



The Nature of Morality: A Philosophical Investigation of the Foundations of Ethics

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Abstract

In my research paper, I investigated how effective the main objectivist moral theories are against the main objections to objective morality, and if any of the main objectivist moral theories are ultimately plausible.

Throughout my paper, I evaluated a wide range of arguments and ethical frameworks, starting by explaining three objectivist moral theories: naturalist realism, non-naturalist realism, and Kantian constitutivism. I tested each theory against three challenges, including the error theory, moral skepticism, and Hume’s is-ought gap. I argued that Kantian constitutivism is the objectivist moral theory that best withstands the objections to objective morality, as this theory avoids many complications that often cause the alternative theories to fall short. However, I showed that the arguments of Kantian constitutivism, such as Kant’s idea of the categorical imperative, may be vulnerable to Friedrich Nietzsche’s critique of morality in particular. I concluded that although Kant’s moral framework consisted of well-supported arguments, through the use of psychology, biology, and genealogy, Nietzsche’s critique significantly weakened his arguments.

Introduction

‘Which main objectivist moral theory is the most successful when faced by the main objections to objective morality, and are any of these objectivist moral theories ultimately plausible?’

Significance of my research:

- Highlights flaws in theories that initially appear perfectly reasonable.
- Addresses gaps in the theories’ answers to questions that seek to undermine them, explaining why certain answers do not fully answer the questions.
- Goes deeper than simply evaluating arguments, as I compared the ‘winning’ theory (Kantian constitutivism) with another strong counterargument to fully see how well it withstands further objections.



Methods

I conducted my research through the Lumiere research program:

- **Identifying areas of interest:** At the beginning of the research program, I discussed my philosophical interests with my mentor in order to get an idea of how my research could be shaped. My main area of interest was investigating morality — for example, whether it is objective or subjective.
- **Weekly readings and analysis:** Throughout the research program, I was assigned weekly readings by my mentor, which I was able to produce a 1-page report on. I would state an idea that I found interesting, and what I personally thought about that idea.
- **Evaluation of theories:** Through the process of evaluating theories and seeing how well they withstood their counterarguments, I could see which theories were more successful than others.



Results

After evaluating how well each objectivist moral framework did when faced with their counterarguments, I could see which frameworks withstood the most challenges, and which encountered complications.

Naturalist realism, the metaethical theory that there are objective moral truths reducible to natural properties of our world, faced significant issues.

Non-naturalist realism, the theory that morality exists objectively as its own kind, also experienced difficulties.

Kantian constitutivism (a moral theory holding that morality is objective but mind-dependent, and that moral knowledge is achievable through practical reason) did not encounter as many challenges as the other theories. However, when challenged with a Nietzschean critique of objective morality, Kant’s arguments were weakened considerably.

Discussion

My research paper answered the question of which objectivist moral theory out of the three is most successful, demonstrating that Kantian constitutivism is most succesful. The factor that caused significant problems for both naturalist and non-naturalist realism was their argument that morality is mind-independent. Therefore, adopting theories which show that morality can be mind-dependent will strengthen moral arguments.

Conclusion

Overall, Kantian constitutivism was the most successful objectivist moral theory out of the three. However, it encountered issues when faced with a Nietzschean critique.

My research demonstrates that although a philosophical framework may seem largely convincing at first, it is crucial to consider its counterarguments. Therefore, I believe that thinkers should approach philosophical research in a way that takes objections into account when evaluating a theory.



References – Works Cited

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