

Announcements and Such

- One Song — *King Crimson*
 - “Epitaph” from *In the Court of the Crimson King*
- **Today:** *Moral Knowledge*
 - Moral Realism, Relativism, and Noncognitivism
 - Intuitionism, Kantianism, and Utilitarianism
- **Next Time:** *Religious Knowledge*
- *First, some leftovers from last time...*

Scientific Knowledge III Social Dimensions of Scientific Knowledge 0

- We saw last time that Scientific Realism is implausible (historically) in its naive form. History teaches us that science is fallible/approximate.
- We can replace naive scientific realism with a more sophisticated “approximate truth” realism, but in its *metaphysical* form, this faces a *dilemma*:
 - *Either* no false theory can be closer to the truth than any other false theory (*triviality*)
 - *or* how “close to the truth” a theory is depends on the language a community adopts (*relativity*)
- This is a *subtle* way that *social* considerations (*e.g.*, the adoption of a language or a set of questions that a community is interested in) can creep in.
- *Epistemic* forms of “realism” must explain “holding true at a level of precision” (similar dilemma here?)

Scientific Knowledge III Social Dimensions of Scientific Knowledge I

- Scientific knowledge is *clearly*:
 - Socially sharable
 - We say “science tells us *p*” or “we” know *p*. Thus, scientific knowledge is *social* and *virtual*.
 - Publicly accessible
 - It’s important that things we call “scientific knowledge” are *accessible* by a community
 - Cooperatively generated
 - Science involves *lots of teamwork*.
 - Inter-Subjectively Reproducible/Testable/Acceptable
 - Experiments must be reproducible by others, and auxiliaries must be accepted by all involved
- These are *obvious* ways in which SK is *social*.

Scientific Knowledge III Social Dimensions of Scientific Knowledge II

- BUT, science is *not* a naive, simple democracy.
- To see why, consider the *doctrinal paradox*.
 - Imagine that three (or more) scientists *vote* on whether certain scientific claims are true. If there is any logical dependence between the claims, then a *majority rule* can *introduce inconsistency*.

	p	$p \supset q$	q
S1	Yes	Yes	Yes
S2	Yes	No	No
S3	No	Yes	No
Majority	Yes	Yes	No

Scientific Knowledge III Social Dimensions of Scientific Knowledge III

- The doctrinal paradox shows that *aggregating* or *combining* (justified) beliefs of multiple agents cannot be achieved by *simple majority* voting.
- If we require *unanimity*, then we can combine without paradox, but this is a *strict* requirement.
- Perhaps we could go for some “super-majority” rule. This is advocated by Pettit, List, and others.
- In any case, what this shows is that when we talk about “(social) scientific knowledge”, we are talking about some *subtle* kind of *aggregate* judgment.
- There is a lot of literature lately on these sorts of “social epistemology” questions.
- Search for “judgment aggregation”, “social epistemology” and “feminist epistemology” (which gets more into the socio-*political* structure of SK)

Moral Knowledge I Scientific vs Moral Realism/Knowledge

- While Scientific Realism faces challenges, there is a tendency to suppose that *something nearby* is true
- On the other hand, there is a (modern) tendency to be much more skeptical about *Moral Realism*.
- **Moral Realism.** There is an *objective fact of the matter* about morality, *and* we have much moral *knowledge* (i.e., there are *objective moral facts*, and we are in a position to *know* many of them).
- There are moral claims that we tend to *agree on*, but they don't *seem* to be *scientifically* grounded, nor do they *seem* to be grounded in the way that *truths of reason* (e.g., math/logic) are grounded.
- (*) it is wrong to thrash a three-year-old for accidentally spilling milk.
- (*) is socially *accepted*, but is it (social) *knowledge*?

Moral Knowledge II Relativism & Noncognitivism I

- We'll discuss two *non*-realist views about morality:
 - **Relativism.** Moral claims are true *relative to* (a) *culture(s)*. I.e., *p* may be a moral truth for one culture, but a moral falsehood for another. *Even if p is universally held, it is not a universal truth.*
 - **Noncognitivism.** Moral claims are *neither true nor false* — they are *expressions* of *attitudes* of condemnation, approval, indifference, etc.
- Both views deny that there is moral *knowledge*, in the sense we've been using that term.
- Noncognitivism implies that there are *no moral propositions*, so no moral claims can be *believed*. But, knowledge (in our sense) implies belief.
- Relativism denies moral knowledge (in our sense), since our knowledge implies (*non-relativistic*) *truth*.

Moral Knowledge II Relativism & Noncognitivism II

- Why be a noncognitivist? Two arguments:
 - *Negative Arguments Against Realism.*
 - Non-realists tend to be *naturalists* and to require that knowledge be *grounded in the basic sources*. How can this work for moral claims?
 - Ask yourself, for instance, *why* it is wrong to be cruel to children? You might say: because it causes them pain. But, why is *that* wrong...?
 - There is a *gap* between *natural* (*scientific*) facts and *moral* facts. This makes it hard to see how moral knowledge could be grounded in basic sources or how Realist moral facts could *supervene* on natural (e.g., *physical*) facts.
 - Also, nothing known *a priori* (analytic or synthetic) *seems* to *entail* any moral fact(s).

Moral Knowledge II
Relativism & Noncognitivism III

- There is also a *positive* argument for noncognitivist views: *Why* do we engage in moral discourse?
- The noncognitivist says that we engage in moral discourse *not to convey information with assertions, but to influence human conduct by expressing condemnation, approval, etc.*
- Note: *not* “anything goes” on a noncognitivist view. One could still have *unreasonable* attitudes (say, ones based on misinformation or prejudice).
 - This presupposes, however, that we are *only* talking about *morally* normative claims, and not normative claims *generally* (since this might include “reasonableness” judgments of *attitudes!*).
- The relativist has a different view on this question. Since moral claims *can be* true/false *in one’s culture, this* can explain they’re *usefulness*.

Moral Knowledge II
Relativism & Noncognitivism IV

- Is noncognitivism *necessary* to explain the *attitudinal aspect* of moral claims? Consider:
 - The curtains are on fire!
 - This is (say) uttered for the purpose of altering human behavior, but it *is* an objective claim.
 - Indeed, part of what gives this claim its power to alter behavior *is* its *propositional content*.
 - Also, perhaps we can explain why moral judgments are “culturally tinged” and vary across cultures:
 - Cultures differ in what they accept as a moral judgment. And, this may depend on *non-moral* facts (*e.g.*, what the *consequences* of an act are)
 - We may *learn* moral truths *via* culture, but this doesn’t imply that what *justifies* our moral beliefs is itself cultural (origin vs justification of belief!).

Moral Knowledge II
Relativism & Noncognitivism V

- Many of our beliefs arise through education and culture (*e.g.*, scientific beliefs). But, *this* (in and of itself) doesn’t seem to count against *Realism*.
- We don’t (for this reason alone) regard *scientific* truths as *culturally relative* (although, recall our last lecture, which may begin to suggest otherwise).
- You might say that non-scientifically justified beliefs are *merely* “true for me” or “true for you”.
- It’s unclear what this sort of relativism amounts to, other than “*p is true for S*” = “*S believes p*”.
- Similarly, what is *cultural relativism*, if not the claim that “*p is true for culture C*” = “*C believes p*”?
- Note: relativism here is *not merely circumstantial* relativism, which says (*merely*) that what we ought to do depends on the circumstances we are in.

Moral Knowledge III
Moral vs “Factual” Beliefs I

- The negative argument is shared by non-realists, and is at the core of this debate. Let’s return to it.
 - The basic (negative) idea is: because experience and reason do not ground moral judgments, those judgments cannot express knowledge.
 - The first claim to address here is that moral claims are *not entailed* by “facts” (*a.k.a., the is/ought gap*).
 - Let’s *grant* that “natural facts” *do not entail* moral claims. Perhaps they *inductively* support them. After all, *science* involves *inductive* inference!
 - The claim has to be that “facts” *do not support* moral claims *at all*. Why should we believe *that*?
 - *E.g.*, the fact that I promised to meet with you doesn’t *entail* that I ought to meet with you. But, perhaps it *supports* this claim, *non-deductively*.

Moral Knowledge III Moral vs “Factual” Beliefs II

- There is a third possibility: that moral claims *can* be known *a priori*, but *in a different way* than other *a priori* claims we’ve studied so far.
- **Ethical Intuitionism.** Correct moral principles can be known through (intuitive) *reflection*. [Note: this concerns moral *principles/laws/generalizations*.]
- This *needn’t* require that all moral truths are *self-evident* (but the same is true for mathematics!).
- Foundationalists think some non-self-evident beliefs are *foundational* in a way that warrants our holding them *without doing so on the basis of prior premises*. This is amenable to intuitionism.
- Coherentism is also amenable to intuitionism, since it allows for support of claims *in virtue of coherence* (which need not be naively *inferential*).

Moral Knowledge III Kantianism, Utilitarianism, and Moral Knowledge I

- Finally, we should ask whether moral knowledge *can* be achieved by reason and/or perception.
- Intuitionists suggest that we can know moral truths (*laws*) by *intuitive (non-inferential) reflection*
- *Kantians* suggest that we can know moral truths (*laws*) by *application of the categorical imperative*:
 - Act only on principles that we can (rationally) will to be universal laws of nature obeyed by us all.
- That is, we can *deduce* the correct maxims by rationally (logically) *applying* the CI to maxims.
- This is a *rationalist* epistemology of moral laws, which is grounded in *reason*. It’s also *internalist*.
 - But, do we know the CI *itself*? If so, *how*? Perhaps *that* is a matter of *intuition*?

Moral Knowledge III Kantianism, Utilitarianism, and Moral Knowledge II

- Utilitarians (*e.g.*, Mill) tend to be *empiricists* about moral knowledge. Mill accepted the following two:
 - (1) our moral judgments are knowable on the basis of factual knowledge of how our acting in accordance with them would contribute to producing something intrinsically good: good in itself, independently of what it leads to.
 - (2) only pleasure and freedom from pain are good in themselves.
- If (1) and (2) known (by *intuition*?), then this leads to an *externalist, empiricist* moral epistemology.
- It is *externalist*, since grounds for moral knowledge may not (*completely*) be *internally accessible*
- This is compatible with *some* of our grounds being internally accessible (including (2) itself, perhaps?)

Moral Knowledge III Kantianism, Utilitarianism, and Moral Knowledge III

- Kant was a rationalist, which coheres nicely with his moral epistemology, according to which moral truths (at least, moral *laws*) are knowable *a priori*.
- Mill was an empiricist, which coheres nicely with his moral epistemology, according to which moral truths are *a posteriori* (because partly *empirical*).
 - But, what about Mill’s (2)? Is *that empirical*?
- This also implies that utilitarian moral truths [except (2)?] are *contingent* in the same way that empirical claims about the future are contingent.
 - Whatever *happens to* maximize pleasure and minimize pain counts as morally good for Mill.
- But, Kantian moral truths are *not* contingent in this sense (or, indeed, in *any* sense, since Kant thought all *a priori* truths were conceptually *necessary*).

Moral Knowledge III

Kantianism, Utilitarianism, and Moral Knowledge IV

- Another key difference between Kant and Mill:
 - For Mill, moral knowledge is *indirect*, in the way that knowledge about the future is indirect for an empiricist. We don't *directly perceive* the truth of moral claims (any more than we do *the future*).
 - For Kant (and intuitionists), we *can* have *direct, basic*, moral knowledge. We can *directly grasp* a moral principle and *thereby come to know it*.
- What about Kant's CI, and Mill's (2)?
 - Mill argued that we can know (2) by determining what people *actually* desire for its own sake. That is compatible with empiricism, but it seems to deprive (2) of much of its *normative* force.
 - I guess Kant says we know CI *a priori*? But, how does this differ from *intuitionist* knowledge of CI?

Moral Knowledge III

Kantianism, Utilitarianism, and Moral Knowledge V

- Audi's discussion seems to be entirely about *general moral principles* or *rules*. But, what about *particular* moral claims that fall under them?
 - Is a *particular act* that "falls under" a known moral principle thereby known to be good?
- Particular acts fall under *many* general descriptions (*a.k.a.*, maxims, rules, laws).
- Indeed, an act can fall under both "good" maxims and "bad" maxims. What do we say about such an act? How do we know which *acts* are good ones?
- We seem to have a kind of *description dependence*.
 - The (intentional) act of shooting Hitler in 1939 could be described as "saving the lives of millions of jews" or as "murdering a human being".
 - Which one is the "right" description of the act?

Moral Knowledge III

Kantianism, Utilitarianism, and Moral Knowledge VI

- This rule/act distinction exposes a crucial divergence between Kantian & Utilitarian ethics.
- For a Utilitarian, we *could* compare *acts* (where this *needn't* depend on *how they're described*) with respect to the utility of their consequences.
- But, a Kantian doesn't have a way to evaluate an act, *except via a description of the act as falling under a rule/maxim*, which is evaluated using CI
- As such, it seems that Kantian and Utilitarian approaches must be compared at the level of the maxims or rules (Kant *vs* Rule Utilitarianism)
- And, at this level, it seems that both theories face a *description dependence* problem, which sounds similar to the one faced by scientific realism (in its more sophisticated "approximate truth" form)