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1. Recap

- Emotivism
- Two central negative theses:
  1. Moral sentences do not express propositions
  2. States of mind expressed in utterances of moral sentences are not beliefs
- Positive thesis
  - Utterances of moral sentences express emotions or sentiments of speakers
1. Recap

Motivations for emotivism:
- Least of all evils (preferable to both naturalistic and non-naturalistic versions of cognitivism)
- Advantages over naturalistic cognitivism:
  - Moore's OQA
  - Motivational Internalism
- Advantages over non-naturalistic cognitivism:
  - Ditto
  - Moral epistemology
  - (logical positivism)

Problems for emotivism:
1. Moral disagreement
2. Frege-Geach Problem
3. The nature of emotivist sentiments

2. Quasi-Realism

Quasi-realism (QR) tries to improve on emotivism:
- Cognitivist moral talk ("It's a fact that torturing innocent babies for fun is wrong") is alright
- However, it is not something that we should assume from the outset in metaethical thinking
- We have to earn a right to it

Project:
- Explain how we can arrive at an entitlement to cognitivist moral talk without invoking cognitivist theoretical machinery (moral facts, properties, judgments etc.)
- Expressivist starting point: The project starts from the assumption that moralizing essentially involves projections of sentiments

Once the project is completed, there are two ways of interpreting the results:
1. Modest QR: We have arrived at an entitlement to talk as if there is moral truth etc. even though there is not.
2. Ambitious QR: We have also constructed a notion of moral truth etc.

Blackburn aims for Ambitious QR:
There is no difference in the end results between realism and QR, the only difference (and the decisive one) is in how we got to them in the first place.
3. Motivations for QR

1. **Naturalism:**
   - The world (including human beings) is in the first instance a natural place
   - If so, the sorts of things we want to say are to be found in it should be things that can be fully described by the natural sciences
   - Natural sciences are value-free
   - If we want to hold onto this stripe of naturalism we must not postulate a realm of moral reality to be discovered by human beings

2. **Supervenience**
   - Here’s an obvious way for a moral realist to explain the supervenience of the moral on the natural:
     - Natural states necessitate moral states: Necessarily, if the world is in natural state N, then it is also in moral state M.
     - This explanation is unattractive: It renders someone who correctly judges that the world is in a certain natural state but wrongly judges that a certain act is right conceptually confused
     - However, it least sometimes, the right thing to say is that the person is instead morally base

3. Motivations for QR

   - If the necessitation thesis is dropped, supervenience becomes hard to explain:
     - A world consisting of a series of two acts: act a, act b
     - Realm of nature: a natural state of the world describable by certain naturalistic predicates: giving pleasure, giving pain. (four possible natural states)
     - Realm of morality: a moral state of the world describable by certain moral predicates: being good, being bad. (four possible moral states)
     - Total state of the world: the natural and moral state of the world. (sixteen possible total states)

3. Motivations for QR

   - Supervenience rules out certain combinations of states: the ones in which a and b have the same naturalistic properties yet different moral properties.
   - If natural states necessitate moral states, it is easy enough to see why this should be so.
   - Once you give up the necessitation thesis and claim that the moral realm is an independent realm out there to be discovered by us, it becomes hard to see why supervenience should hold
3. Motivations for QR

- Compare: World consisting of two objects: A and B
- Two realms (animal kind and size) and two sets of properties:
  1. Property of being a snake and the property of being a fish
  2. Property of being taller than 1 metre and the property of being smaller than 1 metre
- Both realms are independent of and out there to be discovered by us

- Here not only necessitation but also supervenience is very implausible:
  - Not only is it implausible e.g. that “necessarily, if A is a snake then A is taller than 1m” should be true
  - It is also implausible that e.g. “necessarily if A and B are both snakes, then A can’t be taller than 1m and B smaller than 1m” should be true
- In other words, once you drop necessitation and think of the two realms as out there to be discovered by us, it is hard to see why any combination of states should be ruled out.

3. Motivations for QR

- Blackburn: the quasi-realist can avoid this problem:
  - Supervenience is to be understood as a constraint upon proper projection
  - What is the point of moralizing? Answer: To guide action in certain ways
  - If moralizing is to achieve its goal, not anything goes: in particular, you must treat like cases alike
  - Otherwise: It will be impossible for people to know which situations are the good ones and which the bad ones.
  - If this is impossible, it becomes mysterious how moralizing could continue to be action guiding
  - For moralizing to achieve it’s fundamental aim (i.e. to be action-guiding), supervenience must hold

3. Motivations for QR

- How convincing are the motivations Blackburn offers?
  - Naturalism prima facie seems quite desirable
  - Even if it doesn’t work, the fact that one won’t have to populate one’s ontology with moral facts, properties etc. is a good thing
  - The supervenience argument more problematic:
    - Too quick in its refutation of the necessitation principle
    - Recall the distinction between the metaphysical and the conceptual level (lecture 1)
    - It might be that the necessitation thesis is a metaphysical but not a conceptual truth
    - If so, there need be no confusion involved in someone judging the world to be in a certain natural state yet passing the wrong verdict about its moral state
4. Can QR avoid the problems of Emotivism?

1. Moral Disagreement
   - The answer is pretty easy: there is no problem
   - QR countenances moral beliefs
   - If so, moral disagreement becomes possible: people who have incompatible beliefs about a certain moral statement disagree

2. The Frege-Geach Problem
   - Need to give an account of the meanings of moral terms not only in simple assertions but also in a wide range of other contexts in which they occur
   - E.g. emotivism has difficulties in accounting for the validity of arguments like the following:
     1. Bullfighting is wrong
     2. If bullfighting is wrong, getting Peter to do it is wrong
     3. Getting Peter to bullfight is wrong
   - According to the standard account of validity, an argument is valid iff it’s impossible that the premises are true yet the conclusion is false

One thing QR could say in response to this problem:
   - The use of moral terms in the problematic contexts becomes possible only once we (legitimately) have arrived at full cognitivist moral talk
   - Blackburn calls this fast-track quasi-realism

Blackburns most recent (1988) solution to the Frege-Geach problem
   - Here we will focus on the problem of validity
   - Provide a general account of the validity of arguments that
     - Does not explain validity in terms of truth-preservation
     - Will work both for
       - discourses in which we are happy to countenance truth (unproblematic case)
       - projectivist discourses (problematic case)
4. Can QR avoid the problems of Emotivism?

- A plausible idea: a valid argument is an argument that cannot be rejected
- Central notion is the notion of commitment
- ‘Cannot be rejected’ understood as rejection that involves an inconsistent set of commitments
- The notion of validity is explained in terms of the notion of an inconsistent set of commitments

4. Can QR avoid the problems of Emotivism?

- What are the commitments commitments to?
- That depends on the nature of the discourse:
  - For cognitivist discourses for which we are happy to grant a notion of truth from the start, the commitment may be commitments to believe
  - In projectivist discourses the commitments will be commitments to something else: in the ethical case they may be commitments to the attitude projected in an utterance of a moral sentence

4. Can QR avoid the problems of Emotivism?

- Consider discourse about animals
- Consider the following argument:
  1. The animal is a vixen
  2. If she is a vixen, then she is a fox
  3. She is a fox
- This argument is valid iff its rejection involves one in an inconsistent set of commitments to believe
- Blackburn needs to establish the right-hand side of the biconditional--can he do it?

4. Can QR avoid the problems of Emotivism?

- To reject an argument is to accept its premises yet not accept its conclusion
- To accept the premises is to incur a commitment to the attitudes expressed in them:
  - Accepting (1) incurs a commitment to believe that the animal is a vixen.
  - Accepting (2), according to Blackburn, incurs a commitment to believe either that she is not a vixen or that she is a fox, i.e. "to accepting the one [disjunct] should the other one turn out untenable"
- To not accept the conclusion involves at least a lack of commitment to the attitudes expressed in it
  - Not accepting (3) means at least that one lacks a commitment to believe that she is a fox.
4. Can QR avoid the problems of Emotivism?

- This combination of commitments is inconsistent:
  - By accepting (1) one incurs a commitment to believing that one disjunct of (2)--the vixen disjunct--is untenable.
  - By simultaneously accepting (2), one incurs a commitment to believing the other disjunct of (2)--the fox disjunct.
  - Rejecting (3) would mean a lack of commitment to believe the fox disjunct.
- That’s now impossible.

- Accepting (1) and (2) while rejecting (3) leads one to an inconsistent set of commitments.
- The argument from (1) and (2) to (3) cannot be rejected.
- The argument is valid.

4. Can QR avoid the problems of Emotivism?

- This story about validity can be transferred to the problematic ethical case
- Consider:
  4. Encouraging students to demonstrate for good environmental policies is right.
  5. If encouraging students to demonstrate for good environmental policies is right, then it is right for Chris to encourage his metaethics students to demonstrate for good environmental policies.
  6. It is right for Chris to encourage his metaethics students to demonstrate for good environmental policies.
- This argument is valid because it cannot be rejected, i.e. rejecting it involves one in an inconsistent set of attitudes.

- To accept the premises is to incur a commitment to the attitudes expressed in them:
  - By accepting (4) one incurs a commitment to *Hooray for: Encouraging students to demonstrate for good environmental policies*
  - By accepting (5) one incurs a commitment to either not *Hooray for: Encouraging students to demonstrate for good environmental policies* or if that’s untenable to *Hooray for: Chris encourages his metaethics students to do so*
- To not accept the conclusion is to lack a commitment to the attitudes expressed in it
  - By not accepting (6) one lacks a commitment to *Hooray for Chris encourages his students...*
4. Can QR avoid the problems of Emotivism?

- That’s now impossible
- By simultaneously accepting (4) and (5) one incurs a commitment to the second disjunct of (5), i.e. to Hooray for Chris encourages his students…
- So, one cannot simultaneously not accept (6)
- So, rejection of the argument from (4) and (5) to (6) involves one in an inconsistent set of commitments
- So, the argument from (4) and (5) to (6) is valid

4. Can QR avoid the problems of Emotivism?

- Explaining how arguments can be valid was just one of the manifestations of the Frege-Geach problem
- Others: how can we make sense of moral sentences in unasserted contexts:
  - If bullfighting is wrong, it’s wrong to get Peter to do it
  - I wonder whether bullfighting is wrong
- Blackburn thinks he can explain this in terms of his story about commitments

4. Can QR avoid the problems of Emotivism?

- How plausible is Blackburn’s story?
- Some reason to believe that it is at least in some tension with the naturalism that he uses to motivate it
- Recall that the naturalism has it that the things we find in the world should be describable in the natural sciences that that those sciences are value-free
- But now notice that Blackburn helps himself to the notion of commitment
- That’s a normative notion: If one commits oneself to do something one ought to do it (Rosen [1998])

4. Can QR avoid the problems of Emotivism?

- The Moral Attitude Problem
  - For emotivists: What’s the sentiment expressed in utterances of moral sentences?
  - Dilemma:
    1. The sentiment is a specifically moral one: it is dubious that there is such a thing (if there is it’s specifically moral because it’s the upshot of moral deliberation)
    2. The sentiment is a “common-and-garden” one: the same sentiment is present in utterances of aesthetic sentences. You cannot analyse the sentiment at issue in moral utterances in this way because it fails to distinguish moral from other kinds of projectivist utterances
4. Can QR avoid the problems of Emotivism?

- For QR: What is the sentiment essentially expressed in utterances of moral sentences?
- The same dilemma remains
  1. If you say it’s a specifically moral one, problem that there doesn’t seem to be one
  2. If you say it’s a common and garden one, the problem is that it won’t allow you to distinguish between moral and other types of value utterance

5. Conclusion

- Quasi-realism as a successor to emotivism:
  - QR countenances cognitivist moral talk as legitimate (the ambitious version countenances also moral truth, properties etc.)
  - QR denies that moral statement represent and independent realm of morality waiting to be discovered by us
  - Rather, cognitivist moral talk is explained as essentially rooted in expression of sentiments

5. Conclusion

- Some motivations for the view:
  - Naturalism
  - Supervenience
- Can it deal with the problems of emotivism?
  - Disagreement
  - Frege-Geach problem
  - Moral attitude problem

5. Conclusion

- Scorecard:
  - Moral disagreement: no problem
  - Moral epistemology: prima facie no problem
  - Relation between moral and non-moral facts: prima facie nice story (constraints on projection)
  - Semantics of moral discourse: clear improvement vis-à-vis emotivism (commitment-theoretic semantics)
  - Conservatism: clear improvement vis-à-vis emotivism (countenances all ordinary moral talk and thought as legitimate)
  - Parsimony: alright (no independent ethical entities postulated)
References