish ... For a Man endued with Reason, to deny the Truth of these Things; is the very same thing as if a Man that understands Geometry or Arithmetick, should deny the most obvious and known Proportions of Lines or Numbers, and perversely contend that ... a Square is not double to a triangle of equal base and height.”

(Clarke, 1738)

“[W]e ... discover normative truths and mathematical truths simply by thinking about these subjects in the right way. ”

(Scanlon 2014)

“We can form true normative beliefs... in something like the way in which we can form true logical and mathematical beliefs.”

(Parfit 2011)

Parfit's Companions-in-Guilt Strategy

Ethics is epistemologically and ontologically similar to / the same as mathematics, logic, and modal knowledge.

We discover moral truths in "something like the way" in which we discover math. and logical truths; that is "simply by thinking" about them.

"There are" moral, mathematical, and logical truths and objects, but they "do not exist in an ontological sense" and have "no ontological implications."



The Problem with Disagreement

There is widespread moral disagreement on many issues.

Ethical intuitive ability contrasts with perception.

Ethical intuitive ability contrasts mathematical ability.

The Convergence Claim

In ideal conditions for moral thinking, we would all have pretty much the same moral beliefs.

Agreement Distorting Factors

1. We have different non-moral beliefs.
2. We are biased by self-interest and ego.
3. Moral truths are often not precise or exact.
- ...
4. Some moral questions have no answers.
5. Some disagreements are about borderline cases.
6. People equivocate on “right”, “wrong”, etc.
7. Some moral questions have only more-or-less kinds of answers.
8. People apply the same principles differently.
9. People have theoretical differences and those are secondary.

Limitations of the GiC strategy

Differences

- Epistemological differences between mathematics and ethics concerning measure of agreement and agreement distorting factors.

Controversy

- Conception of mathematics must fit the conception of ethics but the correct conception of mathematics is controversial.

Clarity

- GiC is a defensive strategy, it does not clarify the nature and foundation of ethics.

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