

## Introduction to Philosophy Tutorial 3, Week 4

### Moral subjectivism worksheet

1. Simple subjectivism says that when someone apparently makes a moral judgement, such as by saying “Lying is wrong”, they are really reporting their own attitude to lying, ie saying “I dislike lying”. Why does such a view create problems accounting for moral disagreement?
2. Emotivism is a more sophisticated version of subjectivism. It says that moral “judgements” are not really judgements or statements of fact at all, but have a different role. First, they are a bit like commands, and aim at changing behaviour. Second, they express an attitude towards behaviour.
  - (i) How does this position avoid the problems of simple subjectivism?
  - (ii) Rachels says that, according to emotivism, moral disagreements are disagreements about *desires* rather than *beliefs*. This suggests that moral “judgements” are expressions of desire. Is expression of a desire the same as expression of an attitude? Think of examples of each.
  - (iii) Rachels also says that, as the aim of moral claims is to change behaviour, the only way we can make sense of the idea that there are *reasons* for moral statements is by allowing that any factor that could change someone’s behaviour must count as a reason. Is he right? Can you think of any alternatives?
3. Rachels suggests that ‘a moral judgement is true if it is backed by better reasons than the alternatives’.
  - (i) Would this make moral judgements like judgements about physical facts (eg the Earth being round)? That is, are judgements about physical facts true if they are backed by better reasons than the alternatives?
  - (ii) What do you think makes something a reason? For example, what makes the fact that ships appear to sink as they sail away a reason for believing the Earth is round?
  - (iii) Does your answer to (ii) raise any problems for Rachels’s position on what makes a moral judgement true?
4. Perhaps one motivation for moral subjectivism is the thought that we can persuade someone of all the features of an action—eg that it would cause harm, suffering, etc—but they still may not agree that they ought not do it and we would be stuck for anything further to say to them.
  - (i) Is this what most moral disagreements are like?
  - (ii) Is there an analogous problem with reasons for beliefs about physical facts?