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THE GRAMMAR OF THE GOOD: ANALYSING THE LOGIC OF MORAL JUDGEMENTS

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Abstract
Within the context of moral reflection, where conscience engages in a dialectical experiment with reason, the question of how moral judgements acquire meaning and authority emerges as one of philosophy's most reflective engagements. The concern is whether moral claims represent discoveries of objective truth or creations of evaluative significance; and whether such pronouncements describe moral facts about reality, or prescribe norms that guide human conduct within it. This dilemma defines the heart of meta-ethics, where meaning and morality collide. The aim of this paper is thus to clarify the underlying structure of moral statements and to argue that contrary to the views of some positivists like A. J. Ayer, the language of morality passes the gamut of logical coherence. The methodology employed is an analytic-critical inquiry that synthesizes conceptual analysis with philosophical argumentation. Through a comparative examination of major meta-ethical theories such as cognitivism, non-cognitivism, emotivism, prescriptivism and quasi-realism, the paper critically analyses the strengths and weaknesses of each position by examining their meaning, justification and consistency within different moral situations. It further applies tests of logical validity and moral disagreement to determine the coherence of moral language. The contribution to knowledge lies in its articulation of moral judgement as a hybrid cognitive–practical act, a synthesis of rational belief and normative attitude.

Keywords: Cognitivism, Logic, Meta-ethics, Moral semantics, Non-cognitivism.

Introduction

Moral judgements pervade human social life. Claims such as murder is wrong, justice requires equality, kindness is good or lying is immoral, appear to express authoritative evaluations that guide behaviour and ground social norms, but the philosophical foundations of these claims remain disputed. What kind of statements are moral judgements? Do they describe independently existing moral facts, or do they merely express emotions, prescriptions, or just social constructions? If they purport to state truths, how can those

truths be known? The study of moral judgements concerns what people believe about right and wrong and how such judgements are structured, justified and expressed within the context of human reasoning. It involves an analysis of their linguistic form and inferential relation, as well as function in practical deliberations**.** It seeks to understand the ways in which moral claims connect with beliefs, emotions and actions. Interdisciplinary research reinforces the connection between moral cognition and moral emotion. Jiang, Zhou, Wang and Lin (2022) review neuroscientific findings that support dual-process models of moral judgement, linking moral reasoning with neural mechanisms of empathy and deliberation. The result shows how moral explanation can remain logically coherent while rejecting moral realism.

Meta-ethical inquiry stands apart from normative ethics in both scope and orientation. While normative ethics asks which actions are right or wrong (Timmons, 2020), meta-ethics asks what it means to call an action right or wrong, how such claims can be known or justified and whether they can be true or false in any objective sense. This shift from prescription to a somewhat logical analysis marks meta-ethics as the reflective and critical core of moral philosophy. One major aspect of this investigation is the logical dilemma of whether moral statements are governed by the same standards of truth and validity that apply to factual assertions, or they follow a different order of reasoning altogether. This question reaches far beyond mere semantics to engage the issues of belief, motivation and normativity. Metaethical debates, as captured in Russ Shafer-Landau's *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, continue to highlight the connection between cognition, expression and normativity. These works show that the boundary between moral description and moral expression is porous, thereby sustaining a pluralist approach to moral semantics that blends logic with motivational psychology. The subsequent sections of this paper advances the main argument of the paper in a clear and structured progression. A segment of the paper provides a historical overview of meta-ethical inquiry and situates the problem of moral judgement within the evolution of twentieth and twenty-first-century analytic philosophy. It examines how early debates on moral meaning and truth, beginning with G. E. Moore, A. J. Ayer, C. L. Stevenson and R. M. Hare, laid the foundation for contemporary discussions of the logical underpinning of moral reasoning and language.

Another section undertakes a critical evaluation of key theoretical perspectives, including cognitivism, non-cognitivism, emotivism, prescriptivism and quasi-realism. Each of these views is examined in relation to its explanation of the truth-conditions and justificatory basis of moral claims, in a bid to reveal both their conceptual logical strengths and internal limitations. The next section turns to a detailed analysis of the logical and epistemic dimensions of moral reasoning. It investigates the inferential structure of moral statements, the criteria for moral justification and the problem of moral motivation, especially the tension between belief and desire in moral psychology to reveal that that the language of morality is more logical than psychological. Building on these analyses, the subsequent section develops and defends a hybrid theory of moral judgement**,** with the argument that moral discourse unites descriptive and prescriptive elements within a coherent logical and epistemic structure. Moral statements, it contends, both express beliefs about moral reality and guide moral justifications. The final section concludes by reflecting on the implications of this hybrid account for contemporary ethics. It suggests that understanding moral judgements as both cognitive and action-guiding bridges the gap between logical moral knowledge and mere moral motivation.

Meta-Ethical Analysis of Moral Language: From Sentiment to Logic

Before the rise of analytic philosophy, the nature of moral judgement remained largely a background concern of ethics, often discussed in relation to virtue, duty or divine command rather than as a problem of meaning and logic. However, as philosophical attention turned toward the analysis of language and reasoning, the question of how moral terms signify and justify came to define a new and distinct field of inquiry. It is within this intellectual transformation that the modern investigation into the structure of moral discourse emerged. Many philosophers have redefined the relation within moral thought, emotion and reason, giving meta-ethics its distinctive concern with the logical foundations of moral judgement. The development of this discourse, from Hume's sentimentalism through Kant's rationalism to Moore's non-naturalism and Ayer's emotivism, marks the evolution of meta-ethics into a sophisticated study of the meaning, logic and truth-value of moral language. David Hume is often regarded as the pioneer who transformed moral theory by denying that moral distinctions arise from reason. In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume famously declares that "reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions" (Hume, 2000). By this, he means that reason, though instrumental in identifying facts or logical relations, cannot motivate human action. Motivation stems from desire and sentiment, not cognition. Hence, moral judgements, for Hume, are not conclusions of rational deduction but expressions of emotional response. This sentimentalist thesis challenges any view that moral statements describe reality or correspond to objective facts. Instead, moral language expresses feelings of approval or disapproval. When someone says, 'Murder is wrong,' the utterance does not describe a property of murder but rather expresses the speaker's aversion to it (Hume, 2000). As scholars such as Simon Blackburn (1998) note, Hume anticipates the later non-cognitivist tradition in meta-ethics, which sees moral judgements as expressions of attitudes rather than factual beliefs.

Hume's position also raises the is–ought problem, his claim that no set of descriptive premises (what is) can logically entail a prescriptive conclusion (what ought to be). This argument severs moral language from purely factual discourse and introduces the question of whether moral statements can ever possess truth-value (Hudson, 1983). In contrast to Hume, Immanuel Kant situates morality in the faculty of practical reason. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant (1996) contends that moral judgements articulate universal laws that hold a priori for all rational agents. Where Hume interprets moral statements as expressions of feeling or approval (i.e., non-cognitive), Kant interprets them as rationally binding imperatives, that is, statements with logical form and normative necessity.

Formally, the categorical imperative (CI) can be expressed as:

CI: $(x) \in R, M(x) \supset U[M(x)]$

where:

R = the set of all rational beings,

M(x) = the maxim or subjective principle of action adopted by agent ,

U[M(x)] = the universalizability of that maxim, i.e., it can coherently be willed as a universal law.

Thus, the moral requirement is that:

An action, A, is morally permissible, if and only if the maxim of A can be willed universally without contradiction.

Kant contrasts hypothetical imperatives, which are conditional on desire ('If you want X, do Y') with categorical imperatives, which are unconditional. For him, moral statements are not

descriptive but prescriptive, expressing what ought to be done rather than what **is** the case. Hence, "One ought to tell the truth" is represented as:

O(T) where O is equal to the deontic operator, ought, while T is truth-telling.

This indicates that the act of truth-telling is not a matter of empirical observation but a rational obligation grounded in the capacity of reason to legislate moral law for itself:

Autonomy: $(x) \in R, L(x) \supset L_{reason}(x)$

That is, each rational agent is both subject and author of the moral law L, giving morality its self-legislating character.

According to Henry A. Allison (2011), this makes Kant's moral framework cognitivist **in a** practical sense, that is, moral judgements have truth-apt logical form insofar as they can be evaluated for consistency within reason. They are cognitive not because they describe facts of the world, but because they express necessary laws of rational agency. As Christine Korsgaard (1996) observes, Kant thereby inaugurates a rationalist cognitivism that grounds normativity in the structure of reason itself. When we assert "One ought to tell the truth," we are affirming a universalizable law that any rational being, upon reflection, must recognize. The logic of moral judgement thus becomes:

$(x) \in R, O_x (T) \equiv$ Reason(x)

This equation expresses that for every rational being, the obligation to tell the truth arises necessarily from the nature of rationality. Hence, Kant transforms moral language into a system of rational discourse governed by logical universality, autonomy, and necessity, thereby, standing in strong opposition to Hume's sentimentalism, which reduces morality to contingent affect.

This can also be represented using truth conditions.

Table 1: Kant's Categorical Imperative Represented with Truth-condition Table

Maxim (M)	Universalization (U(M))	Logical Result	Moral Status	Explanation
Telling the truth	Universal truth-telling possible	✓Consistent	Moral	Universal law maintains communication and trust; no contradiction arises.
Lying for personal gain	Universal lying possible?	✗ Contradiction	Immoral	If lying were universal, trust and communication collapse, lying becomes impossible, hence, contradiction in conception.
Helping others in distress	Universal helpfulness possible	✓ Consistent	Moral	Society of universal aid is logically coherent and willed by rational beings.
Refusing to help anyone	Universal refusal possible?	✗ Contradiction in will	Immoral	One cannot rationally will a world where no one helps others, since one may need help oneself.

The truth-condition table above helps to show whether a person's maxim, that is, the rule they want to act on, can be made into a universal law without producing a contradiction. It tests whether the rule remains true and consistent when everyone follows it. Each maxim can have one of two possible truth outcomes when universalized, it can be consistent (true) or self-contradictory (false). If the maxim remains true under universalization, it passes the test and is therefore moral. If it becomes false or contradictory, it fails the test and is immoral

Logical and Epistemic Dimensions of Moral Reasoning

The twentieth century ushered in a more formal and linguistic analysis of moral concepts. G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* (1903) marks the beginning of analytic meta-ethics, with its rigorous inquiry into the meaning of moral terms. Moore's most famous contribution is the open-question argument, which he uses to refute all naturalistic definitions of moral goodness. He avers that for any proposed natural property such as pleasure, happiness or desire-satisfaction, it remains an open question whether that property is good. This argument implies that moral properties are non-natural and irreducible to empirical ones. Moore thus defends non-naturalist moral realism, claiming that good is a simple, unanalysable quality, known through intuition rather than observation (Moore, 1903). For Moore, moral statements are cognitive because they assert facts about moral reality, even if those facts are not natural or scientifically observable. As Geoffery Warnock (1967) argues, Moore's view maintains that moral language retains truth-value as it describes aspects of the moral world, though not reducible to natural science. His rejection of the naturalistic fallacy set the stage for decades of debate about whether moral properties are objective, subjective or even meaningful. However, the notion that moral terms can refer to a distinct, non-natural reality soon invited rigorous scrutiny. Moore believes moral statements are true or false depending on how they correspond to moral reality. This means that every moral statement, like 'Honesty is good' can be either true or false, because it refers to something real in the moral world.

For example:

Table 2

Moral Statement	Refers To Moral Property?	Truth-Value Exists?	Cognitive Meaning
Kindness is good	Yes	True	Cognitive Meaning
Stealing is wrong	Yes	True	Yes

So for Moore, moral language has cognitive meaning, because it tells us something about the world, even if moral facts are not part of science. Alfred J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936) emerges as a deliberate challenge to Moore's moral realism, marking a decisive shift from metaphysical intuitionism to linguistic empiricism. Based on the verification principle of logical positivism, Ayer asserts that a statement is meaningful only if it is either empirically verifiable or analytically true. From this standpoint, Moore's moral truths collapse into expressions of sentiment rather than cognition. Since moral claims cannot be tested by observation nor derived by logic, they fail the criterion of factual significance. Ayer rejects Moore's claim that moral statements are truth-bearing. He argues that a statement is meaningful only if it can be:

i. Empirically verified (tested by observation), or
ii. Analytically true (true by definition, like 'all bachelors are unmarried').

So, Meaningful (M) ≡ Verifiable (V) v Analytic (A)

Now, moral statements like 'Stealing is wrong' are neither verifiable nor analytic.

So, according to Ayer:

$(\sim V \bullet \sim A) \supset \sim M$

Therefore, moral statements are not true or false because they are expressions of emotion:

Table 3

Moral Statement	Empirically Testable?	Analytic?	Truth-Value?	Meaning Type
Kindness is good	No	No	None	Emotional expression
Stealing is wrong	No	No	None	Emotional expression

Ayer transforms moral language from descriptive to expressive. Consequently, moral utterances, for Ayer, are linguistic reflections of approval or disapproval rather than statements with truth-value (Ayer, 1952). Thus, his logic cancels Moore's idea of moral truth According to Ayer, when we say Stealing is wrong, we are not describing a fact but expressing an emotion, something akin to saying Boo to stealing! (Ayer, 1952). This forms the basis of emotivism, a theory which was later developed by C. L. Stevenson (1944), who refined it to include the persuasive and social functions of moral language. For Stevenson (1944), moral utterances do more than simply express an individual's emotions; they also seek to influence the attitudes and actions of others. In this way, Stevenson extends Ayer's earlier view that moral statements merely express feelings, by adding a new interpersonal or persuasive dimension. According to him, when people make moral claims, they are saying how they feel and are also trying to shape how others feel and behave. Hence, moral language functions both expressively and socially, as it communicates emotion while aiming to motivate agreement or action.To capture Stevenson's idea logically, consider a moral statement such as 'Stealimg is wrong'. This means that the speaker disapproves the act of stealing and wants others to do same. This can be analyzed as a two-part logical structure:

$M = [E(M) \bullet P(M)]$

E (M) = the expressive meaning that shows how the speaker feels,

P (M) = the prescriptive or persuasive meaning that urges others to adopt a similar attitude.

So, the statement 'Stealing is wrong' both expresses disapproval and invites others to share that disapproval. Imagine a classroom situlation, where student says, "It is wrong to cheat on exams." In Stevenson's view, the student is doing more than expressing emotion; they are also trying to influence others, perhaps persuading classmates not to cheat or encouraging them to value honesty. The moral statement thus carries both an emotional tone and a social function, which are disapproval and persuasion respectively. In logical terms,

Meaning = Disapproval • Persuasion

Stevenson therefore recognizes that moral discourse operates in social contexts where language is used to communicate feelings and to shape collective behaviour. This makes Stevenson's theory a middle position between Ayer's pure emotivism, which sees moral language as emotional expression only, and R. M. Hare's prescriptivism**,** which views it as a kind of rational command (Hare, 1952). In Stevenson's framework, moral statements are neither factual descriptions nor empty emotional outbursts. Moral statements are tools of moral communication**,** where feeling is blended with persuasion. Emotivist perspectives have found renewed empirical grounding. Casas-Mas (2024) explores emotivist mechanisms within digital political discourse, revealing how affective moral communication on platforms such as Twitter reflects the emotional–persuasive duality that Ayer and Stevenson theorized. This modern extension validates emotivism as a functional analysis of moral rhetoric in technologically mediated societies.

Hare's *The Language of Morals* (1952) provides another dimension to moral language, where moral statements are treated as prescriptive rather than merely expressive.

He argues that to say "You ought to do X" is to issue a universalizable command and rational directive applicable to similar cases. Hare thereby synthesizes elements of Kant's universalism and Ayer's non-cognitivism, giving rise to universal prescriptivism. Imagine a teacher saying, "You ought to tell the truth in your exams." According to Hare, this statement has a prescriptive force that directs students to act truthfully. But the command is not arbitrary; it is universalizable, meaning it applies to all students in similar circumstances. If it is wrong for one student to cheat, it must also be wrong for every other student in the same situation. We can illustrate Hare's idea with a logical chain:

i. Statement, you ought to keep promises;
ii. Prescription, it is obligatory to keep promises;
iii. Universalizability, you must keep promises in similar situations; and (x) y, [If x and y make promises, then $O_x(P) \bullet O_y(P)$]
iv. Rational Consistency, if someone says they ought to keep their promises but later excuses another person for breaking theirs in the same situation, they are acting inconsistently, thereby, violating the logic of moral reasoning.

The scholars above shaped the fundamental question of meta-ethics, which investigates whether moral statements are cognitive or non-cognitive, that is, whether they express beliefs capable of truth or falsity, or they only convey attitudes and prescriptions. Hume and Ayer belong to the non-cognitivist tradition that emphasizes sentiment, emotion and expression, while Kant and Moore represent cognitivist approaches that ground moral judgement in reason and truth. However, as latter scholarship suggests (McHugh, May & Whitings 2018; Väyrynen, 2009), this dichotomy is overly rigid.

Critical Evaluation of the Logical and Epistemic Dimensions of Moral Reasoning

Cognitivists argue that moral statements can be true or false in the same way that factual statements can be. To them, when someone says 'Stealing is wrong,' they are making a claim about a moral fact that can, in principle, be known or justified as true or false. Non-cognitivists, however, take a different stance by maintaining that moral language primarily expresses emotions, or prescriptions rather than factual information (Ayer, 1952; Stevenson, 1944; Hare, 1952). The divide between these two views reveals both the logical and epistemic dimensions of moral reasoning, one concerned with how moral claims can form valid arguments, and the other with how such claims can have meaning or knowledge status

Non-cognitivism faces a major challenge of how moral statements can function meaningfully within logical arguments if they are not truth-claims. Logical reasoning requires propositions that can be either true or false, since validity depends on the truth-preserving relation between premises and conclusions. If moral statements lack truth-value, then their role in reasoning becomes obscure. This problem becomes clear when we consider a simple moral argument:

i. Stealing is wrong.
ii. If stealing is wrong, encouraging stealing is wrong.
iii. Therefore, encouraging stealing is wrong.

This argument is valid by the rule of modus ponens*:*
If P (Stealing is wrong) and $P \supset Q$ (If stealing is wrong, encouraging stealing is wrong), then Q (Encouraging stealing is wrong).

The logical structure seems clear, but the non-cognitivist faces a serious difficulty. If 'Stealing is wrong' is merely an emotional expression, it ceases to be a proposition and cannot serve as *P* in a valid argument. Logical relations like entailment or implication make

sense only among statements that assert something that could be true or false. Thus, non-cognitivism must explain how moral reasoning appears to retain logical coherence when its premises, by its own account, are not truth-apt. As explained in one segment of this paper, the roots of non-cognitivism lie in the logical positivist movement of the early twentieth century. Ayer argued that a statement is meaningful only if it is empirically verifiable or analytically true. Since moral judgements cannot be verified by observation or reduced to logical definitions, Ayer concluded that moral statements are not factual claims. This approach shifts moral language from the epistemic domain of truth and knowledge to the psychological domain of feeling and persuasion. While the theory captures the motivational and emotional power of moral speech, it runs into epistemic and logical problems. In the epistemic sense, it undermines the possibility of knowing moral truths. Logically, it cannot explain how moral statements function in arguments, where we infer conclusions from moral premises. If moral language lacks propositional content, then reasoning such as 'If lying is wrong, deceiving is wrong' becomes an incoherent chain of emotional expressions rather than a logical inference. The challenge above is often called the embedding problem or Frege–Geach problem **(**Geach, 1960). It asks how moral expressions can retain meaning when embedded within complex logical structures such as negations, conditionals or hypothetical statements. To illustrate, consider again the argument:

i. Stealing is wrong.
ii. If stealing is wrong, encouraging stealing is wrong.
iii. Therefore, encouraging stealing is wrong.

In the first premise, 'Stealing is wrong' is asserted independently. In the second, it appears as part of a conditional statement. If emotivism is correct, the second premise would read, 'If boo to stealing, then boo to encouraging stealing'. But emotional exclamations cannot meaningfully form conditional statements, because conditionals require propositions that can be evaluated as true or false. Hence, the argument loses logical structure and becomes a chain of attitudes. This problem shows that moral statements needs to behave like propositions. In everyday reasoning, people naturally expect moral consistency, we judge that if an act is wrong in one case, it should be wrong in similar cases. This expectation reflects a logical structure in moral thought, which non-cognitivism struggles to capture.

To address these logical and epistemic difficulties, philosophers such as Simon Blackburn (1984, 1993) and Michael Ridge (2014) developed quasi-realism**.** This approach retains non-cognitivism's central claim that moral statements do not describe objective facts but explains why moral discourse behaves as though it does. According to quasi-realism, humans project their evaluative attitudes onto the world as if they were facts. When we say 'Stealing is wrong,' we are not describing a moral property in the world but expressing a deeply held attitude of disapproval in a way that functions like a factual statement. This projection enables moral statements to participate in logical reasoning while remaining rooted in non-cognitive attitudes (Blackburn, 1993). Thus, quasi-realism preserves the logical coherence of moral reasoning by interpreting it as a consistency test among attitudes rather than a deduction among facts. For example: When one says 'If stealing is wrong, encouraging stealing is wrong', they are asserting the rational consistency of their moral attitudes. The conclusion, 'Encouraging stealing is wrong', follows to preserve coherence in one's moral outlook. Quasi-realism therefore reconstructs moral reasoning in logical terms without reintroducing moral facts. However, as Ridge (2014) observes, the epistemic challenge remains, if moral attitudes are not truth-bearing, it becomes problematic how their logical consistency can have the same status as rational inference among true

propositions. This theoretical debate has practical significance. In moral discussions about justice, law, corruption, or human rights, people reason with moral claims as if they were factual.

For example: If killing innocent people is wrong, then ordering others to kill innocent people is wrong. Killing innocent people is wrong. Therefore, ordering others to kill innocent people is wrong. Many people see this argument as rationally persuasive. If non-cognitivism is strictly applied, the first premise becomes an emotional expression. But such expressions cannot form valid inferences. In real moral reasoning, people expect logical consistency, if lying is wrong, it should remain wrong even when it serves one's interests. This expectation points to an epistemic conviction that moral reasoning yields knowledge-like justification, and not only emotional coherence. Therefore, the Frege–Geach problem shows that moral reasoning operates simultaneously on two theoretical underpinnings:

i. The logical underpinning, where reasoning and inference require truth-like structure.
ii. The epistemic underpinning, where meaning and justification depend on what moral claims represent or express.

Although non-cognitivism faces logical challenges, cognitivism faces epistemic ones. Cognitivists hold that moral statements are truth-apt because they describe moral facts. However, three major criticisms weaken this view. First is the problem of moral facts. Cognitivism assumes the existence of moral facts that make moral statements true or false, but it is unclear what such facts are. We can verify that 'The sky is blue' by observation, but how do we verify 'Stealing is wrong'? There are no empirical properties corresponding to moral wrongness. As John Leslie Mackie (1977) argues, this makes moral realism metaphysically extravagant, as entities that do not fit within a scientific understanding of the world. Second, the argument from moral disagreement (Harman, 1977) raises a strong challenge to the truth-claim of cognitivism. In science, disagreements can often be resolved when people gather more evidence or verify facts through observation and experiment. But moral disagreements continue even after everyone knows all the facts. For example, two people might agree on what happened in a situation but still disagree about whether it was right or wrong. This shows that moral judgements depend more on personal or cultural values, emotions and social norms than on any objective moral fact. If moral truths were factual in the same way as scientific truths, then moral disagreements should eventually disappear once the facts are known, but they do not. This weakens the idea that moral statements describe facts that can be true or false in an objective sense.

Again, the is–ought gap, first explained by David Hume, argues that moral 'ought' statements, such as 'we ought to help the poor', cannot be logically derived from factual 'is' statements like 'many people are poor'. No matter how much factual information we have about the world, facts alone do not tell us what we should do. To move from is to ought, a value or moral principle must already be added. Cognitivism, however, treats moral judgements as if they were factual claims, just like scientific statements. This may lead to ignoring the logical gap between describing what is the case and prescribing what ought to be done (Hudson, 1983). As a result, cognitivism may confuse moral reasoning with factual reasoning and may overlook the special role of moral values, emotions and human choice in ethical thought. These objections suggest that while cognitivism preserves logical structure, it struggles epistemically and cannot justify how we know moral truths or identify what kind of facts make them true.

To reconcile these logical and epistemic dilemmas, philosophers like Allan Gibbard (1990) have developed hybrid expressivism, which holds that moral judgements combine belief and norm acceptance. They are partly descriptive, for they indicate what the speaker believes, and partly expressive because they reveal how the speaker commits to certain norms. This allows moral language to preserve both epistemic meaning and logical structure. However, hybrid theories face their own challenge. This is because once belief is introduced, moral statements seem truth-apt again, potentially collapsing the non-cognitivist stance. The difficulty thus remains in balancing logical validity with epistemic humility whereby rational moral reasoning is retained without overstating claims to moral knowledge. Moral reasoning reveal that moral language operates on two intertwined levels. On the one hand, moral judgements are expressive, as they reveal our feelings and prescriptions. On the other hand, they are rational and evaluative, in that they form arguments, imply consistency, guide moral decision-making and invite justification. An adequate theory of moral reasoning must therefore recognize that human moral discourse is both logical and epistemic. It is logical because it follows patterns of reasoning and coherence; it is epistemic because it aims at justified understanding of right and wrong.

As Hare (1952) argued in his theory of universal prescriptivism, moral statements can be seen as prescriptions that are also subject to logical universality. Thus, moral reasoning is not merely emotional expression nor purely factual description but a synthesis of reasoned prescription and evaluated understanding. Anyam and Gbagir (2019) apply Hare's universal prescriptivism to governance ethics in Nigeria, demonstrating how moral universality can enhance institutional accountability and normative coherence. This reinforces prescriptivism's potential to guide contemporary socio-political ethics. Moral discourse supports logical thinking in several ways. First, deductive reasoning means that if we judge one action as wrong, then any action that is similar in all relevant ways should also be wrong. For example, if lying to cheat on an exam is wrong, then lying to cheat in business should also be wrong, since both involve deception for personal gain. This shows that moral reasoning follows a logical pattern, such that if A is wrong and B is like A, then B is wrong. Moreover, moral judgements often follow logical forms such as modus ponens and hypothetical syllogisms**.** For instance:

If stealing harms others, then stealing is wrong.
This act is stealing.
Therefore, this act is wrong.

This kind of reasoning shows that moral statements can be connected logically, not just emotionally or subjectively. Similarly, moral reasoning must follow consistency constraints**.** A person cannot reasonably approve of cruelty when it benefits them and condemn it when it harms them. For example, it would be inconsistent for someone to support animal cruelty in entertainment but criticize it in food production, both involve unnecessary harm to animals. Consistency is what makes moral judgements rational and credible. These features show that moral language and reasoning have a propositional structure that involve claims that can be true, false, valid, or invalid, regardless of one's metaphysical stance about whether moral facts actually exist (Wedgwood, 2017). This implies that our judgements should not contradict each other when the situations are similar. If we say that cruelty is wrong (let's call this principle C), and we agree that animal fighting for entertainment involves cruelty (E), then by simple reasoning, we must also conclude that animal fighting for entertainment is wrong (W). Symbolically, this can be expressed as:

$(C \bullet E) \supset W$

If cruelty is wrong and this act is cruel, then the act is wrong.
Now, suppose we also recognize that factory farming causes similar suffering to animals (S). Logically, if the cruelty in animal fighting (A) and the cruelty in factory farming (F) are of the same kind, then we cannot consistently condemn one and approve the other. This can be shown as:
If A ≡ S, then F ≡ T (where T = factory farming is wrong).

To act otherwise, say, condemning animal fighting but approving factory farming, would violate the rule of non-contradiction, a basic law of logic stating that something cannot be both true and false in the same sense at the same time. In simple terms, if a person condemns cruelty but then accepts one form of cruelty while rejecting another, their moral reasoning becomes inconsistent. This inconsistency weakens the moral claim because it treats similar moral facts differently without justification. Therefore, logical consistency ensures that moral reasoning remains fair, principled and rational.

Contrary to Hume's claim that moral judgements merely express feelings and cannot be derived from reason, reasons theorists argue that moral judgement actually involves a process of reasoning that moves from moral principles to moral actions (Scanlon, 1998). When we make a moral judgement, we are not just expressing emotion (I dislike lying), but reasoning from a general rule to a specific case (Lying is wrong, therefore I should not lie).
Let us define:
P: Corruption undermines justice.
Q: Any action that undermines justice is morally wrong.
R: Therefore, corruption is morally wrong.

The reasoning follows a valid argument structure:
If $P \supset Q$, and Q, then R.
Or more explicitly:
If any action that undermines justice is morally wrong (P), and this is an act of corruption (Q), then this act is morally wrong (R).

The validity of this reasoning does not depend upon subjective emotion. The statement's logical properties demonstrate cognitive content even though it remains action-guiding. This shows that moral reasoning functions like practical logic that it connects moral principles, which are universal rules, with specific actions in particular cases. This implies that moral judgement is both descriptive and directive. The former states something about the world, for example, 'Lying causes harm' or 'Stealing violates fairness', which are factual or value-laden descriptions and the latter leads to action, for example, 'Therefore, I ought not to lie or steal'. In this way, moral judgement links what is with what ought to be. It demonstrates that moral reasoning is not an irrational leap from emotion, but a structured, logical inference that guides moral action. This directly challenges Hume's claim that reason is the slave of the passions, by showing that reason can generate, guide and justify moral behaviour through sound inference.

Conclusion

From Hume's sentimentalism to Ayer's emotivism, and from Kant's rational imperatives to Moore's non-natural realism, the evolution of meta-ethical thought reveals an attempt to clarify the logic, meaning and truth of moral discourse. Each philosopher isolates a different dimension of moral language. Hume uncovers its emotional basis; Kant, its rational form;

Moore, its irreducible meaning; and Ayer, its expressive character. The problem of logical embedding reveals the tensions of how to reconcile the emotional and rational dimensions of moral language. Non-cognitivism, in denying truth-aptness to moral claims, struggles to explain how they can function in logical argumentation. Quasi-realism and hybrid expressivism provide creative solutions but have not entirely resolved the issue. At the same time, cognitivism faces the challenge of identifying and justifying moral facts. The debate between these two schools shows that moral discourse is neither purely factual nor purely emotive, rather, it is a fusion of reason, feeling and commitment. Moral reasoning, therefore, may not describe the world as science does, but it expresses the human capacity to make sense of values, consistency and justice within it.

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