Saron Negash

The University of Notre Dame, Fremantle

A metaethical analysis of ethics *via* synthetic and analytic distinction: Do ethics have any 'real' significance?

A meta-ethical position that emerged from the logical positivist movement is called emotivism. In an effort to eradicate all metaphysical foundations and discussions pertaining to ontology, the same removal of metaphysics would permit the inclusion of talks regarding ethics. (Ayer, 1959, p. 60) points out that "many had declared metaphysics false since it contradicts our empirical knowledge." This is the issue. Others have held the opinion that it is ambiguous because its problems go beyond the realm of human understanding. Quine's famous essay "On What There Is" (1907) highlights the overabundance of superfluous ontological commitments in philosophical discourse. Quine believes that reality should be identified and described by science itself, rather than by some previous philosophy. Quine believes that rather than philosophy or language, it is the determination of scientists who decide whose ontological commitments we should embrace. In a similar vein, we observe the same tendency to limit discussions of metaphysics to empiricisms through Carnap's verification principal method (VPM) and the well-known analytic/synthetic distinction. In order to support an emotivist stance, this paper will: (1) advocate the verification principal approach as the most effective way to confirm true statements; and (2) and identify sentences that are meaningful. By implying that the VPM is the most effective approach for truth-revealing sentences, it follows that ethics must be subjected to the same approach in order for humans to distinguish between morally right and wrong behaviour. (3) In the instance that ethics is not an empirical matter, then its truth must be discovered analytically, as truth is either synthetic or analytic. But G. Moore brilliantly illustrates in his "Open Question Argument" that ethics cannot be either synthetic or analytical, proving that ethical discourse is not grounded in analytical or factual truth. Despite this, Miller (1998) argues, "Although moral judgments are not significant literally, they possess some other sort of significance:

emotive *significance."* Since ethics is an expression of disapproval or approval towards an action, ethical statements seem to be statements expressing emotion towards an action. As such, their significance must reside in the emotive role. The argument can be made in this way: P1: Ethical claims are either synthetic or analytical if ethical realism is true. P2: Anything that lacks a verification principle cannot be true synthetically. P3: Ethics lacks a verification principal (VP). C: Therefore, it cannot be true synthetically. P4: As a result, its truth must be analytical. P5: All Analytic truths are true by definition. P6: Ethics cannot be true by definition. C2: Therefore, ethical realism is false. Given these conclusions, non-realist positions of ethics are more plausible. The claim made here is that ethics cannot be studied in the same way as synthetic and analytical assertions because it speaks a so-called "different language" and is, therefore, not meaningful in the same way analytic and synthetic statements are. As A.J. Miller says, ethics has value even though it is not a set of facts that can be analytically or empirically verified. And so, unlike other non-cognitive positions, emotivism adequately accounts where the significance of ethics lies [in a descriptive sense], rather than resorting to moral nihilism, which is a denial of something that is clearly significant even if its significance does not mirror that of factual statements. Consequently, this paper will show that ethics must have an emotive significance if not 'real' significance, as they motivate action famously argued by Stevenson in his *"The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms"* *(1937),*

Do Ethics and Truth Speak the Same Language: Why Synthetic or Analytic

An Argument for an ethical non-realism stemming from empiricism goes as such: P1: If ethical statements have a truth value, then they are either true by necessity (Analytic) or true Synthetically. P2: Ethical statements are neither synthetic nor analytic, C1: Therefore, they do not have truth value, P3: Anything that does not have truth value cannot be true or false C2:

Therefore, ethical statements cannot be neither true nor false. All truth-containing propositions can be categorised as synthetic or analytical, take these two propositions: (1) All bachelors are more than three meters tall, and (2) all bachelors are unmarried. (Russell, 2007) notes that, though both (1) and (2) truths can be intuitively grasped. The (1) truth relies on the meaning of the words and how they correspond to the state of affairs in the world, if it is indeed demonstrated that there is one bachelor who is shorter than three meters tall, then the proposition is false. But for instance, take (2), the proposition is true because of the word's meaning, rather than the state of affairs; it follows a law of non-contradiction making it conceptually true rather than synthetically. (Kant, 1781, p. 7) explains that analytical judgments work in such a way that either B belongs to subject A, which is contained in conception A. Or, the predicate B lies out of the conception of A, although standing in connection with it. For Kant, judgments of experience are always synthetical; for if the grounding of synthetic judgments were analytical then it would require extending beyond the concept evaluated. The utility of this distinction lends itself useful when applying it to propositional statements, it first highlights how truth works, conceptually or referentially to the occurrence of affairs in conjunction with the meaning of concepts. If then, a proposition is identified into either category, the meaning/truth value can be evaluated appropriately. To further carve away the pseudo-significant statements that present themselves in natural language, Carnap's VPM would be the best application. Carnap makes these three central claims in his *"Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis"* (Alfred Jules Ayer, 1936/2012), that the meaning of sentences consists of in the method of verification if they are synthetic and conceptual if analytic. And so, if knowing the meaning of sentence is knowing how to verify its truth; and if it is the case that the sentence has no possible method of verification, then it has no real meaning/significance. Now, when subjecting ethical statements into this conceptual frame of thinking about sentences, it allows us to inquire [in

the best way we know how] to know where their significance lies. If Ethical statements are not a natural [synthetic] fact, then why can't they be true analytically? G.E Moore poses this question (Sayre-McCord, 2007, p. 45), he asks "what is good?"— If things contain the property goodness, there seem to be three ways to uncover that. (1) Goodness is a complex property that can be divided into parts; illuminating the definition of the property allowing the identification of the parts that make goodness. (2) Goodness is a simple property in the case it is not complex; meaning it cannot be broken down to parts shedding no light unto its own definition. This is why Goodness cannot be analytical, as analytic truths are conceptual, their meaning is self-referential following the law of non-contradiction. (3) The third option is that goodness is actually not significant as this paper has argued: That no definition can be offered, since its definition/properties are neither simple or complex not analytical or synthetical.

What about Quines objection to Analytic truths?

Even if we take a Quinian approach and say that everything is observable and therefore no such thing as truth by necessity, the only plausible deontological approach has to be done away with as truth by necessity is just truth from regularity. As Hume would say *'tis evident, that this gradual encrease of assurance is nothing but the addition of new probabilities, and is deriv'd from the constant union of causes and effects, according to past experience and observation."* Hume (1739/2004, p. 60) — it is impossible to insert rule of generality which ethics does to conditionals. Quine states in "Necessity and Truth", that necessity is a conditional statement of "if-then" that cannot be a generalization whose truth is independent of particulars. For Quine, 'necessarily' applies only by ellipses to particular events or states. "Necessary if p then q" always refers to particular state of affairs, and from that one makes the "necessary" conditional statement. But this is an illusion. And so if the ethical realist,

"says murder is wrong", it can only be derived from a conditional statement, such as "if you kill it is immoral," but this statement can only come about from a state of affairs that occurred in the world, so ethical statements in a Quinan sense would all be synthetic judgments in which moral virtues and vices would have to be things that exists in nature, which as demonstrated previously cannot be the case. When one commits morally wrong actions such as murder, then the moral wrongness must be apparent empirically *in* that state of affair. Furthermore, since all truth(s) are just particular affairs, no rule of generality can be made. Moral, codes, rules and judgments are mere fictitious prescriptions derived from the rule of regularity.

What significance does ethics have then?

Since established ethics do not have the same weight as factual claims, we must look elsewhere for their relevance, assuming it exists at all. However, with all the other pseudo-meaningful language, why not eliminate them as well? What argument can be made for their significance? An argument for the significance of emotions mirrors that of an argument for internalism. (Björnsson 2002, p. 328) argues emotivism is understood as the combination of internalism and non-cognitivism. Internalism stipulates that moral opinions involve some sort of motivation which bring about or prevent action which they are concerned with. Given that they spur action, they are significant. The argument for emotivism from moral motivation is as follows: P1: Beliefs in themselves never motivate us. P2: moral judgments necessarily motivate us. C: Therefore, moral judgments are not beliefs. Let's start with premise one: is it true that our motivation is not derived from our beliefs? Consider the following hypothetical situation. You begin to suspect that there has been a significant fire in your home after seeing signs of one. You also believe that fires have the power to kill and hurt you. Do these few propositions alone motivate you to leave the house? Of course not; what drives one to action

is their desire to survive. However, if one does not care for their lives, would statements like "I am in a burning building" or "Fire kills," motivate them to flee. (Snare, 1975, p. 1) illuminates Hume argument that "reason is a slave to the passions". Snare interprets Hume's argument from moral motivations with three central points as expressed in the premises. (1) That reason-judgment (R-J) alone do not have any motivational weight on our actions (2) Moral-judgments (M-J) have a motivational influence on out actions. (3) Therefore, no M-J are simply a R-J. Understanding the distinction is crucial between R-J *alone* not having motivational influence on action, vs, R-J themselves. Conceptually (in a modal sense) it is quite possible R-J to cause action, but the claim is they cannot motivate action. Snare (p. 4) argues that "To argue that it logically possible for a belief not to cause an action is not to say it is logically necessary that it not be a cause" furthermore he states that "There is a logically possible world where sparks do not cause explosion. It does not follow that there is not logically possible world where a spark causes an explosion"— (1) and (2) are not speaking of logical necessity, rather that, all beliefs which are acted upon require moral motivation. Given this account of moral motivation, it would seem that ethics is an emotional game. Since moral motivations are emotional attitudes towards a set of beliefs that motivate one to act. And so, it would have to be the case that ethics then would be an expression of our moral emotions; a disproval or approval towards a set of propositions. Take for example the following statement, "if I run him over, he will die" The statement alone is a belief that can be held without any moral connotations, it is indeed the case if I run a person over with my car that they will die. But take for example "it is wrong to run him over", since we have discussed that our moral motivations are emotions, then an expression towards an action is an expression of those moral emotions. And so the sentences can be rewritten to say "I don't like when you run people over" or "boo running over people".

A concern with Emotivism

Often a concern with emotivism can be that we are sacrificing morality just for consistency. Even if emotivism's explanatory power is forceful, does it just lead to the conclusion all actions cannot be wrong or right in an objective sense. Can we even solve moral disagreements working under this kind of framework. As Hume famously said, "you cannot derive an ought from an is". And so even if ethics is an emotive discourse can that have any implication on how we ought to act. In his paper *"A Defense of Emotivism and its Utility in Normative Discourse"* (Barker, 2023, p. 9) responds to a similar objection; that emotivism does not adequality account for objective moral properties, and second, that emotivism when taken to its full conclusions would lead to chaos in moral discourse. Baker (p. 11) starts of by making a distinction in Stevenson's account of emotivism. That (1) there are disagreements rooted in belief and (2) those rooted in attitude. Disagreements pertaining to belief are descriptive disagreements of how things are, whilst disagreements in attitude are "conflicting states of approval with an emphasis on a reciprocal desire to influence the other" (Stevenson ,1944, p. 33-34) . This distinction is important as cognitivist positions tendency to reduce all moral disagreements to mere empirical or factual disagreement often miss the crux of the disagreement. Furthermore, there is actually a strong link between disagreements pertaining to beliefs and attitudes, since, as Baker (p. 11) points out the attitudes we are predisposed to can affect what information we actively seek, limiting our beliefs which in turn influence attitudes regarding the things we observe. When looking at it from this lens, emotivism functionally has the upper hand in identifying what the source of moral disagreements are. Furthermore, it adequately identifies faulty 'beliefs' accepted on a believed acceptance of objective facts, actually being accepted under pre-disposed attitudes which impacts our beliefs.

This concludes the account for emotivism. In this essay, I have tried to demonstrate three central points in favour emotivism and why I find it to be the metaethical theory that I am most sympathetic to. Though the argument works under the assumption that given the reader accepts the synthetic/analytic distinction, or even a Quinan approach to the distinction. First, I have shown that ethical statements are neither synthetic nor analytical. By demonstrating this my aim was to give an alternative way in which ethics should be approached. In order to do this, I interrogated the nature of ethical discourse, what are they expressing. By arguing that moral statements are intimately tied to our emotional states and attitudes I have concluded that their significance must be of an emotive one. As a metaethical theory emotivism's explanatory power has force but often the concern I tried to address is, what about practically. What implication, if any, does emotivism have on normative ethics. I have attempted to show the virtues of emotivism when it comes to moral discourse and the virtues it lends itself when making the distinction between attitudes and beliefs. That attitudes influence beliefs, and correcting attitudes can actually correct beliefs. Yet still emotivism still has a lingering gap that needs to be filled from the emotive to the normative and prescriptive. Furthermore, it largely ignores our fundamental intuitions about morality that indeed actions can be wrong or right, and it is a matter of fact. The question that the emotivist must ask themselves is why is it so counterintuitive? Morals don't seem to be a merely emotional matter, indeed there must be an "ought" not just an "is"

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