PHI 1100: Ethics & Critical Thinking

Sessions 3 & 4
February 4th & 6th, 2020

Intro to Ethics: Meta-Ethics (Part 1)
The next few weeks of class (sessions 3-8) will be a **crash course on ethics**.

- (This is basically a very compressed, potentially oversimplified version of PHI 1700 (“Global Ethics”).)

Here’s a very common question about ethics:

- **“What’s the point of arguing about what’s right & what’s wrong?”**

  This question is often backed up with observations like these:
  
  - **“People have very different views** about what’s right/wrong, and **there doesn’t seem to be a clear way of determining whose views are correct.”**

- **This week, we’ll learn theories & concepts from meta-ethics, the study of the nature of morality,** which will help us understand:
  
  » why this question is so common, and
  
  » how moral philosophers respond to it.
Let’s first focus on the observation:

“People have very different views about what’s right/wrong”

- It’s certainly true that for a lot of actions & policies, there’s no consensus on whether they are right or wrong.
  - (source: bit.ly/3a39sfc)
It’s certainly true that for a lot of actions & policies, there’s no consensus on whether they are right or wrong.

- (source: pewrsr.ch/2ToNEoE)
» Additionally, there is disagreement about what it means to be a moral person:
  • (source: pewrsr.ch/2ToNEoE)
Moral philosophers have developed many theories that can provide insight regarding why people disagree about morality.

– Some of these are epistemological theories (concerning beliefs and knowledge),
  
  • regarding how people acquire beliefs about which actions/policies are right & which are wrong:

    moral empiricism = the view that all of our beliefs about what’s right/wrong are learned during our lifetimes
    
      • (More generally, empiricists defend the conclusion that all knowledge arises from experience.)

    moral nativism = the view that humans are born with some understanding about what’s right/wrong, or born with a “moral sense” that allows each of us to figure out what’s right/wrong on our own.

      • (…nativists defend the conclusion that some of our knowledge is innate.)
…why people disagree about morality

• theories about how people acquire beliefs about right & wrong (cont.)

» **moral empiricism** = the view that all of our beliefs about what’s right/wrong are learned during our lifetimes

ício Empiricists can explain moral disagreements as a consequence of differences in moral learning:

People in different households, cultures, religions, eras (etc.)

• are exposed to different lessons about right/wrong,
• witness different examples of behavior from people in their lives
• witness different reactions to behavior (e.g., praise, blame, approval, disapproval) from people in their lives
  • ...so they develop divergent views about right/wrong.
– theories about **how people acquire beliefs about right & wrong** (cont.)

» **moral empiricism** = the view that all of our beliefs about what’s right/wrong are learned during our lifetimes

…though perhaps empiricists ought also to acknowledge that there is plenty of convergence among the moral lessons taught in different communities, e.g.:

| **Sikhism:** I am a stranger to no one; and no one is a stranger to me. Indeed, I am a friend to all. (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1299) |
| **Buddhism:** Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful. (Udana-Varga 5.18) |
| **Christianity:** In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. (Jesus, Matthew 7:12) |
| **Confucianism:** One word which sums up the basis of all good conduct... loving kindness. Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself. (Confucius, Analects 15.23) |
| **Hinduism:** This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you. (Mahabharata 5:1517) |
| **Islam:** Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself. (The Prophet Muhammad, Hadith) |
| **Judaism:** What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary. (Hillel, Talmud, Shabbat 31a) |
| **Taoism:** Regard your neighbour's gain as your own gain, and your neighbour's loss as your own loss. (T’ai Shang Kan Ying P’ien, 213-218) |
- theories about how people acquire beliefs about right & wrong (cont.)

In contrast to moral empiricism, moral nativism = the view that:

» humans are born with some understanding of what’s right/wrong,
» or born with a “moral sense” that allows each of us to figure out what’s right/wrong on our own

Some nativists have suggested that

➢ moral disagreements could reflect differences in the operation or calibration of the “moral sense”

• e.g., some people think empathy is the moral sense, and that someone who lacks empathy cannot understand what’s right/wrong
  • (for conflicting evidence, see bit.ly/2QXRx1S)
  • …this may be a better explanation of why some people fail to act morally at all than why so many ordinary people have differing views about what’s right/wrong.
theories about **how people acquire beliefs about right & wrong** (cont.)

**moral nativism** = the view that:
» humans are born with some understanding of what’s right/wrong,
» or born with a “moral sense” that allows each of us to figure out what’s right/wrong on our own

This theory is often invoked to explain interpersonal *agreement* about morality:

- **There may be some very basic beliefs about morality that (nearly) all humans share, due to innate capacities (although they may not always act in ways that uphold these beliefs), e.g.:**
  - it’s important to be fair / practice reciprocity
  - it’s important to take care of one’s children
  - it’s important to value life / avoid death

- (We may share these beliefs with some animal species:
why people disagree about morality (cont.)

Other theories that weigh in on this question, from moral psychology (the study of mental processes involved in moral judgments & decision-making), have to do with:

– how people make judgments about whether X is right or wrong (when they haven’t already acquired beliefs regarding X)

**moral rationalism** = the (descriptive) view that we determine whether X is right or wrong by using our *reason* (thinking, cognition, etc.)

**moral sentimentalism** = the (descriptive) view that we determine whether X is right or wrong by using our *emotions* (gut feeling, empathetic responses to others, etc.)

➢ (“descriptive” means that the aim of these theories is to describe a phenomenon accurately; ➢ “normative” theories express a view of how it *should* be.)
why people disagree about morality (cont.)

– …theories regarding how people make judgments about whether X is right or wrong:

**moral rationalism** = the (descriptive) view that we determine whether X is right or wrong by using our *reason* (thinking, cognition, etc.)

➢ Rationalists can explain differences in moral beliefs as the consequence of *differences in ethical reasoning*.

• On this view, A and B hold different moral beliefs because they have drawn different conclusions from their reasoning about what’s right/wrong.

• (Some rationalists think that good ethical reasoning leads to *true* beliefs about what’s right/wrong, while bad ethical reasoning leads to false beliefs …more on this later)
- ...theories regarding how people make judgments about whether X is right or wrong:

*In contrast to moral rationalism,*

**moral sentimentalism** = the (descriptive) view that we determine whether X is right or wrong by using our emotions (gut feeling, empathetic responses to others, etc.)

» Generally, positive emotional responses to X → X is right; negative emotional responses to X → X is wrong

➤ Sentimentalists can explain differences in moral beliefs as the consequence of **differences in emotional attunement** (what we react to, with which emotion, and how strongly)

  e.g., one emotion that is strongly associated with moral beliefs is *disgust:*

  • *different people are disgusted by different things* (either by nature or through nurture; bit.ly/3aexunN), which may lead to different judgments about right/wrong.
“People have very different views about what’s right/wrong”

Insights into why this is the case, from various moral philosophy theories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Insights</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>moral empiricism:</strong></td>
<td>• different people are exposed to different lessons about what’s right/wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>moral nativism:</strong></td>
<td>• different people have a stronger/weaker “moral sense”, or their moral senses work differently</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>moral rationalism:</strong></td>
<td>• different people arrive at different conclusions about right/wrong through ethical reasoning</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>moral sentimentalism:</strong></td>
<td>• different people have different emotional reactions, leading to different judgments about right/wrong</td>
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(You might be asking yourself: Which of these theories are correct?)

» One (perhaps unsatisfying) answer: they may all be correct to some extent, in that they each highlight information that helps us grasp the full complexity of morality.)
We’ve explored some possible explanations for why – “People have very different views about what’s right/wrong”

…but what about the further observation:

» “there doesn’t seem to be a clear way of determining whose views are correct”?

Another way of expressing this impression of morality is that moral disagreements cannot be resolved:
• there is no way to settle once and for all whose beliefs about morality are true / whose are false,
  • or to declare a winner in a debate about morality.

One possible reason to believe this is that moral disagreements are very persistent:
• you might think that if there was a way of settling debates about right/wrong, we would have figured out how to do so by now!

Let’s see what moral philosophers have to say about this question:

➢ Can moral disagreements be resolved?
Can moral disagreements be resolved?

- A set of **metaphysical** theories (concerning what exists, & in what manner) that address this question have to do with:
  
  - **whether or not there are objective facts about morality,** according to which we can judge a person’s moral beliefs as **true** or **false**.

  In philosophy, “**objective**” means existing independently of human minds
  
  - (more specifically, independently of human **subjectivity**: how things seem from the perspective of a particular observer)

  » …so an objective fact is something that **would be true** even if there were no humans alive to believe it:
    
    - it’s objectively true because it comes from forces beyond human control, like nature or a higher power.

  …in contrast, “**subjective**” = based in subjectivity; reflecting the perspective of a particular observer (or set of observers).
objectively, this is a shape that exists in the world

subjectively, the shape appears to be
• #6 from one perspective,
• #9 from another
• theories about whether or not there are facts about morality (cont.)

**moral realism** = the theory that there are objective moral facts (about what is right/wrong):

- There is a fact of the matter about whether X is right or wrong,
  - and this absolute standard applies to all of us whether we believe it or not,
    - because it is set in place by forces much larger & more powerful than human minds.

**moral anti-realism** = the theory that there are no objective moral facts (about what is right/wrong):

- either there are no moral facts at all,
- or there are only subjective moral facts:
  - standards of right/wrong that arise from human action & decision-making,
    - which only continue to exist as long as people believe them and treat them as true.
theories about whether or not there are facts about morality (cont.)

**moral realism** = the theory that there are objective moral facts (about what is right/wrong)

A very popular version of moral realism that you’re probably already familiar with is called

**divine command theory:** the view that God determines the facts about morality:
- X is right if God commands us to do it;
- X is wrong if God commands us not to do it.

Some disagreements among DC theorists:
- *Is X right simply because God says so, or is it right regardless of God’s perspective?*
- *Is the human mind truly capable of comprehending the facts about morality?*
  - *video:* bit.ly/2Ro5u8F
theories about whether or not there are facts about morality (cont.)

**moral realism** = the theory that there are objective moral facts (about what is right/wrong)

– Another common version of moral realism is

**natural law theory**: the view that objective facts about what’s right/wrong can be derived from objective facts about human nature & the natural world

» Some versions of NLT put God in charge of morality (similar to divine command theory),
  • by stating that God designed our nature so as to establish these facts about right/wrong;

» others are agnostic about a higher power, and focus on forces like natural selection & the necessity of group cohesion for survival
  • video: bit.ly/38WaTL6
moral realism = the theory that there are objective facts about what is right/wrong

Moral realists believe that:

– if A believes X is right & B believes X is wrong, A and B cannot both be correct about X:
  » there is a fact about the morality of X, and either A’s belief or B’s belief is consistent with that fact.

Ø So, moral realists believe that moral disagreements can be resolved:

» Debates about what is right/wrong can be settled by appealing to the facts about morality,
  * ...assuming that we as human beings are capable of discovering the facts about morality.
  * (Some moral realists might say that moral disagreements could be resolved by appealing to the facts, but we can’t know the facts, so our disagreements will remain unresolved.)
Let’s revisit a theory we considered previously:

**moral rationalism** = the (descriptive) view that we determine whether X is right or wrong by using our reason (thinking, cognition, etc.)

– Some rationalists are **also moral realists** (believers in objective facts about right/wrong), who think that
  - good ethical reasoning leads to **true** beliefs about right/wrong,
  - while bad ethical reasoning leads to **false** beliefs.

According to these rationalist realists, **moral disagreements can be resolved,**
– by determining whose reasoning arrives at conclusions that align with objective facts about right/wrong

» …but how are we supposed to know whose reasoning is correct, unless we already know what the moral facts are?
  - (Some philosophers just assert that their conclusions align with the moral facts, and hope we’ll believe them!)
theories about whether or not there are facts about morality (cont.)

**moral anti-realism** = the theory that there are no objective facts about what is right/wrong

– The most common version of moral anti-realism:

**moral relativism** = the theory that there are only subjective facts about what is right/wrong, which can vary between individuals or communities

• A **subjective fact** (I know it sounds like an oxymoron, but stick with me here!) is mind-dependent: it’s true as a result of human action or decision-making.

  – E.g., it is true that a special piece of paper (that looks like this →) has a monetary value of $1 in U.S. currency

    » this is **subjectively true**, because what makes it true is that a lot of humans collectively agree to regard it as true
theories about whether or not there are facts about morality (cont.)

**moral anti-realism** = the theory that there are *no* objective facts about what is right/wrong

**moral relativism** = the theory that there are only subjective facts about what is right/wrong, which can vary between individuals or communities

- According to moral relativists, if we want to know whether “X is right” is *true* or *false*,
  - instead of expecting a single answer that describes the truth/falsity of “X is right” for all people in all places at all times,
    » “X is right” could be subjectively true in some belief systems, but subjectively false in others.

- In other words, the truth/falsity of a moral belief is *relative* to a particular frame of reference, rather than absolute. *(video: bit.ly/2tarziV)*
theories about whether or not there are facts about morality (cont.)

**moral anti-realism** = the theory that there are no objective facts about what is right/wrong

**moral relativism** = the theory that there are only subjective facts about what is right/wrong, which can vary between individuals or communities

» According to moral anti-realists, moral disagreements **cannot** be resolved,

- because there is no single determinative set of facts, or absolute standard, according to which we can tell whose beliefs are true and whose are false:
  - we can only say if someone’s views are true or false relative to the prevailing perspective of a particular culture, nation, etc.
  - Each person in a debate about the morality of X is correct about X according to their belief system.
Can moral disagreements be resolved?

• Let’s revisit another theory we considered previously:

**moral sentimentalism** = the (descriptive) view that we determine whether X is right or wrong by using our emotions (gut feeling, empathetic responses to others, etc.)

– According to some (but not all) moral sentimentalists, moral disagreements **cannot** be resolved,
  • because our beliefs about right & wrong are based upon emotional responses that cannot be true or false – they just are.
  – In other words,
  no one is correct/incorrect in their moral belief about X, because feelings toward X can’t be judged as correct/incorrect.

  » On this view, moral beliefs are basically matters of **taste**:
  • they simply vary from person to person just like favorite ice cream flavors, preferred genres of music, or clothing styles,
  • and **there’s no way to determine** whose tastes are better than anyone else’s.
Let’s return to the impression that:

• “there doesn’t seem to be a clear way of determining whose views are correct”

Differing responses from moral philosophers:

- **moral anti-realists** agree: there are *no* objective moral facts, so there’s no absolute standard we can use to determine who is correct

- **moral realists** disagree: there are objective moral facts which can settle who is correct about what’s right/wrong

- (some) **moral sentimentalists** agree: moral beliefs cannot be correct/incorrect, because the feelings these beliefs are based upon cannot be correct or incorrect.

- (some) **moral rationalists** disagree: someone could be correct about their moral beliefs if they use good reasoning to arrive at a true (or at least well-justified) conclusion

• This observation turns out to represent *some* philosophical perspectives on morality, but certainly *not all* of them.
metaphysical theories about the existence of objective facts about morality

» moral anti-realists agree: there are no objective moral facts, so there’s no absolute standard we can use to determine who is correct

» moral realists disagree: there are objective moral facts which can settle who is correct about what’s right/wrong

• (Again, you might be asking yourself: Which of these theories is correct?)
  – There’s basically no definitive evidence in favor of either side.
  
  • Let’s look at a typical argument in defense of each theory, to understand why it’s so unconvincing to the other side:

Typical Argument for Moral Realism

[P1] At least some moral beliefs must be true.

[P2] In order for a belief to be true, there must be an objective fact which makes it true.

[C] There must be objective facts about morality.

Moral anti-realists can reply:

• [P1] and [P2] are assumptions, rather than widely agreed-upon common knowledge.

• [P2] is false, because a belief could be true due to a subjective fact rather than an objective fact.
мoral anti-realists agree: there are no objective moral facts, so there’s no absolute standard we can use to determine who is correct

» moral realists disagree: there are objective moral facts which can settle who is correct about what’s right/wrong

• Which of these theories is correct?
• Let’s look at a typical argument in defense of each theory:

Moral realists can reply:
• [P1] is false: disagreement about right/wrong could indicate that:
  • some people know the moral facts,
  • while other people are ignorant of the facts.
  (Rachels 1986)

Typical Argument for Moral Anti-Realism

[P1] If there were objective facts about morality, people would agree about what’s right/wrong.

[P2] People do not agree about what’s right/wrong.

[C] There must not be objective facts about morality.
Since *we don’t really know whether or not there are moral facts*,
– …so the debate between *moral realists* & *moral anti-realists*
may boil down to a *difference in preferences*.

**moral realism** = the theory that there are objective moral facts (about what is right/wrong)

• Plenty of people simply feel a strong conviction that the standards for right/wrong must be objective – not just based on perspective.
  » Moral realists may just feel more comfortable with the idea that the truth about right/wrong is not up to humans to decide.

**moral anti-realism** = the theory that there are *no* objective moral facts (about what is right/wrong)

• Other people are more attracted to the idea that humans are in charge of setting the standards for morality:
  » Moral anti-realsits may be motivated to emphasize the power humans have to influence each other’s ideas about what’s right/wrong. *(video: bit.ly/2Uil7RZ)*
• By now, you should be able to recognize that it’s a bit naïve to conclude that “there’s no point in arguing about right & wrong.”

  – We’ve considered a lot of different reasons why people might disagree about morality,

  • and we’ve seen that there is a enduring controversy in philosophy (between moral realists & anti-realists) over whether or not it’s possible to determine a winner in debates about morality.

  – …though perhaps we should be asking ourselves:

    » Could it be worthwhile to engage in ethical reasoning & argumentation, even if no one wins in the process?

    ➢ My answer: absolutely!

      • We can learn a ton in the process of thinking through problems about morality, whether or not we arrive at solutions.
Now we’ll go into more detail about **moral rationalism** & **sentimentalism**.

**moral rationalism** = the (descriptive) view that we determine whether X is right or wrong by using our reason (thinking, cognition, etc.)

**moral sentimentalism** = the (descriptive) view that we determine whether X is right or wrong by using our emotions (gut feeling, empathetic responses to others, etc.)

A recent theory called **intuitionism**, which **aims to reconcile these two opposing views**, is defended by psychologist **Jonathan Haidt**.

According to intuitionism, **both reason & emotion are involved in moral decision-making:**

» moral judgments reflect quick emotional responses,

» often closely followed by reasoning to provide justification (called post-hoc rationalization).
One of the primary phenomena that motivates an intuitionist view of moral decision-making is called **moral dumbfounding**:

- There are cases in which people feel extremely certain that something is right/wrong, but they cannot provide any credible reasons why it's right/wrong.

**Julie and Mark are brother and sister. They are traveling together in France on summer vacation from college. One night they are staying alone in a cabin near the beach. They decide that it would be interesting and fun if they tried making love. At very least it would be a new experience for each of them. Julie was already taking birth control pills, but Mark uses a condom too, just to be safe. They both enjoy making love, but they decide not to do it again. They keep that night as a special secret, which makes them feel even closer to each other. What do you think about that, was it OK for them to make love?**

**Most people who hear the above story immediately say that it was wrong for the siblings to make love, and they then set about searching for reasons (Haidt, Bjorklund, & Murphy, 2000). They point out the dangers of inbreeding, only to remember that Julie and Mark used two forms of birth control. They argue that Julie and Mark will be hurt, perhaps emotionally, even though the story makes it clear that no harm befell them. Eventually, many people say something like “I don’t know, I can’t explain it, I just know it’s wrong.”**
An intuitionist can explain people’s reactions to the incest story as follows:

• “…one feels a flash of revulsion at the thought of incest and one knows intuitively that something is wrong.”

Haidt says this is an instance of **moral intuition**:

– “the sudden appearance in consciousness of a moral judgment, including an affective valence (good-bad, like-dislike), without any conscious awareness of having gone through steps of search, weighing evidence, or inferring a conclusion” (6)

According to Haidt,

➢ **moral intuition is based upon quick, automatic emotional responses** to the actions/policies we are evaluating.

• The systems in our brain that generate these responses work independently from the systems that enable conscious reasoning,
• and they can generate feelings before we begin consciously processing information.
Intuitionists believe that:

- **although people make moral judgments using moral intuition,**
  they recognize that their judgments ought to be justified by reasoning,
  
  - so **they also engage in post-hoc rationalization:**
    
    » “an effortful process,
    
    engaged in after a moral judgment is made,
    
    in which a person searches for arguments
    
    that will support an already-made judgment. “ (7)

- E.g., people confronted with the incest case
  
  “[put] forth argument after argument,
  
  never wavering in the conviction that Julie & Mark were wrong,
  
  even after one’s last argument has been shot down.” (2)

  (Haidt thinks that people *occasionally* reason
  
  in ways that contradict & override moral intuition,

  • but **most of the time** we reason with the goal of
    
    confirming our intuitive judgments.)
So, the **intuitionist** view is that:

» **though people do engage in reasoning about what’s right & wrong** (as **rationalists** believe), especially under social pressure to explain their judgments,

» **this reasoning occurs separately from** (and occurs after) the primary source of moral judgments: **moral intuition**, based on emotional responses (as **sentimentalists** believe)

Haidt emphasizes that moral intuition can vary between people & cultures, – because **people in different cultures learn to respond emotionally to different objects, situations, etc.**

- people in the US “are more likely to link feelings of disgust to actions that limit a person’s rights or degrade a person’s dignity”,
- while people from Japan “are more likely to link feelings of disgust to actions that frustrate their integration into the social world” (Haidt et al. 1997)

» **videos**: bit.ly/2vNfml7, bit.ly/2N3pIFr (1:45-end)
Now, let’s move on to a new, important question:

- Should we make decisions about what’s right/wrong using our head, or our heart?

We can understand this question as outlining a normative debate between rationalists & sentimentalists.

- So far we’ve analyzed these views as descriptive theories, which strive to accurately describe a phenomenon;
  - however, rationalism & sentimentalism can also be offered as normative theories, which strive to characterize how things ought to be (as opposed to how they actually are).

- **normative moral rationalism** = the view that we should make judgments about right/wrong using reason

- **normative moral sentimentalism** = the view that we should make judgments about right/wrong using emotions
Normative moral rationalism is a very popular outlook:
• the title of this course – “Ethics and Critical Thinking” is basically an endorsement of this view!
  – The strongest defenders of normative moral rationalism believe
    • reason shouldn’t just be part of the decision-making process;
    – reason should be the only method we use to make decisions about what’s right/wrong:
      » emotion should play no role in moral decision-making.
normative moral rationalism = the view that we should make judgments about right/wrong using reason

• One well-known defender of NM rationalism, Plato (428-328 BCE), described his view with the so-called chariot analogy:
  – a person should put their reason in control of all of their activities,
    • and keep their emotions & desires from taking over,
      » like a chariot driver who steers & maintains control by “reining in” two wild horses.

• A popular argument for N.M. rationalism, which recurs throughout the history of philosophy, is that
  – reason is a uniquely human capacity,
    • so humans ought to use this special gift as much as possible
      – (and suppress more animalistic features of our nature, like emotions & basic drives (for food, sex, violence, etc.))
However, a well-known challenge to normative moral rationalism comes from David Hume (1711-1776, Scotland).

- Hume begins by remarking upon the popularity of NM rationalism, and the idea that reason & emotion are at odds with each other:

  “Nothing is more usual in philosophy, and even in common life, than to talk of the combat of passion and reason,
  – to give the preference to reason,
    » and assert that men are only so far virtuous [morally good] as they conform themselves to [reason’s] dictates.

Every rational creature, it is said, is obliged to regulate his actions by reason; and if any other motive or principle challenge the direction of his conduct, he ought to oppose it . . .

  – On this method of thinking the greatest part of moral philosophy . . . seems to be founded; nor is there an ampler field . . . than this supposed pre-eminence of reason above passion.
    » The eternity, invariableness, and divine origin of the former [reason] have been displayed to the best advantage:
    » The blindness, inconstancy, and deceitfulness of the latter [emotion] have been as strongly insisted on.” (1)
He offers an argument that the rationalist v. sentimentalist debate rests upon a misunderstanding:

[P1] Reason & emotion make different contributions to decision-making.
[P2] Reason & emotion work together rather than opposing each other.

[C] Therefore, it is a mistake to speak as if reason & emotion are at odds with each other.

➢ “We speak not strictly and philosophically when we talk of the combat of passion & of reason.” (2)

• ...as well as a counterargument to normative moral rationalism (an argument which concludes that a particular view is wrong):

[P1] Though reasoning can determine what we ought to do, reasoning doesn’t motivate us to actually act in accordance with our conclusions.
[P2] Emotion motivates us to actually act upon the conclusions we arrive at through reasoning.
[P3] Emotion is the true motive underlying moral decision-making.

[C] Therefore, we should not eliminate emotion from moral decision-making.
• Hume’s **counterargument to normative moral rationalism:**

[P1] Though reasoning can determine what we ought to do, reasoning doesn’t motivate us to actually act in accordance with our conclusions.

[P2] Emotion motivates us to actually act upon the conclusions we arrive at through reasoning.

[P3] Emotion is the true motive underlying moral decision-making.

[C] Therefore, **we should not eliminate emotion from moral decision-making.**

“**Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions** [emotion],
– and can never pretend to any other office than to serve & obey them.” (2)

➢ **Hume is endorsing normative moral sentimentalism:**
– In direct contrast to Plato (and his chariot analogy) he’s saying that **emotions should be in charge of our activities,**
  » and **reason should play a supporting role of figuring out how to achieve what our emotions want.**
As a normative moral sentimentalist, **Hume thinks that completely ignoring or suppressing emotions is not only unrealistic, but undesirable:**

- “What we call *strength of mind*, implies the prevalence of the calm passions above the violent;
  - . . . we may easily observe,
    there is no man so constantly possessed of this virtue, as never on any occasion to yield to the solicitations of passion and desire.”

He’s saying that

» **the people who we admire as good decision-makers don’t ignore their emotions entirely:**
  - they are motivated by the right kind of emotions in the right circumstances.

So, he thinks

- **if we want to become better decision-makers, we should focus on learning to respond emotionally to the right things in the right way.**
  - *video:* bit.ly/30zYhGN (2:02-4:34)
Recently, neuroscientist Antonio Damasio has offered empirical evidence for Hume’s view that emotions are necessary for good decision-making:

• Patients who have lost the ability to respond emotionally to information (but have no impairment in reasoning) struggle to ever decide what to do. (video: bit.ly/1HGDNL2)
  – Like Hume, Damasio suggests that emotions motivate us to actually act upon a conclusion that we’ve drawn:
    • without emotions, we are not motivated to choose one option over any alternative.

• These same patients are often susceptible to bad decision-making in high-risk situations:
  – they performed poorly (lost $) in a gambling game where some moves basically guaranteed losses,
    • because “they could not experience the negative emotions that normally accompany large losses”, and thus never learned to avoid those moves. (Kreuger et al., 2-3)
So, new information available from neuroscience may give us reason to reject the strongest form of normative moral rationalism: (reason should be the only method we use to make decisions about what’s right/wrong: • emotion should play no role in moral decision-making.)

Let’s revisit the question:

- Should we make decisions about what’s right/wrong using our head, or our heart?

- The head/heart distinction – reason vs. emotion – might be a false dichotomy, where a situation is presented as a either/or choice between two mutually exclusive options, • but in reality there are more options, including both.

- Despite the popularity of rationalist viewpoints on this question, – moral philosophers (& scientists) have raised considerations in favor of the view that it’s unrealistic and/or undesirable to completely eliminate emotion from moral decision-making.