

Lessons from Einstein on Ethics

Reason, Relativism, and Reality

Spring 2005

Diversity vs. Disagreement

- Moral *disagreement* is when your moral claim and mine *conflict*: they cannot both be true together

Note: Harman sometimes uses "disagreement" loosely for diversity, e.g., bottom of p11

- Moral *diversity* is when we make *different* claims that are not necessarily in conflict
- "Bread is inexpensive," "Kerry is tall," ...

Relativists: *diversity* w/out *disagreement*

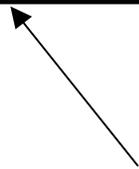
- Compare velocity, again
- I make different velocity judgments from the person zipping by on the train; I say she's zipping along, she says she's sitting still
- That's diversity
- But we're not *disagreeing*: we'd never dream of conducting research to figure out who is really correct

Diversity without Disagreement

- This combination is relativism's strong point, and at the same time its greatest vulnerability
- Strong point because it steers between two views people find hard to accept: absolutism, the idea that there is a unique moral truth which (almost) everyone is somehow missing, and nihilism, which says morality is just a big fat lie
- Weak point because there's an underlying agreement in the velocity case that seems totally absent in the moral case. Hitler and ML King Jr are not just stating the same facts different ways.

Reminder of how we got there: explanations of moral diversity

<i>Variation in....</i>	<i>Possible Example</i>
circumstances	No need any more to eat meat.
factual beliefs	Fetus is not a person.
moral beliefs	Abortion is OK even if it is a person.
moral frameworks	Cannibalism -- it's simply not done!



Relativist picks this

Structure of Harman's argument

- Two key theses: *No single true morality* and *For purposes of assigning truth-conditions, it's as though we'd said "in relation to moral framework M, so and so is wrong"*
- *No single true morality* best explains diversity
- Thesis about truth-conditions is supposed to follow from *No single true morality*.

What sense can the relativist make of

- Moral disputation, moral concern (ch2)
- Moral language (ch3)
- Moral reasoning (ch4)
- Condemnation of outsiders (ch5)

This (or as much as we can pack in) will be the topic of the next few classes; then we have our debate.