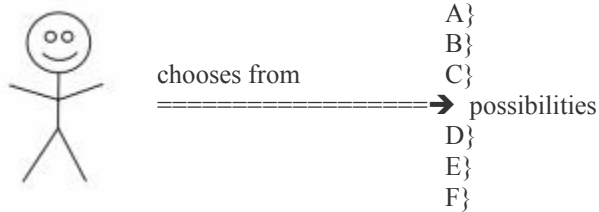


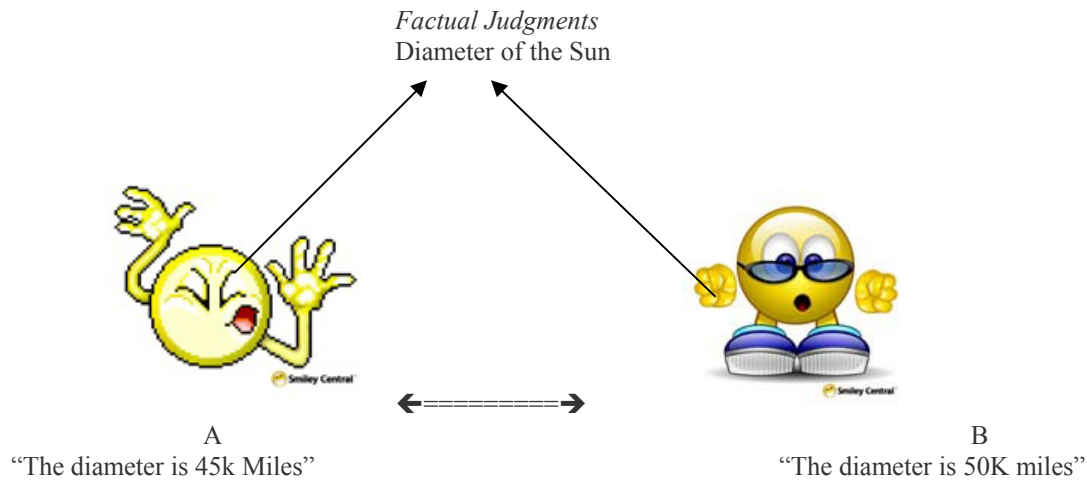
1. **The basic character of moral judgments.**

““Smith ought (ought not) do B.”



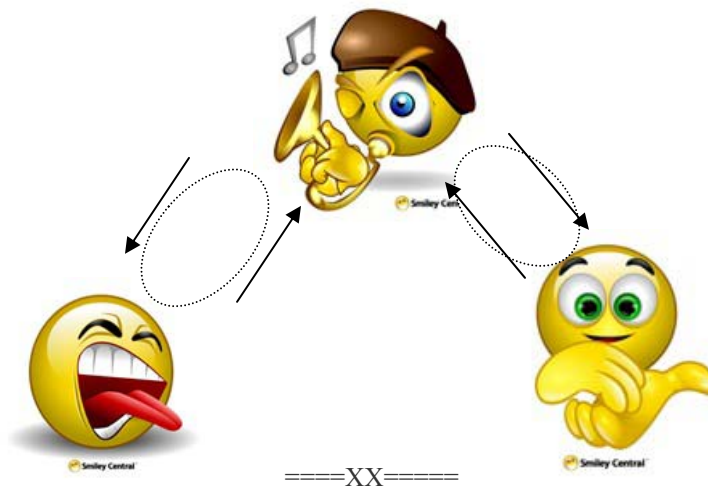
Moral judgment, e.g., “Smith ought do B,” claim to provide directions or rules for how we should make choices. Moral judgments only apply to actions that are under our control. Moral judgments typically tell us to choose certain things or avoid others. Moral judgments must refer to some standard or norm in terms of which they are justified. A key issue of moral theory is what those standards might be, how we can know them, and makes choices in light of them.

2. **Kinds of judgments:**



(In ‘factual judgments’ people refer to the thing under discussion. A and B can have a disagreement with each other because they are talking about a feature of the sun. Both of their statements cannot be true simultaneously. A statement is true if it accurately describes what it signifies.)

Aesthetic Judgments



A

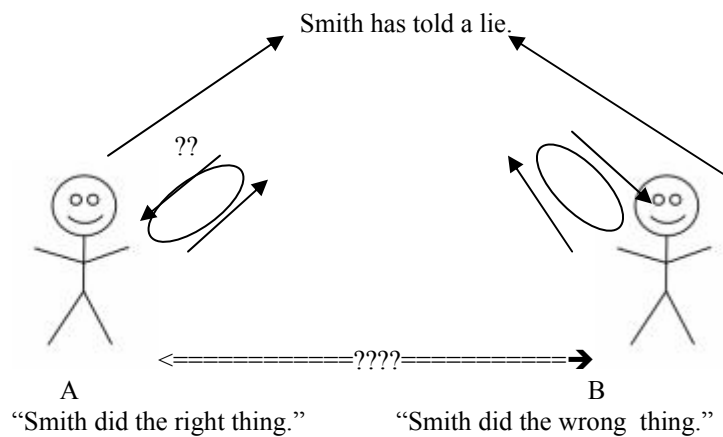
“Man, that was ugly. Sounded like he was having a root canal”

B

“Really beautiful”

(In ‘aesthetic judgments’ people seem to refer to the thing under discussion but perhaps are only talking about they like or dislike something. This is a common interpretation of what is involved in aesthetic judgments. A and B can not have a disagreement with each other because they are not talking about the same thing but about their respective likes or dislikes for something.. The statements are true only if they accurately convey what they are feeling.)

Moral Judgments



A

“Smith did the right thing.”

B

“Smith did the wrong thing.”

Whether there is a legitimate disagreement between A and B in moral judgments depends upon the status of the standards that underlie moral judgments.

INVENTED STANDARDS: If we adopt the subjectivist or cultural relativist positions, then we reduce the moral standards to personal or social preferences respectively. In either case there really is no disagreement between A and B except, in the case of cultural relativism, the cultural norms to which the judgments might refer. For the subjectivist, there really aren’t any moral standards. Moral judgments are true for an individual only if they convey

his or her preferences when the statement is made. Statements are true on the CR view only if they accurately convey or conform to the customs of the particular society in which the statements are made,

DISCOVERABLE STANDARDS: In this case, the moral standards are not a function of personal or collective preferences. Various philosophers have offered different candidates for such standards: God's will; universal duties, good consequences, etc.. If there are such standards, then there can be legitimate disagreements between A and B with reference to those standards. The statements above of A and B cannot both be true with reference to the same discoverable standards.

Moral and Non-Moral Judgments and Standards

Moral judgments often take the form of commands or imperatives: "X ought to do Y." Such commands or imperatives claim to direct someone concerning the possibilities they should choose or avoid. But there are various non-moral commands or judgments as well. While it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between them there is a distinction between moral and non-moral standards as well as between the sort of reasoning we use to justify moral and non-moral commands.

There are three basic features of moral judgments: (1) moral judgments concern behaviors that have significant bearing on human welfare in terms of harming or benefiting other people; (2) moral considerations typically have precedence over other sorts of non-moral considerations (e.g., etiquette, social customs, laws, etc); (3) rationally based moral judgments require an adequate sort of reasoning and justification that must appeal to something other than some sort of authoritative declaration or fiat.

So moral considerations differ from matters of etiquette or codes of behavior in a society that deal with matters of courtesy or what is polite and impolite. Codes of etiquette are always socially relative since they are creations of a particular society and they often vary among different societies. When we judge people's manners as good/bad or right/wrong we mean simply that they are socially appropriate not that they are morally good or evil.

Morality and law: laws and legal systems are conventional in origin. That is, they are created by particular societies. The nature of legal standards and legal reasoning varies between societies depending upon the legal system in a society. In the US, the legal code is written and the determination of whether something is legal or illegal requires seeing whether an action conforms to a particular written law subject to the framework of the US constitution. In England, there are both written and unwritten laws (common law); some traditional societies have entirely unwritten legal systems; in some cases, the law may be determined by the will of the ruler. Laws may or may not reflect moral considerations: laws against stealing reflect such considerations; many laws simply concern various forms of regulation. Law and morality may not correspond. E.g., many people think that laws permitting abortion in the US permit immoral behavior. So too, there may be many actions that people consider immoral that they believe the law should not regulate: laws relating to certain kinds of sexual activity (sexual relations among consent adults).

Morality and religion: many religions have specify various moral teachings as part of the religion. In this case, the moral teachings are considered to be revealed by the divine being(s) worshipped in the particular religion. In this case, morality depends upon the faith people have in a divine being or beings and what has been revealed by such being(s). Certainly if God or the gods have created human beings and have declared to humans how they ought behave and live, then this would be a solid basis for morality. But a common philosophical consideration is various actions are right or wrong not because God or the gods say they are wrong; but rather, God or the gods declare actions morally right or wrong because they are right or wrong. In other words, a rationally based approach to morality or ethics seeks to find a justification for actions without recourse to religious faith in the existence of any divine being(s) or what such a being or beings may have revealed to humans.

One of the first questions to be addressed in ethical theory is whether there is any discoverable basis for ethical standards. There are two theories which DENY that such standards exist. One is cultural relativism; the other is ethical or moral subjectivism.

4. **Cultural Relativism** – moral standards are a function of the collective tastes and preferences of a society. MS are socially and culturally dependent.

What is moral for a person to do is dictated by what the person should do in the society in which he or she lives. “When in Rome, one ought to do as the Romans do.”

One of the principal arguments for cultural relativism is the observations that in fact moral standards appear to vary across different societies. Some societies condemn certain practices as immoral (e.g., abortion); others permit such practices. One basic argument for cultural relativism is that since different societies have different moral codes, there is no objective or discoverable basis for moral standards. However popular this argument might be it is simply fallacious since it mistakenly claims that because people believe something to be moral or immoral that it is so. But in principle we do not typically believe that people are correct in their beliefs simply because they hold them. People are often mistaken in the beliefs they hold. The cultural relativist can get around this objection only by holding that moral beliefs merely reflect the preferences and tastes of the people in a particular society (or at least those in the society who have the power to shape preferences and tastes). That is, cultural relativists hold that moral standards are socially invented.

The implication of cultural relativism is that the moral practices of one society cannot be critiqued in terms of the moral standards of a different society since the preferences and tastes of one group of people provide no ‘objective’ or discoverable basis for criticizing the preferences and tastes of another group. Similarly, the moral practices of a society at a particular point in time cannot be criticized in terms of the moral standards of the same society at a different point in its history. That is, for the cultural relativist, contemporary US society has no rational basis for morally criticizing the practice of slavery in the early 19th C.

It should be noted, however, the cultural relativists typically argue that individuals in a given society are obligated to follow the moral code of the society in which they live: “When in Rome, one ought to do what the Romans do.” This claim, however, leads many people to think that cultural relativism simply collapses into ethical subjectivism: the view that there are no moral standards since preferences and tastes are completely subjective and vary from individual to individual. For, once we see that the moral beliefs of a particular culture and society are grounded on collective preferences, then the people in a society really have no legitimate basis for criticizing the moral beliefs of those who disagree with those held by the society. The reason is this: the fact that N number of people collectively prefer the same thing as good still means that the claim about the goodness of the things is based upon preferences. But 100 preferences in favor of X aren’t any more ‘objective’ than 1 preference opposed to X. Hence, the clever person will see that the injunction to do in Rome what the Romans do is really unwarranted. If I reject the moral norms of my culture there is really no moral reason to follow them. I may be punished because society has the power to punish me for not following moral customs, but if I think I can break the moral rules of society and not get caught, there is no reason for me not to do so.

Moral Subjectivism:

This position claims that moral standards are merely the function or expression of personal preferences and tastes. That is, there are no moral standards so that individuals are free to do whatever they want at a particular moment. (There may be social or legal standards to which individuals are expected to conform lest they be subject to

punishment or various social sanctions but, for the subjectivist, there is no moral basis for such standards.) Rachels gives two versions of this subjectivism: simple subjectivism, which claims that there are moral judgments which simply state our preferences at a given moment ("I ought do X" simply means "I approve of doing X), or emotivism, which claims that there really are no moral judgments that can be true or false. Rather, moral assertions are simply a way of expressing our preferences at a give moment. So, I think abortion is wrong merely means "abortion, boo!" For the moral subjectivist, we can never provide moral criticism or analysis of anyone's actions since my preferences provide no basis for critiquing anyone else's' preferences. So too, my preferences at a given moment provide no basis for critiquing my preferences at a different time in my life.