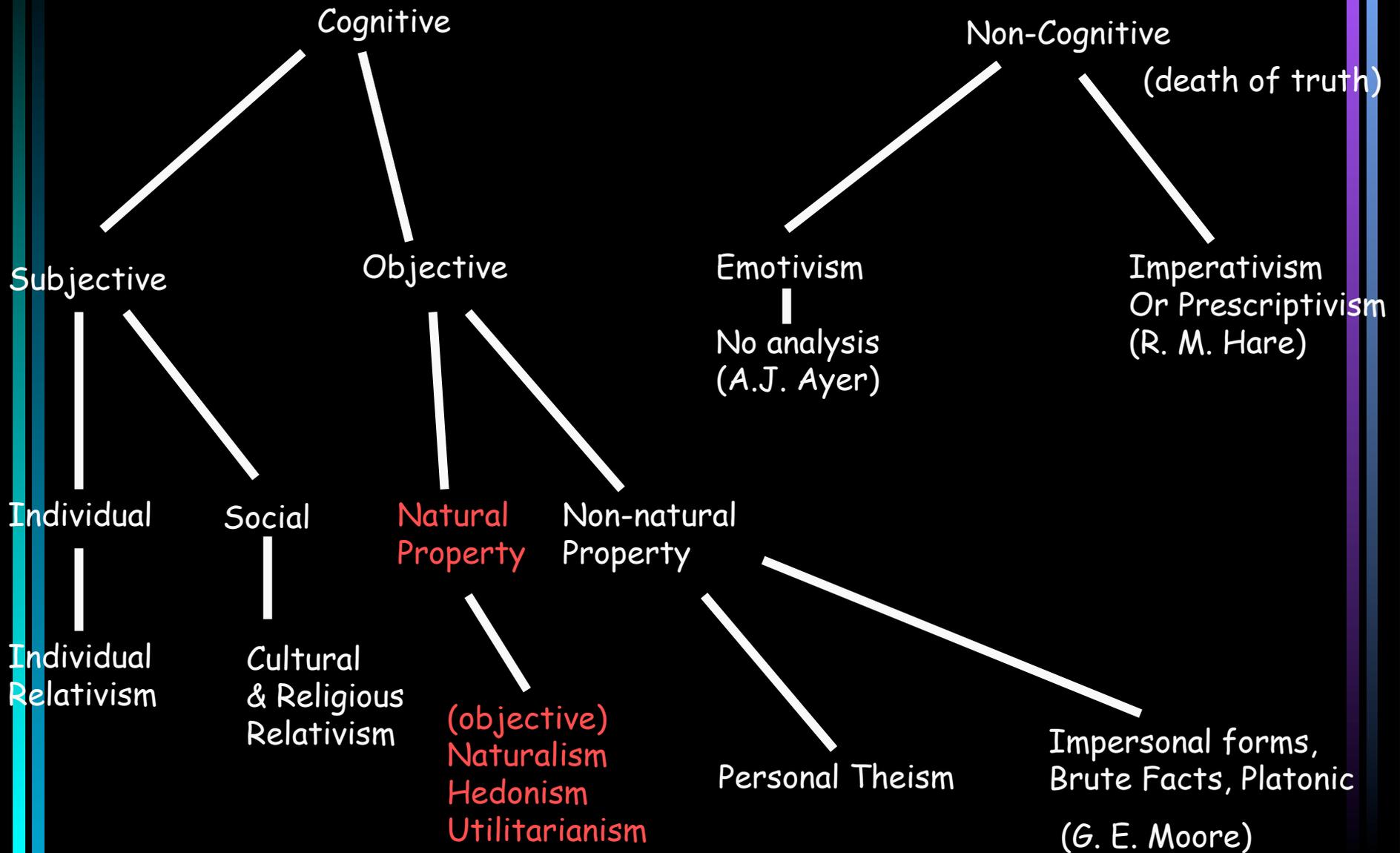


Moral Objectivism

Pojman's Account

Moral Statement Schema



Defined

- Typically understood as the naturalist account of morality that transcends individual cultures
- Note: super-naturalists accounts of morality hold that their account of morality transcends (typically, in some sense, ultimately or absolutely transcends) individual cultures

Defined

- Typically naturalists want to contrast or distinguish their view of morality from an absolutist view—the absolutist holds that there at least some moral principles that ultimately or absolutely transcend individual cultures and that they ought never be violated

Defined

- But again, some (secular) act utilitarianists hold there are absolutes while eschewing supernaturalism and some absolutists hold to very few absolute principles and at the same time hold that many other moral principles can be overridden in certain situations

Defined

- Getting back to a non-supernatural or naturalist objectivism, they may hold:
 - It is morally wrong to torture people for the fun of it
 - This intuition is binding on all rational agents
 - So that those whose behavior violates this intuition should be explained in terms like “perverse”, “ignorant” or “irrational” rather than the principle itself is not a true principle

Defined

- The moral objectivist hold that the principle mentioned (and others) are not arbitrary—they can give reasons in terms of securing life and liberty and the ability to secure other goals
- A list or set of the principles could be called the “stable core morality”—sort of a minimalist morality

Defined

- That is, there could be more than one adequate morality that contained different rankings of these principles and other principles that are consistent with core morality
- Also, there could be some relativity to secondary principles (e.g. monogamy or polygamy or limited euthanasia) but applied according to environment, belief, tradition, etc.

Defined

- The core moral rules are analogous to the set of nutrients necessary for a healthy diet
 - The basic nutrients may be had by all without rigid regimentation or an absolute set of recipes
 - This is to say that an objectivist bases his/her moral system on a common human nature with common needs and desires

Arguments for objectivism

1. Human nature is relatively similar in essential respects in that it has a common set of needs and interests
2. Moral principles are functions of human needs and interests, instituted by reason in order to promote the most significant interests and needs of rational beings (and perhaps others)

Arguments for objectivism

3. Some moral principles promote human interests and meet human needs better than others
4. Those principles that meet essential needs and promote the most significant interests of humans in optimal ways can be said to be objectively valid moral principles

Arguments for objectivism

5. Therefore, because there is a common human nature, there is an objectively valid set of moral principles, applicable to all humanity

Arguments for objectivism (2nd)

1. Objectively valid moral principles are those, adherence to which meets the needs and promotes the most significant interests of persons
2. Some principles are such that adherence to them meets the needs and promotes the most significant interests of persons

Arguments for objectivism (2nd)

3. Therefore, there are some objectively valid moral principles

- So if these arguments work then the work for a moral objectivist is to determine under what conditions would an 'ideal observer' discover (or choose) the best principles.
 - Conditions like: maximal knowledge about the consequences of actions; impartiality and knowledge of other possible forms of life, etc.

An illustration (per Pojman)

- Hell: people with eternal back itch but cannot scratch their backs because their arms are paralyzed in front of them
- Heaven: same backitch, but everybody smiling because everyone has his/her arms stretched out to scratch someone else's back—hell turned into heaven!
- If we can imagine some states of affairs or cultures that are better than others in a way that depends on human action, we can ask what are those character traits that make them so

Summary

- In the story the people in heaven, but not those in hell, cooperate for the amelioration of suffering and the production of pleasure
- These are primitive goods—but not sufficient for full-blown morality—but give us a hint about the objectivity of morality
- Moral goodness has something to do with the ameliorating of suffering, the resolution of conflict, and the promotion of human flourishing

Critique

- So what do you think?
- Why take **this** moral point of view?
 - Why should moral principles be functions of human needs (flourishing)?
 - It seems true that human needs are objective
 - Some essential needs and significant interests of humans could be called “good,” but can all of them be called “good?”; doesn’t suffering have moral value?
 - Some people seem to flourish a long time (short of eternity) doing “bad” things. Allowing for eternity makes this a less secular view

Critique

- Is it always good that humans flourish?
 - What if people (the human race) were incorrigibly bad—would you want them to flourish anyway?
 - Would flourishing make people good?
 - How do you determine the final outcome of mankind?
- Is human nature theory dependent?
 - Some say that it is; how have they shown that it isn't?
 - If it is theory dependent, then it is a relative theory and has culpability similar to ethical relativists
- Can't the community and individual needs and interests conflict?
- What if the arguments for non-natural properties succeed?