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Ethical Theory as Analogous to Economic Theory

By Bryan Goodrich
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There exist many parallels between economics and ethics. It is not my goal to iron out all of these similarities. However, I do want to establish a few key elements that will illuminate the different perspectives of ethical theory. Morality is a very real thing, and theory plays a distinct role in both analyzing and directing that moral practice. The purpose of this paper is to lay out two distinctive roles for ethical theory and how they relate to moral practice: descriptive and normative. I will argue by analogy to a long standing tradition of economic theory because its organizing principles are congruent with those organizing principles in ethical theory. This comparison will discern the theoretical roles, making clear what benefit ethical theory can have on moral practice.

Taking a general perspective at economic practice, we quickly run into ethical similarities. Economics, contemporarily, is involved with studying markets. A market is a collection of people making choices, interacting and producing outcomes, all the while imbued with culture, attitudes and perspectives. Likewise, moral practice is a collection of people making choices, interacting and producing outcomes, all the while imbued with culture, attitudes and perspectives. The similarities do not stop there. The fundamental economic question is “Was my choice or action the economical [good] one?” The fundamental ethical question is “Was my choice or action the ethical [good] one?” Since ethics and economics are fundamentally and generally analogous in this sense, it appears the “method” behind economic theory cannot be too far off from what we should expect of ethical theory. The obvious divergence at this point is that what is good economically is not the ethical good. Since the realistic aspect of what is being studied, i.e., the

people's culture and choices, etc., is the same, we shall see that the approach to the theoretical relations is also similar.[1]

Positive economics takes a, supposedly, unbiased perspective at the human interactions in the market. The goal is specifically descriptive. This is contrasted with normative economics which discerns value judgments and their role in the market practice. Descriptive ethical theory is one approach to meta-ethics.[2] Analogously, descriptive ethical theory takes an unbiased perspective on human interactions in moral exchanges. As economic theory attempts to understand the economic and non-economic variables involved in market exchanges, i.e., why certain people make some choice X, and what patterns can be discovered as objectively consistent, we see a familiar parallel. Ethical theory in the descriptive sense is concerned solely with those moral and non-moral variables involved in ethical exchanges, i.e., why certain people make some choice Y, and any patterns that can be discovered as objectively consistent. Therefore, ethical theory is important in describing the real-world situations human (moral) agents find themselves in, to determine what choices are made, and the effects culture, attitudes, etc. play on those choices. They describe the "how" of moral practice.

The descriptive aspect of any theory is not that interesting, since it is only the substance of what the theory is about. The interesting part is what those relations produce; moreover, the question of why some practice goes on instead of another, and if we can discern which is better. Of course, that requires an approach of determining goals. To keep with the analogy, normative economics looks at group A with goal X, and what best choice they should make to achieve X, compared with group B with goal Y and what it would take for them to achieve Y. In addition, they need to know how A and B relate

and interact; Do they conflict? Does A going after X impede B going after Y? Should B go after X instead? Would B change their goal from Y to X if they knew what A knew? Congruently, normative ethical theory is concerned with the same kind of abstracted model and questions in terms of morality. Does a person (or group) with goal P conflict with person (or group) with goal Q? The list goes on. Therefore, ethical theory appears to approach the real-world much in the way economic theory has approached the market in the past hundreds of years. Key relational questions arise, and value judgments or "why" questions emerge. This is the role of normative ethical theory.[3]

The final parallel this analogy clarifies is the benefit and role of ethical theory. Since the normative aspects are the most interesting, they seem to appear to be the most important. Simply describing what is going on is useless besides information gathering; therefore, making value judgments at the meta-level and affecting the moral practice becomes critical. Economics is well aware of this fact and, since Adam Smith, has known that we can make choices, given our theoretical understanding of the real-world relations, to shape and mold those practices. Likewise, ethics can make "policy" assertions as moral imperatives, for individuals and groups alike, given the real-world situations (with relevant information) and normative understanding of what goals should be achieved. These can be considered "action-guides."[4] Economic theory discerns how the world works so that we can make better economic choices; ethical theory discerns how the world works so we can make better ethical choices.

A caveat should be mentioned that ethical theory is not required for moral practice; just as economic theory does not make the market work or come into existence when directing policy.[5] These real-world events occur regardless of whether or not we are

theoretically aware of their relations.[6] For example, some "Joe" may not be aware of anything about ethics, but he is still making ethical choices in his life. Thus, caution should be held in thinking normative practices make the world. Meta-ethics simply provides the tools for making the better choices by being aware of not only how the matters of facts are, but also why, or what, can affect them.

The conclusion can be drawn that meta-ethics plays a very important role in human activities. No one would discount the importance of economic knowledge (i.e., positive economics) and economic theory (i.e., normative economics). Knowledge has often been compared to power. Economic knowledge, just as other scientific knowledge, has benefited humanity. Economics is concerned with the real-world and human choices or actions. Ethics, as has been shown, parallels that study. Therefore, it is only clear that ethical theory plays a crucial role in benefiting humanity in one of our most basic and natural behaviors. It not only describes how human affairs go on in the real-world, in terms of morality, ethical theory describes how that moral knowledge is obtained, what it describes, why one thing happens instead of another. Most importantly, it provides the normative analysis for moral practice to benefit from the theoretical advancements. Ethics, too, should not be discounted for the important knowledge it provides.

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[1] The distinction made between moral practice and moral theory is expressly articulated by Annette Baier, "Extending the Limits of Moral Theory" *Journal of Philosophy* 83, no. 10, Eighty-Third Annual Meeting American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division (Oct. 1986): 538-545. This parallels the economic distinction between theorizing about the economy, and actual economic practices that go on. A divergence should be noted that whereas Baier argues for a kind of merging between intellectual theorizing and personal (emotive) reflection between theory and practice, economics may not have this at all. This is uniquely characterized by the fact one is economic and the other moral.

[2] Peter Railton, "Moral Theory as A Moral Practice," *Noûs* 25, no. 2 1991 A.P.A. Central Division Meeting (April, 1991): 185-190, distinguishes moral theories that are or are not meta-ethical, for meta-ethics has traditionally been considered a thing of intellectual inquiry concerned with meaning (p. 185). Though I agree with the idea that there needs to be a separation in the level of abstraction in theory, this does not seem to be incongruent with the analogy presented. Even in economic theory, questions of the very meaning of terms is present, and the distinction made between normative and positive articulated here simply divide the actual usage of theory, i.e., to explain the "how" or ask the "why" and make an integrated whole of it all.

[3] Fredrick A. Olafson, "Meta-Ethics and the Moral Life," *Philosophical Review* 65 no. 2 (april 1956):159-178, draws the distinction between normative ethical theory and meta-ethics as "[explicating] the 'logic' of moral reasoning…" (p. 159). I do not argue that the logic can be addressed in its own right, but to separate that from the real-world information it is expressing is a disservice to the analysis one would undertake. It becomes empty formalism. Economic theory, which this analogy draws on, has its "logic" and metaphysical assumptions, but like science, you cannot divorce that from the meat of the analysis. Ethics is concerned with the real-world, and therefore may not be so easily divorced either. I think Paul W. Tayler, "The Normative Function of Meta-ethics," *Philosophical Review* 67 no. 1 (January 1958):16-32 provides some critiques that might lend support to my concerns.

[4] Though economic policy differs greatly from what might be a similar idea in meta-ethics, the action guide tends to require certain distinct criteria to even be considered a moral action guide (while economic policy would be an economic action guide). For more see William K. Frankena, "The Concept of Morality," *Journal of Philosophy* 63 no. 21, American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Sixty-Third Annual Meeting (Nov 10, 1966): 688-696.

[5] Some argue that using policy choices can make society or the market worse off. I suspect some could also make the parallel argument against ethical theory; e.g., just going off our emotive basis or intuition is a better, and more "natural," practice of moral choices. That just seems to suggest "ignorance is bliss." But I would not claim that is the inherent position of non-cognitivists e.g., intuitionists or emotivists.

[6] Another parallel can be given to mathematics here. Simply because we do not know the interior angles of a right triangle add up to 180 degrees does not mean we cannot use triangles. Our ignorance does not make the object non-existent. We are just ignorant of its abstracted relations.

The Error of Language

By Bryan Goodrich
Friday, March 21, 2008

Non-cognitive views of ethical theory can take on many perspectives about the nature of moral values. The one common thread is that they clearly object to there being such a thing as objective moral values. The question for these meta-ethicists falls upon what moral values become. Two prevailing views are the emotivist, championed by A. J. Ayer, and error theory, expounded by J. L. Mackie. The goal of this paper will be a different kind of error, from the one Mackie addresses in regard to objectivism. Instead, this paper will show the error Mackie brings out in the focus on language as the method of understanding and determining moral values. Ayer's linguistical dependence becomes a paramount weakness for his view, to which Mackie's insights into the meta-ethical analysis prove beneficial. To profit from Mackie's insight, the structure of this paper will, first, be to analyze Ayer's view of non-cognitive ethics and approach. Secondly, a critique of Ayer's focus on linguistics will illuminate the weakness as we elucidate a promising alternative that Mackie affords. With Mackie's contributions in hand, we can see the error in the dependence on language as a means of ethical analysis.

Ayer's emotive theory of value attempts to establish the proper place of ethical analysis as distinct from the rest of any other analyses. This has a two-fold effect. First, it clarifies what the role of the moral philosopher is in regard to meta-ethical theory. Second, it draws out the properties by which we can view ethical values and how to analyze them. For Ayer, the latter will be done exclusively through linguistics. Before getting into the consequences of Ayer's linguistical analysis, something should be said of the approach Ayer takes. Looking toward the role the moral philosopher is supposed to take, in Ayer's view, toward ethical analysis, we get a sharp divide between what is and is not ethical philosophy. Ayer designates four classes of what

has been studied in the domain of ethical theory by moral philosophers; much of which involves non-ethical concepts. Of the four classes only one class is what Ayer deems proper of ethical philosophy (Ayer 1952, 103), because it actually contains ethical content. Without concern that he may be constructing philosophy to fit his view and begging the question, what are important in this doctrine are the underlying assumptions. For Ayer, moral philosophy is concerned solely with "propositions which express definitions of ethical terms, or judgments about the legitimacy or possibility of certain definitions," (*ibid.*). Therefore, to appreciate what Ayer has to offer we must understand what it means for philosophy to be distinctly concerned with linguistics, and why this emotive theory of value forces us toward that means of analysis.

The fundamental question regarding ethical philosophy, as Ayer would have us believe, revolves around whether or not moral statements are statements of propositions. Ayer can properly be understood as a kind of subjectivist; therefore, moral statements are not propositions. The question for moral philosophers is forced to challenge what moral statements mean or entail. The emotive theory of value suggests our semantics behind moral statements are utterances of feelings, i.e., what we emote.[1] This is not to be confused, however, with factual positions such as the proposition whether the speaker of some moral statement does or does not obtain the specified sentiment.[2] Since all moral content in language, which is assumed to be connected to our morality,[3] is an expression of feeling about a certain object, and "not to make any assertion about them," (*ibid.*, 108) we can designate moral utterances to a kind of command. Specifically, "[t]hey are calculated ... to arouse feeling, and so to stimulate action," (*ibid.*). It becomes clear that ethical theory, for Ayer, is an analysis of the statements in moral practice, and whether or not they arouse appropriate feelings in others to stimulate them to action. Like a command, they are simply differentiated by the kind of utterance it is, i.e., whether it is a "strong" or "weak"

command comparing "it is your duty to ..." with "it is good to ..." If accurate by his account, then Ayer's framework, which moral philosophy is supposed to function under, is merely a concern of language. Really, though, it is not even the semantics of the language itself, but the expression of non-word commands that have moral content. The moral content itself is "unanalysable," (*ibid.*, 112). If Ayer is correct by this account, then meta-ethics is concerned with only "pseudo-concepts," (*ibid.*) we capture in statements about the world, separate from the sociological studies of actual moral practice.

Mackie provides an alternative account completely rejecting the linguistic framework Ayer would have moral philosophy relegated to. What Mackie calls an Error Theory is a negative thesis rejecting moral objectivism. On this, Ayer and he are in accord. What Mackie is concerned with, however, is the ontology of moral values, not the linguistics or concepts of them (Mackie 1977, 18). Therefore, Mackie rejects Ayer's framework. Mackie's account of an ontological approach, negative to moral objectivism, is concerned with what first-order moral statements describe. It cannot, he says, "be settled conclusively or exhaustively by finding out what the word 'good' means," (*ibid.*, 19). The reason Mackie has a critical divergence from Ayer's emotivism is apparent given Mackie's rejection of objectivism. In fact, Mackie claims that, due to the inherent objectivism in language, a second-order analysis of ethics restricted to linguistics "ought to conclude that moral values ... are objective," (*ibid.*, 35). For instance, Mackie is aware of value judgments existing with propositional values, given some standard to analyze them (*ibid.*, 25-6), but Ayer contends that "the fundamental ethical concepts are unanalysable, inasmuch as there is no criterion by which one can test the validity of the judgments in which they occur," (Ayer 1952, 107). This is a possible error for Ayer, given a framework restricted to linguistics. Mackie focuses on the rejection of objectivism in analyzing

value. Even in the case where value claims can be made in light of some standard, his focus on the ontology of moral values goes beyond those, and the error language will afford.

The second-order ethical analysis of moral practices, particularly the semantics of the language used therein, can fundamentally be different depending on what proper role one assigns moral philosophy. Ayer insists on restricting ethical analysis to that of linguistics, to which moral content is merely differences in expressions of feelings aiming to motivate others; though, supposedly disjoint from the actual assertion of feelings in the speaker. Mackie rejects this strict adherence to language. Error Theory is about the error of allowing objectivism to bleed into non-objective values. Language suffers this error, and more is needed for a proper moral philosophy. Therefore, an alternative to meta-ethics being strictly one of language is easily obtained with Mackie's considerations.

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[1] In addition, Ayer (pg. 107) states, "the presence of an ethical symbol in a proposition adds nothing to its factual content." Even if we consider a "moral statement" to be partially a proposition, or a proposition proper, then the moral content itself does not effect the statement's propositional value regardless. Therefore, the moral content is not in regard to the proposition.

[2] Ayer separates himself from the traditional subjectivist theory by drawing the distinction that emotive statements, which are moral statements, "do not express propositions about the speaker's feelings," (pg. 109). To support this, Ayer clarifies that there is a difference between an expression and an assertion. Assertions of one's feelings are representative of the subjectivist theory. For Ayer, emotivism is about the expression of the feeling as disjoint from any propositional assertion.

[3] Actually supporting this notion with factual information, or justifying that language adequately represents a description of moral practice(s), is not a concern for ethical theory. Instead, as he suggests, it is the area of the social sciences, apart from moral philosophy.

In Search of a Prescription: A Cognitivist Identification of Moral Value

By Bryan Goodrich
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Let us say, for the sake of argument, that moral realists are correct in saying moral statements are propositions. We are still left with the clear challenge to locate where, in the facts of the world, do we find prescriptions? It follows that if a moral statement can be right or wrong, and it says something about the world, then we ought to be able to identify the moral value from its truth value and the way the world is. This framework is too naïve to sufficiently supply the answer. Unfortunately, it is this kind of framework non-cognitivists often approach. This paper will focus on the cognitivist's arguments for moral realism and objectivism. It will be attempted to identify, at the very least, the general area or boundaries to which we need to look to identify moral values or prescriptions, and what their content will be like. To achieve this end we shall first identify cognitivism, realism and their general moral ideas, especially the phenomenology thesis they propose. We will then venture to locate where in the moral statement, and in the world, we might derive prescriptions and what it will require to derive them. The hope is to show both the conceptual framework of objective moral prescriptions and the phenomenological basis to obtain that understanding.

Before we can search for the prescription in a cognitivist theory of ethics, we need to understand what the cognitivist theory entails. As Foot describes it, "A cognitivist theory of ethics says that moral judgments are about the world," and "A realist theory of ethics would be one that refused to let the possession of truth of falsity by a particular ethical proposition stand or fall by our capacity or lack of capacity for assigning truth or falsity to it."[1] Jonathan Dancy concurs when he argues for his strong conception of moral realism,[2] wherein "real properties are those which are not constituted by the availability or possibility of a characteristic human

response."[3] For this argument there will be no real separation between cognitivism and realism, and each shall be used interchangeably. The key facet is that moral propositions or properties are considered to be of the real world in some manner, independent of human experience or capacity for experience. Therefore, if a tree falls in the woods and no one is around to hear it, it still does make a sound, at least in the objective sense. But are moral properties like properties of sound, whether objective or otherwise? Dancy compares them to, in a Lockean sense, secondary properties; e.g., he compares moral properties to the idea of something's being red. Using this phenomenological thesis for moral experience, we will investigate moral prescription in some relation to real world objects, like we might investigate the nature of color given that objects have such an appearance to the observer.

If the phenomenological thesis is correct, then we can view moral properties to be like that of secondary properties in Locke's conception. When we speak of something in the world appearing red, we are not saying something necessarily about the object itself, but how it appears to us. This admits two things. First, that something in the world is such that it can appear red, and second, that to certain observes it does, in fact, appear red under some given conditions. We can say these are two properties being objective and subjective. We know that its being red is because of some objective properties to do with wavelength, while the observer's experience of the object being red is subjective, requiring that it relates to the individual in some way we appropriately describe as appearing red. Under Dancy's strong view of realism, this redness is real if this property is not constituted by the possibility of a characteristic human response (i.e., the subjective experience). Foot agrees with this definition, as stated previously. In a more appealing view, we can say this subjective possible experience is constituted by its objective, or primary, qualities. This means it is an objective fact of the world that an event can occur such

that it is possible for a human to experience an object in what we describe as red. It is under this kind of example of phenomenological moral realism that we will examine for the prescriptive quality of the "ought."

If it is the case that moral properties are like secondary properties as described above, then when we say something is good (or any other moral term), we are saying something of an event in which the observer making the statement experiences an object in such a way that the fact of the world (i.e., the objective properties) constitute this subjective experience of goodness to the observer. This still does not answer the question of where the prescription, nor the goodness, resides. To elaborate by analogy, the redness itself is not of the objects, but it is in the relation between the objects, i.e., the object appearing red to the person seeing it appear as such. Likewise, the goodness is in the relation of the object(s) appearing good to the person seeing it appear as such. But this only provides a descriptive account of the world, in such a way to say there are at least two objects relating in such a way one can, and does, observe such a thing considered "good."[4] Wherein does the prescription reside? There needs to be more.

Hare provides another account for a cognitivist theory. The descriptive account which leads to the above statements is appealing but not enough. It will lead to relativism, Hare explains,[5] but it also has two requirements non-cognitivists might appeal to which can be summed up as "because moral judgements do not state facts, any kind of moral reasoning is impossible."[6] As was shown above, they do not state facts, since secondary properties are not facts of the world like objective properties. How then, Hare will demonstrate, can we derive prescriptions from these moral judgments? Descriptive accounts are not enough. Hare explains:

> An imperative like 'Shut the door' does not state any fact about the door. And a statement of fact like 'The door is locked' cannot be used to tell somebody to do something. It only becomes a guide to action when conjoined with some general prescription like 'If a door is locked, do not try to open it.'[7]

It is under this kind of framework that these phenomenological experiences provide a moral relation we can understand as action-guiding given some kind of prescription. Is the prescription arbitrary and relative? It is possible in the latter, but some may not have a problem with that. But need it be arbitrary or without bounds? It is unlikely to be the case since they are bound by the way the world is; you cannot ask the impossible of someone with an action-guide, no more than you can prescribe a red object to be treated in a way it cannot. Therefore, at the very least, we have bounds on the prescriptions available to choose from in regard to real-world relations that admit of moral properties. They are imbued in the events that correspond to people's interactions with them. Like Kant, the range of possible prescriptions may require a rational framework that escapes the scope of this paper. Thus, in closing, this argument demonstrates the possibility for objective moral prescriptions to exist in context to the way the world is, given the relational properties ascribed to objects in our moral reasoning.

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[1] Philippa Foot "Moral realism and Moral Dilemma," *Journal of Philosophy* 80 no. 7 (1983):397.

[2] Jonathan Dancy and Christopher Hookway, "Two Conceptions of Moral Realism," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 60 (1986):171. This strong conception of moral realism is the only conception, according to Dancy, because, as he says, "the weaker conception collapses into the stronger one at the end of the day."

[3] Ibid, p. 168.

[4] One needs to remember, though, even if they do not grasp the goodness in the event, it does not mean it isn't there, just like a person not hearing the tree fall in the woods does not mean it does not generate sound waves.

[5] R. M. Hare, "Objective Prescriptions," *Philosophical Issues* 4 Naturalism and Normativity (1993): 22. Hare states his objective to show, at that time, that both provided accounts of descriptivism will lead "inevitably to relativism."

[6] Ibid., p. 25. Here Hare points out some philosophers claim "since moral reasoning must be possible, moral judgements must state facts" which is just the equivalent contrapositive statement quoted initially.

[7] Ibid., p. 16.

Ethical Pluralism and the Limitations of the Non-Cognitivist and Cognitivist Divide

By Bryan Goodrich
Sunday, May 18, 2008

In metaethics the contrasting views of non-cognitivism and cognitivism suffer from central features that limit both of their accuracy. In particular, both views oversimplify the nature of reality, and they both adopt a system of metaethics that lacks the capacity for higher-order organization which is crucial to a robust ethical system. This paper will focus on how pluralistic accounts demonstrate superiority in assessing moral disagreements, and bring out the benefits pluralism has over traditional views. To accomplish that goal, moral conflicts will be evaluated by the two limitations traditional metaethical views suffer from and how pluralism succeeds as an alternative. In addition to this aim, it will be noted that the first-order metaethical analysis of descriptive ethics will not be considered since it does not appear relevant to the issues presented here. Given the facts of the world and ethical practices, what pluralism offers will benefit specifically in a second-order metaethical analysis on values and organization of ethical systems. To further this end, in the scope of what will be analyzed, a first-order organization will be in the domain of a standard second-order metaethical analysis, and a higher-order organization will be a higher-order analysis ranging over the properties the lower-order organizations will obtain.[1]

A central issue that arises between cognitivist and non-cognitivist philosophers is moral disagreement. The cognitivists generally assert that moral statements are propositions, asserting a single truth value. Conversely, the non-cognitivists generally deny moral propositions exist. One denial is that there are clear cases when one is faced with two distinct moral statements that cannot be reconciled if there is only one ultimate truth of the world to which we must assent. If there is a plurality of truths, then it seems to dissolve into a kind of subjective pluralism,[2]

permissible in non-cognitivism. These two accounts are diametrically opposed; wherein, the cognitivist requires a monism in value and the subjectivist demands values are not found in the world. There is no middle ground in this kind of divide. These polemic accounts oversimplify metaethics in relegating it to an analysis of single statements (Brogan 1993, 295); a statement which one side says is about the world and monistic while the opposition denies that hypothesis. A pluralistic account, though more complicated, will more appropriately handle the values, the facts and the perceived disagreement.[3]

Two benefits can be said of a pluralistic account, in regard to ethical conflicts as described above. First, the subjectivists are right in understanding there are cases in which objective monism of value is wrong; however, these non-cognitivists are wrong in believing the only option in a plurality of value is to remove moral accounts from pertaining to facts of the world. The criticism from these kinds of non-cognitivist accounts state that cognitivism is in error for stating moral values are in the world.[4] A pluralist account can, in fact, be non-subjective leaving the possibility open for objective pluralism.[5] The power of pluralism is found in its management of moral accounts under disagreement. A monist interpretation of the disagreement is that whichever principle of value is applied will wholly account for the moral conclusion, i.e., it is fully determinate. This completeness is found lacking by the opposition holding a different set of beliefs, pointing out where the former fails. The pluralist will identify that completeness in this sense is too much to ask for in every case. Instead, both values can have legitimate influence over the matters of fact. This kind of incompleteness can very well lead to multiple, and opposing, conclusions. The conflict arises from the mistaken belief that there is one, and only one, conclusion and it cannot have legitimate oppositions.[6] The simplification of the cognitivists and non-cognitivists is to stick to monistic accounts, in the former, or to believe in an almost

"everything goes" account, in the latter.[7] This simplification leads to the second benefit of pluralism.

Pluralism has the ability to manage multiple, and opposing, conclusions by allowing for higher-order organization in an ethical system. The objective monist lacks second-order organization because the singleton value dominates the ethical system. It obtains completeness at the cost of inconsistencies, brought out in the numerous writings on moral conflicts. The non-cognitivists allow for plurality, but also fail to provide second-order organization by making an ethical system about mere expression and human behavior. Even if this subjective relativism is not an "anything goes" account, the organizing principles are trivially simplistic in identifying moral values in the subject only, and not in the world or how the subject relates to the world.[8] A pluralist account can be relative but still operate objectively or appreciate realist tendencies in how a moral subject, to which some values may derive, relates to the world. In this view, a pluralist account walks in the spectrum between cognitivism and non-cognitivism, making it possible to get the best of both worlds. This is best seen in how pluralism can provide the effective higher-order organization of ethical systems.

The simplification of ethics to an analysis, even ontologically, of moral statements and whether those statements apply to the world, or wholly capture moral values, is the crux of the cognitivist and non-cognitivist limitations.[9] Two examples demonstrate pluralist's more effective adaptation to real-world situations, and both utilize the objective facts of the world and the relation to the subjective nature of the moral agent involved. Consider, first, Dispositional Ethical Realism which is a system that relates the subject's disposition to the realist approach to ethics. It takes "a position midway between extreme subjectivism and extreme objectivism," (Brower 1993, 249). Additionally, two similar approaches discussed in (Sen 1993) and

(Tannoch-Bland 1997) leave open the availability to analyze the objective facts in relation to the subject, with positional objectivity in the former and perspectival objectivity in the latter. Both demonstrate the capacity to utilize relevant subjective information in the overall analysis, bridging this cognitivist and non-cognitivist divide. It overcomes the shortfalls of the above mentioned limitations while still allowing for higher-order organization in the way of obtaining further information on the first-order ethical system, i.e., it allows a way to analyze the values in context to all the relevant objects and their properties.

Pluralism overcomes many problems identified in the literature of these traditional accounts. These problems express the clear limitations that cognitivists and non-cognitivists have adopted in trying to find unique or complete approaches to ethics, thinking there is always a determinate answer to moral problems.[10] Instead, pluralists realize moral propositions are not stuck being relative or absolute, but that "sometimes" (Wolf 1992, 788-89) we are faced with indeterminacy in moral conflicts. Moral values need not be monist, and even if that is the case it does not force ethics into subjectivism or relativism. Pluralism simply makes it possible to get the best of both cognitivism and non-cognitivism, though opening up problems of its own. In its accomplishments pluralism allows for higher-order organizations and analyses, which in their own right may not solve indeterminacy, but provide a different kind of relativism. Nonetheless, it solves traditional problems and provides a more robust ethical system; pluralism is an improvement to the study of metaethics.

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Wolf, Susan. 1992. Two Levels of Pluralism. *Ethics* 102: 785-798.

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[1] This is to coincide with how, say, a first-order predicate calculus has properties ranging over objects, while a second-order predicate calculus has properties ranging over properties that are found in the first-order calculus. The power of a higher-order organization is that it can capitalize on the ease of declaration over lower-order analyses and they have the capacity to analyze the properties of lower-order analyses for further values. This fact should be made clear in the following arguments. Furthermore, it follows along similar sentiments found in Susan Wolf, "Two Levels of Pluralism," *Ethics* 102 no. 4 (1992): 797; wherein, she states "the pluralist option is an option at either (or both) of two levels: the level of first-order decision making ... and the level of moral codes or moral systems."

[2] A. P. Brogan, "Objective Pluralism in the Theory of Value," *International Journal of Ethics* 41 no. 3 (1931): 295. Brogan states it most clearly in his conclusion that, "Many of the chief reasons which thinkers have given for subjectivism have been drawn from the plurality of values."

[3] For some of the non-cognitivist positions, consider "ethical sentences do not serve to convey information," Jonathan Harrison, "Can Ethics do without Propositions?" *Mind* n.s. 59 no. 235 (1950):358. Additionally, "For, since the expression of a value judgement is not a proposition, the question of truth or falsehood does not here arise," A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, 1952), 22.

[4] J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (New York: Viking Press, 1977), 15.

[5] Consider A. P. Brogan, "Objective Pluralism in the Theory of Value," *International Journal of Ethics* 41 no. 3 (1931): 287-295.

[6] The ideas of lack of completeness, or indeterminacy, can be more fully articulated in Susan Wolf, "Two Levels of Pluralism," *Ethics* 102 no. 4 (1992): 785-798. Specifically, she demonstrates how a plurality of value need not be subjective, or relative. Further, and more importantly, she demonstrates that objectivity of value need not be unique (pg. 791).

[7] The "everything goes" account tends to resolve subjectivism into relativist accounts where as long as some person or culture believes X to be good, then it is, as much as they really do believe it to be the case, X is good. One such account can be found in Gilbert Harman, "Moral Relativism Defended," *Philosophical Review* 84 no. 1 (1975): 3-22; wherein, Harman accounts for moral justification to be part in parcel with the collective agreement. Thus, moral value becomes a sort of contract theory. This account, however, either still suffers from the problem of moral disagreement, or it is such an ad hoc approach to ethics that it, by construction, circumvents inherent moral problems (such as ethical conflicts), and rightly casts itself as an "everything goes" system. Alternatively, another account doesn't say everything goes, but narrows it, instead, to that "we seem to be faced with a trilemma." Robert C. Coburn, "Morality, Truth and Relativism," *Ethics* 92 no. 4 (1982): 668. Coburn suggests we are faced with deciding which is more correct, moral realism, objectivism or subjectivism and we really have no definitive stance on which is right. The problem, as the argument from plurality here suggests, is that they all may hold some truth.

[8] Even if we allow for some kind of organization in, say, a non-cognitivist account of intuitionism as found in David McNaughton, "An Unconnected Heap of Duties?" *Philosophical Quarterly* 46 no. 185 (1996): 447. McNaughton even concludes, "Intuitionism seeks to perform some but by no means all of the tasks which are often demanded of moral theory." If the remainder is to be filled by alternative theories, especially those including objective elements to the analysis of value, it may just end up a pluralist account; thus, pluralism seems to be a method of filling the remainder to have a more robust ethical system where extreme subjectivism and objectivism are lacking by themselves.

[9] It should be noted that the non-cognitivist position from moral disagreements need not focus on the objectivity of values ontologically. See William Tolhurst, "The Argument from Moral Disagreement," *Ethics* 97 no. 3 (1987): 610-621. Tolhurst argues against moral realism for its epistemic failings of positing truth values that are epistemologically inaccessible (pg. 611). Though a pluralist account for epistemological accessibility is important, such an account escapes the scope of the current argument. Nevertheless, the higher-order organization of the ethical system permitted in a pluralist account provides for more robust epistemic undertakings. Pluralism, in short, will more than likely lead to more accessibility than its alternative.

[10] Or such accounts lumped as "traditional" just ignore determinacy and obtain it with the "everything goes" relativism discussed previously.