

Cognitivist Presumptions of Moral Realism in Justification of Moral Truths

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Abstract: This study critically examines the foundational principles of impartiality and value independence advocated by moral realist epistemologies in the pursuit of objectivity. Central to moral realists is the cognitivist presupposition necessitating a clear distinction between cognitive and emotional components inherent in moral judgments. The investigation focuses on the cognitive-emotional dichotomy underlying the moral realist perspectives of David Enoch and Thomas Nagel. The research findings unveil that the interplay between cognition and emotion, as evidenced by experimental data, poses a formidable challenge to the traditional understanding of impartiality and value independence. The article's initial section delves into the ontological nature of moral judgments, followed by an exploration of the cognitive assumptions shaping Nagel and Enoch's conceptualizations of objectivity. The final section elucidates the cognitive-emotional interdependence that disrupts the conditions of impartiality and value independence, conventionally posited as prerequisites for objectivity.

Keywords: Objectivity, moral realism, cognitivism, moral truth, impartiality, emotion.



Introduction

The question of the possibility of ethical knowledge refers to the philosophical search for a criterion by which a justification of morality can be formulated. One of the oldest ideas of this criterion within the traditions of philosophy is to assert rationality as the basis for the universalizability of action motives. In rationalist approaches, acting ethically is meaningful only because it is universalizable on the basis of rationality. Plato, as a rationalist, was a moral realist who advocated the idea that objective moral truths exist independently from the mind and subjective points of view. There is no room for desires and emotions in the platonic understanding of ethical choices because of their lack of universalizability. The tradition of excluding subjective feelings from the plain of ethical judgements achieve its most abstract form in Kantian formalism in respect of "categorical imperative" (Immanuel Kant, 1997, 4:421). Kant reminds us that the imperative here is not a hypothetical one that serves to satisfy desires, interests, and personal choices to be determined by given circumstances, and even the consequences of an action, all of which do not serve the universalizability principle of rationality. Here, rationality is defined as being isolated from contingent facts about an agent (Kant, 1997, 4:421)

The formal structure of reason becomes the basis of universalizability, derived from a non-empirical form of practical reason that all rational agents share. Kant and Plato shared the idea that the universalizable character of reasoning is associated with impartiality. They differ in their view of the ontological status of universalizable truths in the sense that the former places it in the universal structure of the mind, while the latter places it independently of subjects and objects. However, both agree in moral cognitivism within moral realism that the objectivity of morality rests on the rationality of which moral requirements cannot be rejected by any rational agent.

Contemporary moral realism is the view that moral claims can have truth value with respect to reporting objective facts. The truth claim of moral judgements is thought to be derived from the business of reporting facts rather than being motivated by subjects' desires and emotions, which might refer to taking a position for and against certain states of affairs. In this sense, moral realism is compatible with ethical cognitivism, which



asserts that moral claims are ordinary beliefs or cognitive states apt for truth values. In moral realism, moral knowledge is considered descriptive or propositional, and moral objectivity is possible either by relying on the correspondence theory of truth or the coherence of truth. In any case, presuppositions of moral realism have been accused to give rise to the birth of a platonic realm of norms because of rejecting Hume's Law, which prohibits inferring 'ought to' from 'is' (Hume, 1739, p.335).

Moral objectivity has been challenged by the antirealism of non-cognitivist approaches, which advocate the idea that moral sentences cannot be truth-apt, either because they are based on emotions and desires or because they are prescriptive rather than descriptive sentences (Blackburn, 1984; Gibbard, 1990; Hare, 1952, 1963; Stevenson, 1944). In both cases, since moral claims are derived from the subjective realm and are dependent on an emotion or norm, they cannot meet the conditions of objective truth.

The debate between moral cognitivism and non-cognitivism focuses on two lines of argument: the metaphysics of being counted as fact-dependent and forms of language. When moral sentences are considered by their linguistic form, cognitive and normative sentences are distinguished again in two different domains of relation to states of affairs; the former is accepted as fact-dependent and truth-apt, while the latter is fact-independent and not truth-apt. The main argument between moral cognitivists and non-cognitivists can be concisely stated as whether normative statements function similarly to cognitive ones in conveying information. In both cases, moral knowledge is questioned as a matter of dependence on the factual world by appealing to impartial objectivity. This raises the question of whether including practical demands arising from desires, emotions, values, judgments, and practices as the basis of normativity or not, because if these aspects of moral claims are counted as components of moral judgements, then how will it be possible to claim impartial objectivity of moral claims? There is a conflict between realist and non-realist arguments on the nature of moral claims regarding how the practical requirements of normativity will be counted as cognitive or rational propositions that are truth-apt, which meet the requirement of impartiality of objectivity.



To pave the way for justifying the truth of moral claims, moral realism includes moral claims into cognitive or rational realms, while moral anti-realism excludes them, though their justification of their views is based on the same assumption. The underlying presumption behind these two directions in moral epistemology is that objectivity can only be sustained by the principles of impartiality, for which only cognition or rationality can be ground.

It is clear that moral non-realists associate moral judgments with practical needs arising from desires, emotions, values, and situational practices, which is why they do not view moral statements as cognitive in nature. Thus, Moral non-realists take advantage of not justifying their argument that moral claims are not truth-apt because they already reject the objectivity of moral sentences and any ontology of moral sentences. Similarly, even if error theorists confirm a moral ontology, they reject the truth claim of moral sentences, so they are also free from proving the claim for the objectivity of moral claims (Mackie, 1977). However, moral realism faces the challenge of providing a moral ontology that accommodates normativity within the debates on objectivity. In this case, they first face the challenge of showing that moral claims are truth-apt. Second, how do standard definitions of objectivity accommodate normativity so that moral claims can also meet the requirements of impartiality within objectivity? It is crucial to examine how moral realists, who believe that moral statements are considered to be cognitive and truth-based, determine what it means to be cognitive in relation to the practical demands of an action's motivation. Considering that moral realist approaches favor the impartiality of normative sentences to meet the requirements of objectivity, they should render adequately presumed impartiality of normative sentences with respect to the practical demands of perspectival engagements of moral agents.

In order to clarify how moral realism account for impartiality of normative sentences with respect to the practical demands of perspectival engagements of moral agents, this article focuses on the realist argument of moral truths by investigating the objectivity claim of moral knowledge with respect to the metaphysical presumptions behind the ontology of moral claims and the definitions of objectivity in their moral epistemology. For



this aim, David Enoch's and Thomas Nagel's moral realisms will be examined as they represent two different views on the ontology of moral claims, which eventually share the same conclusion that confirms the objectivity of normativity. There are various types of moral realism and non-realism with respect to their positions on how moral claims are cognitive sentences that are truth-apt. I selected David Enoch's (2007) "Robust Realism" for the reason that it pushes limits of realism to the edges and claims for the existence of "irreducible non-naturalist normative truths" whereas Thomas Nagel's (1997) version of realism remains stick to naturalist reasons behind the claim for realism of normative truths. Examining these two versions of moral realism can show us how the objectivity of moral truths is possible from the different perspectives of strong moral realism on the one hand and a relatively weaker one with a naturalist rationale behind it.

The Ontology of Moral Claims in Moral Realism

The heart of the moral realism debate centers on whether moral sentences express beliefs or desires as motivational states of approval. Non-cognitivists argue that moral claims are grounded in motivation, distinct from cognitive sentences (Ayer, 1946). The conflict between cognitivists and non-cognitivists hinges on the dichotomy of motivationally inert cognitive states and emotions as the motivating force behind moral sentences, operating independently. Non-cognitivists, favoring Moore's (1903) "Open Question Argument" argue that moral sentences are not references to natural properties due to their inherent connection to motivational forces, implying the reporting of non-natural facts. Hume's sentiment-based claim is reinforced by Moore's argument, distinguishing moral statements from natural properties by highlighting their lack of empirical justification. Russell extends this view, contending that moral values cannot be independently existing properties, rejecting their objectivity (Russell, 1935, p.229). He asserts that moral values cannot be objective because it is not possible to prove the objective existence of "intrinsic value" such as being good so they cannot be truth-apt.

Stevenson's non-cognitivist theory clarified this categorization and divide moral judgments into "descriptive" and "emotive" components, stating that moral sentences express emotions rather than beliefs about the factual world (Stevenson, 1944, p.33).



Hare expands Stevenson's classification, differentiating between descriptive and prescriptive language (Hare, 1952, p.14). He argues that moral sentences do not convey factual statements because they are prescriptive. This emotivist non-cognitivist perspective, although describing morality in emotive terms, is cognitivist in formulating the dichotomy between descriptive and emotive aspects of language, which is basically related to the dichotomy of facts and values in Humean terms. Hare replaces Hume's distinction between sentiment as the motivational force behind moral actions and reason with the distinction between descriptive and prescriptive forms of language.

Non-cognitivists assert that the function of moral sentences is to guide actions, rooted in expressing desires, emotions, or prescriptions, not beliefs, as beliefs are deemed insufficient to motivate action. Non-cognitivists assert that the function of moral sentences is to guide actions, rooted in expressing desires, emotions, or prescriptions, not beliefs, as beliefs are deemed insufficient to motivate action. Non-cognitivists take an internalist stance, viewing the source of moral claims as motivational forces, while cognitivist realists are externalists, maintaining that moral language expresses beliefs. However, both approaches agree on dichotomies between sentiment and reason, or description and prescription.

Enoch's Robust Realism and Nagel's naturalist moral realism are two instances of externalist moral theories, which maintain the distinctions between emotions and cognition, facts, and values differently from non-cognitivists by positing moral sentences as beliefs that are separate from the emotive factors.

Enoch understands moral truths as response-independent truths which are perfectly universal and objective, and also not reducible to natural truths (Enoch, 2010, p.148). Response-independence here means that moral truths are independent of us, "our motivations, our responses, and our social practices" (Enoch, 2010, p.415). For example, the sentence "genocide is wrong" is an assertion which is not constructed or dependent on individual beliefs, feelings, or cultural norms. In this sense, moral truths are categorical in their nature since they are not contingent on empirical observations or subjective inclinations, so they can be objectively true, such as mathematical or logical truths. Thus, for Enoch, the objectivity of moral



truths is independent of subjective or contingent perspectives and context. He asserted that we discover moral truths rather than create or construct them (Enoch, 2007, p.21). Moral truths exist in a way similar to how scientific or mathematical truths exist, as moral sentences are cognitive beliefs that are not different from any other beliefs subjected to epistemological surveys. This is why they are subjected to the same conditions to justify their truth as other beliefs. Enoch explores how moral facts could exist and asserts that realism about moral beliefs meets all requirements of scientific realism because moral facts play an explanatory role, just as electrons and numbers have a role in the best explanation of respectable explanandum (Enoch, 2007, p. 25). For him, irreducible normative truths were not explanatorily redundant. By contrast, they are deliberately indispensable in the sense that they are indispensable for deliberating and deciding what to do (Enoch, 2007, p. 22). Thus, deliberative indispensability is a way of justifying belief in normative facts in a similar way as the explanatory indispensability of theoretical entities such as electrons justifies belief in electrons. The important part of this explanation of moral truths for the purpose of this article is that, even if we think of desires rather than beliefs to motivate deliberation in normative truths, he asserts that there would still be a need for committing oneself to a normative truth to make the desired action sense to perform. The part of the belief that makes sense is the normative truth itself, not desire as a motivational force. Therefore, Enoch frees the truth conditions of moral beliefs from being dependent on the practical demands of normative decisions such as desires. He defends his idea against all the rival theories that normative truths are based on “a sense in which all normativity is grounded in the attitudes she just happens to find herself with” (Enoch, 2007, p.44). For the truth condition of moral sentences, the sense and other states of mind are separated. What Enoch meant by sense is a belief and beliefs have their own reality.

Enoch follows the way of justifying the truth claim of moral sentences by showing that they pass the test of being justified, reliable, and counted as knowledge as any other belief to be issued in epistemological surveys. Epistemic justification, reliability, and knowledge generally apply to the case of normative beliefs, regardless of various types of epistemic positions;



thus, any epistemological challenge regarding the justification or reliability of knowledge is welcomed under the general banner of realism (Enoch, 2010, p.417). The epistemological explanandum of a robust realist form of normativity is based on the assumed correlation between moral truth and moral judgment. From a realist view of normativity, it is not one's normative judgements that cause normative truths, but normative truths themselves. Therefore, moral knowledge is conceived purely in Platonic form for Robust Realism. Enoch emphasizes that it is the only way of defending the justification of moral truths to assert the realism of normative truths in the same way that scientific realism does for law-like scientific truths. For instance, the naturalist version of realism can face and, in principle, explain the correlation between normative truths and beliefs. However, Enoch emphasizes on the fact that "there is no general reason to suspect that a naturalist realist cannot come up with such an explanation, whereas there does seem to be such a reason in the case of the robust realist" (Enoch, 2010, p.422).

Thomas Nagel's version of realism is a naturalist one, to the extent that moral truths have a basis in the natural world, though their objectivity extends beyond empirical explanations. Human nature, evolution, and social interactions contribute to the emergence of moral values and norms; however, moral truths are irreducible to the empirical reasons that motivate them (Nagel, 1997, p.17). For Enoch, deliberative indispensability is based on a belief, whereas for Nagel, it is the rationality itself that gives the truth about reasons for action that is independent of interests and attitudes. There is no independent reality for moral theory, as is the case for physical theory; however, moral truths are universal and objective because of the nature of moral reasoning that grounds in universal reason both theoretical and practical. Nagel's general view of mind sets his understanding of morality, which recognizes the irreducible and independent character of both the mind and external reality. Thus, he places the objectivity of moral truths within the independent nature of the mind as the universal ground of rationality. Mental states cannot be reduced to physical states; it should be noted here that Nagel presents a tendency toward property dualism in his view of mind, which is almost in a Cartesian way (Nagel, 1997, p.138). He is also a naturalist, but his assertion of autonomy of reason as a



character of mind that is irreducible to any physical property is Cartesian, in the sense that the human mind has the capacity of logic and grasping the objective laws of the universe.

Nagel is not moral realist in Platonic terms but his emphasis on “autonomy of reason”, which is the basis of his moral theory, can be regarded as adhering to the Kantian as well as Cartesian form. Practical reason has the property of “universality”, which involves certain reasons for actions. These reasons are not akin to discoverable chemical elements but are irreducibly normative truths about individuals, and realism asserts that their truth is independent of our belief (Nagel, 2021, p.83).

Moral knowledge is only possible with impartial objectivity, which means eliminating subjective perspectives and values. Nagel posits the idea of agent-neutral reasons for actions, but he subsequently incorporates agent-relative reasons for actions in his later works. Nonetheless, his definition of general reason mandates the principle of universality. General reasoning is defined in this formula: “every reason can be expressed by a predicate R, such that for all persons p and events A, if R is true of A, then p has prima facie reason to promote A” (Nagel, 1970, p.90). All universal reasons and principles, which refer to predicate R, do not contain agent variables. What is important here is that Nagel excludes all agential properties such as desires from the reasoning process. The reason is objective because desires cannot be a necessary condition of a reason’s motivation because they are not a necessary condition for the presence of reason (Nagel, 1970, p.30). For Nagel, attempts to postulate desire as a source of motivation for an action are akin to attempts to postulate a belief behind every inference, as Enoch does. Nagel replies in the same way that even if desire and belief are always present, reason motivates or convince. However, it is not the desire or belief that explains motivation or conclusion or provides a reason for it, but the reason itself that explains both the belief and the conclusions (Nagel, 1970, p.31). Therefore, for Nagel, desires or beliefs cannot be the condition of having reason to draw conclusions in accordance with what belief is selected as true. Consequently, for Nagel, beliefs and desires are the raw material, it is the reason that “underlies our inferences from one set of beliefs to another, and explains both the



conclusions and those logical beliefs which embody our inferential principles in general propositional form” (Nagel, 1970, p.31).

Nagel and Enoch agree on the objectivity of moral truths in an impartial and universal way, but they differ in their emphasis on truth conditions. The former posits the structure of rationality as the condition of justification of truth, whereas the latter refers to a belief that makes the reasoning process sense. Both hold the view that desires and cognition are separate entities, with only the cognitive part being capable of producing moral truths. These two forms of moral realism are influenced by the Kantian and Platonic forms of rationality and objective truth. Both perspectives assume that rationality or cognition functions with a general purpose in general contexts, independent of specific contexts such as desires. The question arises: How do we ensure that this hypothetical separation between reason and desire as the ground for objectivity is true?

Cognitivist Presumptions Underlying Realism Debates

The arguments and counter-arguments of strong and weaker realisms are already loaded with problematic presumptions of cognitivism that have not been questioned by any attempts to construct an intelligible basis for ethical knowledge. Nagel and Enoch take the presumptions of cognitivist ideals as self-evident without questioning. The views of cognition put forth by Nagel and Enoch are deeply rooted in the traditional rationalist perspective that is still prevalent within cognitivist theories of mind.

Rationalist traditions in history philosophy are the initial forms of contemporary cognitivist movements in which the quest for universalizable objectivity supposed to be provided by impartial rationality has been accompanied by the search for the impartial objectivity of facts, independent of human perception and practice. The impartial stance of rationality has been accepted as a guarantor of the justification of factual truth. The conditions of impartiality of “cognition” in modern terms lie in its structure of relating to and processing information about factual world. The inherited understanding of rationality in contemporary cognitivism defines cognition as general-purpose information processing in general contexts.

Cognitivism in standard cognitive science defines cognition as a matter of information processing on the basis of that internal states represent certain properties of external world. This seemingly innocent definition of



cognition holds a deeper meaning. Information processing is a keyword used to understand the cognitivist approach, which is usually described as a “computational theory of mind” or “representational theory of mind” (McCulloch & Pitts, 1943; Fodor, 1975). There are different views on how information processing takes place in the form of computation in type of either universal “Turing Machine” (Turing, 1936) (TM) or neural network from “connectivist” (CP) perspective (Boden, 2006). The former model of computation suggests that cognition involves manipulating symbols based on explicit rules of thought (Anderson, 2003). The symbols represent unique inner states that serve as substitutes for certain states of affairs. What resembles about mind to TM is that cognition is understood by the interaction of symbols as discrete functional elements in a computer according to physical form of these symbols not their meaning. In other words, the representations of outer reality functioning as symbols are processed according to specific rules, in Fodor’s terms “language of thought”(1975), and so it is not internal properties of representations that determine its content but rules. The connectivist model of TM suggests a new paradigm for conceiving how information is represented and processed in the brain. For CP, representations are encoded as patterns, not symbols, and distributed over the brain rather than being locally stored and operating as units. In this case, there is no need for rules for encoding representations, because they are organized by the similarities and differences between patterns. Thus, in the connectivist model, a representation carries information regarding what it encodes. These two models diverge in their understanding of computation, yet they share a fundamental notion of representation that is central to the cognitivist perspective. Regardless of the rule followed, the notion of representation inevitably leads to a separation between the inner process of representations and the external source of meanings, since the encoding process of representations is not content sensitive in either case (Anderson, 2003, p.94). As long as cognition is defined as input-output system, the interaction with the environment and also the role of the rest of the body except for the brain turn out to be a suspended component of the cognitive process (Shapiro, 2007, p.339).

In this respect, all the subjective components of mind related to bodily processes, such as practical demands arising from desires, emotions, and



values, are being separated from and made dependent on the cognizing mind. This indicates the disembodied nature of representational theory of mind, which reduces bodily processes to mere vehicles or products of the central unit of cognition. Cognitivists either include emotions as cognitive products of mind in the sense that they are judgements and appraisals of the world in propositional form, or exclude them from the cognitive part and exile them to bodily dynamics. Cognitivism separates context-free general-purpose information processing from the context-dependent processes of bodily dynamics. Therefore, it regenerates body-mind dualism and posits a disembodied understanding of cognition that breaks the continuity between the body and cognitive processes. Moral realist approaches inherent cognitivist presumptions, and agree to distinguish cognitive processes from bodily and environmental contexts.

The primary consequence of the separation between the mind and the external world along with body and mind is that cognitive processes are cut off from the bodily dynamics and from the environment, which results in an inability to elucidate the origin of mental content, specifically, the mechanism by which symbols in the mind acquire semantic meaning. Representationalism in cognitivism is an inherent theory from “Cartesian Psychology”, which refers to Cartesian subject-object dichotomy (Wheeler, 2005, p.25). Subject-object dichotomy results in the epistemic gap between subject and pre-given objective world, which is inherited within cognitivism and also influences the modern definitions of objectivity. The idea of representationalism as the core of cognitivism maintains two features that shape the understanding of rationality and objectivity within the moral realism debate: one is that representations are context independent, that is, they exist independently from the needs, projects, and previous experiences of an intelligent agent acting in and around the world (Wheeler, 2005, p.25). The other is Cartesian metaphysical realism that objective world exists independently of subjects’ mind and can only be known by a true description or representation of the pre-given external reality in an impartial way.

The ontological commitment of the definition of objectivity as describing facts about the world is that there are facts out there, and objective truth is only possible with their correct descriptions. A correct



description is possible only by eliminating the influence of subjective perspectives. In this case, the aspects of outer reality that change with one's perspective and those that do not should be distinguished (Nagel, 1986, p.14). The underlying presumption within this understanding of objectivity is that "there is a true nature" out there that can be detached and independent from any perspectival appearance, which is the view that Nagel calls "view from nowhere" (Nagel, 1986, p.14). From this view of objectivity, an unmediated and non-distorted representation of the external environment by a cognizer is assumed to be possible. This absolutist conception of objectivism is at the core of scientific realism, and is compatible with Cartesian metaphysical realism.

Nagel has been trapped himself by the "view from nowhere" form of objectivism in his moral realism due to his cognitivist perspective on rationality as the foundation for moral truths, which he later criticizes (Nagel, 1986). Nagel and Enoch both understand rationality not to be content sensitive, since they separate rational processes or beliefs as cognitive constructions from practical demands arising from our desires, emotions, values, judgments, and practices. In this case, moral claims are objectively truth-aptness when they are in a cognitive structure. The objective existence of normativity is explained through the appeal to the universality of rationality, either as the process itself or as its products. In both cases, moral truths are not created or constructed by us but are discovered as other facts. Nagel and Enoch's understanding of objectivity is theory-laden with respect to the metaphysics of dichotomies of body-mind and object-subject. Cognition and other bodily dynamics are separated, and cognition is cut off from the context of the environment for the sake of impartial objectivity of moral truths. Reducing objectivity to impartial rationality refers to defining objectivity with context-independence. When cognition is isolated from other bodily dynamics, desires, emotions, and practical aspects that arise from its interaction with the environment, it becomes difficult to assess its credibility in reporting facts. This is because cognition is disconnected from real-world contexts, which are critical for genuinely comprehending the facts. Furthermore, various research has revealed the interrelatedness between emotions and cognition in human cognitive processes. Cognitivist presumptions in moral realism debates lead to



disregarding these findings, confirming the interdependence between cognition and practical demands arising from desires, emotions, values, judgments, and practices. The next part of this article elaborates on the interdependence between cognition and emotions.

The Amalgam of Cognition and Emotion

What is emotion anyway? Rationalist roots within cognitivism assert that emotions behave like backup systems for rationality with regard to their motivational role in rational process, but they are separated from rationality itself due to their context-dependence. How do they separate from reason? Are they really separated? Theories of emotion are classified differently based on how they describe the emotional process, with varying interpretations of the early and late stages (Prinz, 2004, p.4). The early stage of the emotional process takes place between the perception of the stimulus and the initiation of the bodily response, while the latter stage involves physical reactions including changes in heart rate, skin conductance, and facial expressions. Cognitive and non-cognitive theories of emotion differ in their views on the relationship between the stages of the emotion process. On one hand, cognitive theories propose that the early stages of emotion involve the manipulation of information and should thus be considered a cognitive process (Goldie, 2000; Nussbaum, 2004; Solomon, 1977). On the other hand, non-cognitive theories assert that the emotion response is a direct and automatic outcome of stimulus perception (A. Damasio, 1994; Ekman, 1977; Griffiths, 1997; James, 1884; Lange, 1885; J. Prinz, 2004; Robinson, 2004). While non-cognitive theories argue that emotions originate before and, for some, independently of conscious cognitive processes, cognitivist theories view emotions as the outcome of information processing that involves value judgments or propositional-like states, such as beliefs, thoughts, and evaluative judgments. In the case of cognitivist theories of emotion, both feelings are not considered essential for experiencing an emotion and emotions are believed to be first generated through cognitive processes in the brain, and the body then responds to the brain's judgment. In this context, cognition refers to an intellectual process rather than a physical one, and the role of the body is limited to the transmission of sensory data and physiological responses. Emotions are understood as a product of general reasoning and are therefore viewed as



beliefs about the world. Thus, cognitivist theories of emotion results with a gap between the mind and body in terms of emotion constitution. This approach to emotion is disembodied, as it does not require a connection between emotions and bodily experiences.

Non-cognitive theories of emotion place significant emphasis on bodily changes as a component of emotion, in contrast to cognitivist perspectives that view physiological responses as occurring subsequent to emotional experiences, on the basis of the idea that emotions are constituted directly by the perception of bodily responses, for example, fast breathing, racing heart, sweaty hands etc. For non-cognitivist, emotions are bodily feelings, that is, the process of that bodies are becoming aware of the changes or somatic responses (James, 1884, p.193). This is how James-Lange Theory of emotions defines emotions. Jesse Prinz defines emotions in the same line of the James-Lange Theory of emotions by asserting emotions as feedback systems of the body, which includes the respiratory, circulatory, digestive, musculoskeletal, and endocrine systems as well as the nervous system (Prinz, 2004, p.5). In any way it is defined from non-cognitivist perspective, emotions are understood as survival mechanisms of reacting automatically and adaptively to the environment from evolutionary perspective (Darwin, 1998).

Contemporary neuroscience supports this view of feedback systems theory and furthers the studies on the role of emotions in rationality. Antonio Damasio's Somatic Marker Hypothesis (SMH) is one of them. Based on his empirical observations, Damasio shows that cognitive processes particularly decision-making depend on emotional valuation rather than merely an intellectual evaluation process (Damasio et al., 1991). Somatic processes as the multiple reservoirs of feedback from all the physico-chemical dynamics of body regulate decision making processes to reduce the complexity and uncertainty. Damasio establishes an inseparable connection between the body and the brain, emphasizing the reciprocal interaction between biochemical and neural pathways (Damasio, 1994, p.87). As a result, the body and brain are in constant interaction with one another, creating a circular relationship that must be continuously mapped in the brain. Emotions enable "forming systematic connections between categories of objects and situations" (Damasio, 1994, p.134). For this reason,



cognitive processes cannot be reduced to a function of brain (Damasio, 1994, pp.226,118). In this context, any perspective that disconnects emotional and cognitive processes and views them as separate entities is insufficient, as they are inherently interconnected and interdependent.

Another empirical finding about the role of emotions in selective attention, proposed by Schupp et al., argues that selective attention for visual perception is determined by emotionally significant stimuli (Schupp et al., 2007). Emotions play a significant role in not only directing our attention towards relevant information and detecting its significance but also in retrieving specific details from our memory to effectively address the current situation (Megill, 2014, p.192). Emotions play a crucial role in shaping the information we attend to in our surroundings, the data that gets stored in our memory, and the information from our memory that we retrieve in a specific context (Megill, 2014, p.193).

The approach of embodied cognition in cognitive science posits that cognition is simultaneously also affective, they are inherently intertwined systems (Colombetti, 2014, p.18). Thompson (2007) clarified the reason why these two systems are not distinct. Initially, the neural systems responsible for mediating between cognitive and emotional processes exhibit considerable anatomical overlap, and the interaction between them is reciprocal and circular. Second, “the emergent global states to which these interactions give rise are *appraisal-emotion amalgams* in which appraisal elements and emotion elements modify each other continuously” (Thompson, 2007, p.371). Thus, cognitive processes are an amalgam of emotion and cognition, making it impossible to differentiate between them while they are occurring.

In light of the cognitivist and non-cognitivist perspectives on emotion, cognitivist assumptions of moral realism result in a misconception of the true nature of emotions and subsequently moral sentences. On one hand, cognitivist view of emotion understands emotions as in the form of judgements, and they become one of any other beliefs as a mental state. In this case, it is difficult to distinguish between emotions and cognitive beliefs, as emotions are considered to be beliefs. On the other hand, for non-cognitivist theories of emotion, it is clear that the processes of emotion and cognition are intricately interconnected so they cannot be separated



from each other. In both cases, it is clear that cognition and emotion cannot be distinguished either in their linguistic expression as they are both in form of belief, or in their ontology as cognitive processes are intertwined with emotions.

The dichotomy of cognition and emotion is based on cognitivist ideals advocating for excluding practical demands arising from desires, emotions, values, and situated practices from being considered part of rationality and truth-apt. The image of practical demands depicted here is one in which they lack naturalistic validity as they represent perspectival or partial motivations. They can serve as action-guiding prescriptions but not as knowledge-bearer statements. The categorization of moral language derives from the metaphysics of being counted as fact-dependent, of which the underlying presumptions are based on dichotomies of rationality and emotion and facts and values, respectively. Given the evidence that emotion and rationality cannot be separated in decision-making processes, the former dichotomy is a false one, but what about the second one? The question of how the distinction between facts and values be ontologically framed requires further study, which can be a topic for another article.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study critically examined the foundational principles of impartiality and value independence advocated by moral realist epistemologies in the pursuit of objectivity, with a particular focus on the cognitivist presuppositions underlying the perspectives of David Enoch and Thomas Nagel. The investigation revealed that the traditional understanding of impartiality and value independence faces significant challenges due to the intricate interplay between cognition and emotion, as evidenced by empirical data.

While the pursuit of objectivity in moral theory remains a legitimate endeavor, the adherence to cognitivism in moral realism debates introduces challenges stemming from representationalist ideals reminiscent of Cartesian metaphysical realism. These ideals, anchored in impartiality claims, create a theoretical framework that appears detached from the nuanced interplay of internal and external realms and fails to account for the subjective nature of normative claims. It is odd to consider normative claims to be unmediated reports of facts that are not distorted by any



subjective perspective, based on the practical demands arising from desires, emotions, values, and situated practices.

The need to reconsider the definitions of objectivity becomes evident, advocating for the inclusion of the perspectival experience of moral agents, encompassing practical demands arising from desires, emotions, values, judgments, and practices. because every cognitive process involves emotional valuation and so all cognitive processes are perspectival and partial. Furthermore, if truthful objective facts exist, they are the value-laden nature of our interactions with the environment, which has nothing to do with universalizability in any sense. Human character based on perspective is also the character of the world, which indicates a way of knowing that is peculiar to humans (Yıldız, 2018, p.93). Recognizing the inherently perspectival and partial nature of cognitive processes prompts a reassessment of the objectivity of normative claims. In this light, truthful objective facts may be found in the value-laden nature of interactions with the environment, challenging the notion of universalizability.

Moreover, the assertion of the existence of moral truths based on the universalizable ontology of rationality, as proposed by Nagel and Enoch, is critiqued for being theory-laden with cognitivist presumptions that prioritize the impartiality of moral truths. The interconnectedness of cognition and emotions complicates the maintenance of the required impartiality for asserting the objectivity of moral truths.

In light of these challenges, alternative epistemic tools, such as Hillary Putnam's perspective on moral claims, offer avenues for exploring the complexities of value-dependent interactions with the environment and challenging traditional fact-value dichotomies. Cognitivism emerges as a major obstacle to moral realism's claim of objective moral truths and poses a significant challenge to naturalism in moral claims (Putnam, 1981, 1990, 2002, 2004).

The central question revolves around whether the requirement of rationality should be universally applied to define objectivity. Acknowledging the interdependence of cognition and emotions, which renders cognition context-dependent, underscores the need for a refreshed definition of objectivity that aligns with the embodied situatedness of value-laden bodily interactions of moral agents. This study advocates for further



investigation into alternative perspectives, particularly non-reductive naturalism, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the objective nature of moral claims.

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Öz: Bu çalışma, ahlaki gerçekçi epistemolojilerin, nesnellığe ulaşmakta temel aldığı tarafsızlık ve değer bağımsızlık ilkelerini eleştirel olarak incelemektedir. Ahlaki gerçekçiler için merkezi olan, ahlaki yargılarda içerilen bilişsel ve duygusal unsurların birbirinden ayrılması gerektiğine dair bilişselci varsayımdır. Araştırma, David Enoch ve Thomas Nagel'in ahlaki gerçekçi görüşlerinin altında yatan bilişsellik ve duygu ikiliğine odaklanmaktadır. Deneyisel verilerle desteklenen araştırma bulguları, biliş ve duygu arasındaki karşılıklı etkileşimin tarafsızlık ve değer bağımsızlığa ilişkin geleneksel anlayışlara karşı bir zorluk oluşturduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Makalenin ilk bölümü ahlaki yargıların ontolojik doğasını incelemekte, ardından Nagel ve Enoch'ın nesnellik kavramlarını şekillendiren bilişsel varsayımları keşfetmektedir. Son bölüm, geleneksel olarak nesnellik için önkoşul olarak kabul edilen tarafsızlık ve değer bağımsızlığı koşullarını bozan biliş-duygu bağıllığını açıklamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Nesnellik, ahlaki gerçekçilik, bilişsellik, ahlaki doğru, tarafsızlık.

