

Introduction

1. Syllabus
2. Sign-up Sheet

What is Cognitivism?

3. Cognitivism and noncognitivism are theses in philosophy of mind and language.
4. Roughly speaking, cognitivism about some things is the thesis that the meanings of those things are to be understood in terms of truth conditions.
 - a. For instance, I am a cognitivist about mass predicates and mass sentences, such as 'is 1 kg' or 'The Hope Diamond is 9.104 grams'.
5. Noncognitivism about some things is a negative thesis; it is, roughly speaking, the thesis that the meaning of those things are not to be understood in terms of truth conditions.
 - a. For instance, I am a noncognitivist about particles, such as 'meh' or 'um', as well grimaces and finger-wagging.
6. Some surprising, interesting forms of noncognitivism:
 - a. In ethics: Perhaps the meanings of 'is good' and 'Giving to charity is good' are not to be understood in terms of truth conditions.
 - b. In epistemology: 'is likely' or 'John knows that it is likely that Jones is in the building'.
 - c. Self-ascription: Perhaps my utterance of 'I have a headache' is not to be understood in terms of truth conditions.

Communication as Sharing Information

7. Often the goal of communication is to share information. We share information by expressing our beliefs, and then altering our beliefs or forming new ones. Our new beliefs then help us act in ways that better satisfy our desires.
8. An example: riders on a bus. Some want to disembark at Princeton Junction. Some want to take a photograph of Princeton Junction. None of them can recognize Princeton Junction; they've never been to New Jersey.
9. The riders and bus driver establish a convention. Perhaps,
 - a. Ding Ding ---means---> The bus is at Princeton Junction.
 - b. Ding Dong ---means---> The bus is at Piccadilly Circus.
 - c. Dong Dong Ding ---means---> The bus is at Grand Central.
 - i. How this convention is set up is a difficult and controversial matter.
 - ii. How to make this convention systematic is a difficult and controversial matter, which Branden will talk more about.

1. For now, just assume that the convention is in place.
10. When the driver believes that the bus is at Princeton Junction, she dings the bell twice. In doing so, she shares information: she transfer her belief to the riders.
 - a. The riders who want to disembark at Princeton Junction, disembark.
 - b. The riders who want to take a photo of Princeton Junction, take a photo.
11. 'Ding Ding' expresses the bus drivers belief that the bus is at Princeton Junction.
 - a. The same notion of expression appears elsewhere. (But beware: 'expression' has many meanings.)
 - i. Glaring one's teeth might express one's anger.
 - ii. Wagging one's finger might express one's disapproval.
 - iii. Genuflecting might express one's respect.
 - b. But 'Ding Ding' does not mean what it expresses. It means that the bus is at Princeton Junction.

A Simple Introduction to Truth-Conditional Semantics

12. Take the sentence for which cognitivism is true: 'The Hope Diamond is 9.104 grams'.
 - a. How are we to understand the meaning of this sentence?
13. The meaning of "The Hope Diamond" is a particular stone: namely the Hope Diamond, aka, Le Bijou de Roi.
14. The meaning of 'is 9.104 grams' is a property: namely, *being 9.104 grams*.
 - a. It is helpful to think of a property a function from possible worlds to sets.
 - i. *Being red* is a function that maps a possible world and outputs the things that are, at that world, red.
 - ii. *Being 9.104 grams* is a function that maps a possible to the things that are, at that world, 9.104 grams.
 - iii. If *being 9.104 grams* maps a possible world to a set containing The Hope Diamond, then it is true at that world that The Hope Diamond is 9.104 grams
15. We can then identity the meaning of the sentence as a whole with the conditions under which it is true.
 - a. Roughly: 'The Hope Diamond is 9.104 grams' means that the actual world is one of the world at which it is true that The Hope Diamond is 9.104 grams.
 - b. The meaning of the sentence is understood in terms of the conditions (i.e. possible worlds) under which the sentence is true.

A Flat-Footed Moral Cognitivism

16. Just as things have masses, so too they have moral qualities.

- a. Giving to charity is good.
 - b. Lying is wrong.
 - c. That the needle is dirty is a reason to not use it to inject the medicine.
17. When people utter mass sentences, they share information about the masses of things, information that helps people act in ways that better satisfy their desires. Similarly, when people utter moral sentences, they share information about the moral qualities of things, information that helps people act in ways that better satisfy their desires.
18. The meaning of 'The Hope Diamond is 9.104 grams' is to be understood in terms of the conditions under which the sentence is true. Similarly, the meaning of 'Giving to charity is good' is to be understood in terms of the conditions under which the sentence is true.

Three Motivations for Moral Noncognitivism

19. First, Metaphysical skepticism: There is no moral reality. Things have masses, but nothing has moral qualities.
- a. Error theory versus noncognitivism

The presence of an ethical symbol in a proposition adds nothing to its factual content. Thus if I say to someone, 'You acted wrongly in stealing that money,' I am not stating anything more than if I had simply said, 'You stole the money.' In adding that this action is wrong I am not making any further statement about it. I am simply evincing my moral disapproval of it. It is as if I had said, 'You stole that money,' in a peculiar tone of horror, or written it with the addition of some special exclamation marks. The tone, or the exclamation marks, adds nothing to the literal meaning of the sentence. It merely serves to show that the expression of it is attended by certain feelings in the speaker.

If I now generalise my previous statement and say, 'Stealing money is wrong,' I produce a sentence which has no factual meaning—that is, expresses no proposition which can be true or false. It is as if I written 'Stealing money!!'—where the shape and thickness of the exclamation marks show, by a suitable convention, that a special sort of moral disapproval is the feeling which is being expressed. It is clear that there is nothing said here which can be true or false (Ayer 1936: p. 107, emphasis added).

20. Ayer's theory is sometimes simplified into the *Boo!*, *Hurrah!* theory of moral language.
- a. 'Stealing money is wrong' ---means---> *Boo!*: stealing money.
 - b. 'Giving to charity is good' ---means---> *Hurrah!*: giving to charity.

21. Second, Moral motivation: Moral beliefs are not like non-moral beliefs; they are not information receptacles.
22. Third, Moral Thought and Talk: The use of moral sentences is not like the use of other, grammatically similar sentences:

Traditional interest theories hold that ethical statements are *descriptive* of the existing states and interests—that they simply *give information* about interests. [...] Doubtless there is always *some* element of description in ethical judgments, but this is by no means all. Their major use is not to indicate facts but to *create an influence*. [...] They *recommend* an interest in an object, rather than state that the interest already exists [...] The difference between interest theories and my view is like the difference between describing a desert and irrigating it (Stevenson 1937, p. 16).

An indicative sentence is used for telling someone that something is the case; an imperative is not—it is used for telling someone to make something the case (Hare 1952, p. 5).

23. Although much of language use fits the model of the bus driver and riders, not all of it does. For instance,
 - a. Where is the bus station?
 - b. Meh! Ugh! Sheesh!
 - c. Shut the door! Leave me alone!

Hare held that an adequate theory of meaning for English needs to recognize that sentences in the imperative mood are specially suited for issuing suggestions or commands [...] just as interrogative sentences are specially suited for asking questions [...]. Now, there is an initial puzzle about how a truth-conditional semantics [...] can explain this. After all, on the face of it, it doesn't seem like 'Bring me my slippers' is the kind of sentence that *can be* true or false (Schroeder 2010, p. 32)

Moral: You behave well.

Non-moral: You behave.

Adding 'well' to 'You behave', according to Hare's idea, is *like* adding the imperative mood. [...] The idea is not that adding 'well' makes this an imperative sentence—it clearly is not. Nor is the idea that 'You behave well' has the same meaning as the one-word imperative sentence, 'Behave'. Rather, the the idea is that the ways in which the contributions that 'well' and the imperative mood make to the meaning of a sentence are very

similar in kind. Both suit sentences for issuing *prescriptions* (Schroeder 2010, p. 32)