Ethical Intuitionism: The Meaning of Meaning

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Introduction

At first glance, the concept of ethical intuitionism—the notion that absolute moral values are grasped through intuition—pulses with magnetism difficult to resist. It presents itself as a defense of the seeming certainty imbuing what Kant refers to as the moral law within. It serves as a sturdy, resolute anchor for the ambling personality tossed about in the torrential currents of a thoroughly demystified secular ethos, stripped of religious or a priori foundations. Furthermore, the rise to prominence of intuitionism corresponds with the justification of rationalism—the notion that some truth is ontologically prior to observational evidence—over empiricism—the notion that all truth depends on observational evidence. However, ethical intuitionism also introduces a glaring host of dangers. In general, intuition is a notoriously hazardous tool for guiding behavior. How can something as important as ethics be founded on something as nebulous as intuition? It is undeniable that intuitions have led people astray in the past and will continue to do so in the future. These are some of the concerns that have preoccupied the minds of critics of ethical intuitionism.

At the crossroads between rationalism and empiricism, certainty and skepticism, the compelling philosophy of ethical intuitionism emerges. Grappling for purchase for their conception of ethics, ethical intuitionists compare intuitions both to perception and axiomatic logic. The latter comparison, of ethical knowledge to logical knowledge, scintillates with particular allure to those seeking justification for an absolute moral schema. How can one deny the self-evident axioms which undergird thought itself? The formal logic system operates on a set of principles which are sacrosanct to the rational mind. In other words, the principles of logic are the very atoms that comprise the rational universe, the skeleton upon which all theoretical
and practical knowledge is fleshed out. If one were to extract the axioms of logic from their vaunted position as self-evident truths, the whole enterprise of human knowledge would crumble into disarray.

It is not difficult to see why ethical intuitionists wholeheartedly appropriated the sphere of formal logic as the indigenous habitat for ethical truths. Ethical intuitions position themselves at the base of ethics in the same way that their logic counterparts underlie cognition. More specifically, the analogy to logic buttresses intuitionism’s twin theses: the epistemological and the ontological. In terms of ontology, logic truth helps justify the existence of moral truth: both of which cannot be observed. Here, the indisputable truth-value that axioms of logic enjoy despite their dissonance with Darwinian naturalism demonstrates that it is sometimes sensible to assert the existence of non-natural properties. Thus, the persistent charge that intuitionism is “queer”\(^1\) since it assumes the existence of phenomena ontologically distinct from empirical data can be happily dismantled. Still, the unsettling question as to the method by which one apprehends ethical truth remains pressing; the epistemological problem still demands attention. However, once the ontological thesis of ethics is clarified by the analogy to logic, the move to an epistemological defense is relatively simple. In the same way that the rational mind can ascertain objective logical principles, it can also ascertain objective moral verities. Although the nature of ethics still evades clear explanation, the supposed strangeness of ethics evaporates.

Thus, the analogy to logic serves an indispensable role for intuitionism by supplying its often ridiculed ontological and metaphysical theses with a conceptual precedent. No longer must the individual gripped by moral conviction spew apologetics which strain credibility in order to justify the intelligibility of non-natural properties. Ethical intuitionism is camped securely within

\(^1\) This charge traces back to J.L. Mackie’s *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*
the temple of logic. In order to engage in combat with ethical intuitionists, critics must desecrate that temple.

However, it is at this point, just where intuitionism appears most formidable, where a fatal vulnerability exposes itself. Galvanized by the credibility logic confers to their system, ethical intuitionists fail to erect any conceptual partition between logic and ethics. Instead, ethics is subsumed within the province of logic and inherits its properties. Thus, ethics is regarded as inherently intellectual as opposed to emotive and visceral. But is this true to our experience of ethics? Can the luscious moral imagination be identified with the intellect without straining away the heart of ethics? The vigilant philosopher must be wary of overweening rationalism and ensure that philosophical theories are both logically valid and phenomenologically sound. I believe that ethical intuitionists have stumbled in the latter enterprise. They have furnished a bastion of moral life both alluring and imposing but categorically foreign to the nature of the convictions which fueled the task at the outset.

When one reflects upon one’s powerful ethical convictions, one immediately notices that these convictions derive not from an abstract intellectual gesture but from some variegated and bustling reality. Thus, to label ethics as an intellectual rather than an intimately emotional experience is phenomenologically disingenuous. This does not imply that ethics should be demoted to the class of purely subjective phenomena devoid of the universality and necessity that abstract, cerebral truths of logic demand. Here, one must tread carefully because a mistake is easily committed. The truths of ethics, I will argue, occupy a conceptual realm somewhere between the abstract intellectual truths of logic and the intimate subjective drives of emotion. Thus, morality can neither be characterized as inherently logical nor as inherently emotional.

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2 Obviously, many critics will seek to reject ethical intuitionism while maintaining logic truth. However, they will have to specify why logic truth should be embraced while ethical truth is dismissed.
Rather, morality is in some ways the confluence of the two and in some ways unfamiliar to both. In fact, the primary purpose of this essay is to discover in what sense ethics can be perceived as axiomatic like logic yet also deeply emotive.

In the following pages, I will elaborate further on these themes and more. In the first chapter, I will describe some primary features of ethical intuitionism. In doing so, I hope to express ethical intuitionism’s strength and will therefore eschew interpretations of intuitionism which are easily invalidated. The next chapter will directly challenge the ethical intuitionists’ claims enumerated in the first chapter. Here, I will enlist the most crippling forms of arguments against ethical intuitionism. In these first two chapters, I hope to highlight the major points of contention between ethical intuitionists and their critics, thereby supplying the reader with a sense of the strengths and weaknesses of ethical intuitionism. In the third chapter, I will hone in on the analogy to logic which features so prominently in ethical intuitionism. Here, I will mine the territory shared by ethical intuitions and logical intuitions while exposing some key differences between ethics and logic which I think have been overlooked by ethical intuitionists. Finally, in the fourth chapter, I will propose a theory of affective intuitionism which combines the absoluteness and necessity maintained by standard ethical intuitionism with the tumultuous emotionality maintained by non-cognitivism.

Before concluding, I would like to mention several routes I will not be pursuing in this essay. To begin, this essay is primarily an essay on meta-ethics. In terms of Mackie’s distinction between first order and second order ethics, I will be concerned here with second order ethics. That is, I will not be discussing any specific practical ethical theories, such as utilitarianism. Rather, I will focus on more fundamental questions concerning the possibility of axiomatic moral

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3 Later in the essay I will refer to standard ethical intuitionism as cognitive intuitionism, referencing its inherently intellectual account of ethical truth.
values. I will not attempt to construct or evaluate any extant first-order ethical system. Of course, this does not imply that ethical intuitionism is equally compatible with all first-order ethical theories. In fact, it may be the case that some first-order ethical theories are more amenable to ethical intuitionism than others. An analysis of the possibility of synthesis between first-order and second-order ethical theories would indeed be fascinating and important. However, I will skirt any such project here.

I should also note that, though ethical intuitionism asserts the existence of non-natural moral truth, it should not be expected to explain the nature of such truth. Indeed, non-natural properties are probably not explicable in conceptual or intellectual terms. If non-natural properties can be grasped, and I believe they can, both the capacity to grasp them and the properties themselves will likely remain unanalyzable. They are simply foundational and must be accepted by their intuitive force⁴. Thus, they are not suitable to the process of deconstruction and analysis which typifies much intellectual comprehension. Hence, ethical intuitionism’s epistemological and ontological theses cannot be substantiated in the same way a scientific theory could be substantiated by empirical data. Nonetheless, throughout the essay I intend to argue for the validity of some form of ethical intuitionism. This is the challenge which confronts any ethical absolutist, yet it is a perennial challenge to philosophy which I believe can be met. The mind transcends the narrow borders of the physical world. When foraging for meaning, philosophers must plunge deep into the realms of ontology and phenomenology, sober but invigorated.

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⁴ As I will note later, there are additional methods for determining the validity of an intuition apart from intuitive force. However, the basic idea that the non-natural properties of ethics are unanalyzable, fundamental, and non-reducible remains true.
Chapter 1- Ethical Intuitionism

Ethical intuitionism is best understood in contrast to competing metaethical theories. In his compelling case for ethical intuitionism, Michael Huemer conjectures that ethical intuitionism is categorically distinct from other metaethical theories\(^5\). According to Huemer, the significant distinction between ethical intuitionism and other ethical theories—such as naturalism, subjectivism, non-cognitivism, and nihilism—revolves around whether the relevant theories consider moral values to exist independent of other psychological/physiological properties. On the one hand, naturalism reduces moral values to natural properties and subjectivism reduces moral values to psychological properties. On the other hand, non-cognitivism asserts that moral properties are identical to valueless emotions and nihilism asserts that moral properties are illusions. Therefore, naturalists and subjectivists reduce moral properties to non-evaluative physical or psychological properties while non-cognitivists and nihilists eliminate moral properties altogether. In other words, the reductionists believe that an action can be good but only in the sense of satisfying physical or psychological properties whereas the eliminativists deny that an action can be good at all. However, both reductionists and eliminativists reject the existence of any set of moral properties beyond natural ones. In this sense, ethical intuitionism is uniquely dualist: it asserts fundamental non-natural ethical properties.

In order to clarify ethical intuitionism in contrast to other meta-ethical approaches, it will be helpful to illustrate different ways each would approach a given scenario. Consider the simple moral proposition: *torturing an innocent child is wrong*. First, I will suggest possible interpretations of this statement that reductionist theorists may give. **Naturalists**: since torturing an innocent child inflicts more pain than pleasure, all things considered, one should not torture

\(^5\) See Huemer’s *Ethical Intuitionism.*
an innocent child\textsuperscript{6}. Subjectivists: Since society condemns torturing innocent children, one should not torture an innocent child. Now, I will suggest possible interpretations that eliminativist theorists may give. Non-cognitivists: When one says that torturing an innocent child is bad, what one really means is that such an action elicits strong internal negative emotions. Nihilists: Torturing an innocent child cannot be bad, because no such “bad” properties exist in the world. Finally, I will suggest the interpretation an ethical intuitionist would give. Ethical Intuitionist: Badness is a genuine, self-evident, and non-natural property which applies to torturing an innocent child.\textsuperscript{7}

Of course, these example interpretations are thoroughly simplified and actual theorists would propose much more complicated and nuanced explanations. However, this breakdown serves to highlight the distinctiveness of the ethical intuitionist’s approach to reality. The intuitionist’s world view vehemently opposes reductionist and eliminativist approaches. Further, it asserts aspects of reality which cannot be explained away in terms of more familiar or observable phenomena. On the one hand, ethical intuitionists could argue that only their ethical theory respects ordinary perceptions of morality whereas other theorists believe, in one way or another, that most people are deluding themselves. On the other hand, adversaries of intuitionism would claim that intuitionists advocate a perplexing vision of reality which relies on phenomena unfamiliar to those that science has meticulously recorded. At this point, intuitionists must justify their theory against indictments that it is absurd, unphilosophical, and naïve.

\textsuperscript{6} This specific example of moral thinking is characteristic of a strain of ethical hedonism. Another example of a naturalistic metaethical theory is social Darwinism. Here, the innate fitness which increases the probability of survival and procreation is the natural property identified with goodness.

\textsuperscript{7} I am drawing a distinction between these metaethical categories in order to highlight the uniqueness of ethical intuitionism. In reality, I do not believe these categories are clearly demarcated. In fact, in one way or another, these theories which compete with ethical intuitionism all devolve into a rejection of absolute moral truth. Moreover, I believe that the rejection of absolute moral truth is concomitant with the rejection of the possibility of ethics altogether. A system that denies the reality of the objects with which it deals is self-defeating. In other words, a monistic ethical theory does not represent an alternate approach to ethics; it represents the death of ethics.
Like many comprehensive ethical theories, ethical intuitionism contains an epistemological as well as metaphysical thesis. The epistemological thesis can be roughly formulated as follows: moral values can be cognized through intuition as self-evident and non-inferential ethical truths. Of course, this definition contains a few enigmatic properties, namely self-evidence, non-inferentiality, and intuition. One of the major tasks of ethical intuitionists has been to mine these elements exhaustively in order to devise the most appealing and reasonable form of ethical intuitionism.

The meaning of “self-evidence” initially seems apparent; however it is susceptible to porous definitions. Various definitions of self-evidence have been posited by ethical intuitionists. Sidgwick, for example, suggests that a moral proposition is self-evident if it must “be accepted at once by an intelligent and unbiased mind” (Sidgwick, 229). This definition is misleading because it implies that self-evidence depends upon the speed at which a proposition is accepted. However, speed is an entirely irrelevant factor regarding self-evidence. Sidgwick goes on to compare the self-evidence of moral principles to that of mathematical axioms. In itself, this is not a definition, but it indicates the kind of thing self-evidence is in relationship to more familiar phenomena. Ross expands the definition of self-evidence by suggesting that a proposition is self-evident if “it is evident without any need of proof, or of evidence beyond itself” (Ross, 29). Here, Ross suggests that self-evident propositions must be accepted by the force of some intellectual compulsion, or seeming, that they must be true. Since the truth of such self-evident propositions is grasped by this intellectual seeming, any further substantiating proof is unnecessary. In fact, if self-evident propositions comprise the foundation of knowledge, they may not be amenable to

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8 In fact, the relationship between speed and an intuition’s clarity is obscure. Often, people will experience strong immediate intuitions. However, upon reflection, these intuitions may turn out to be nothing more than misconceived notions. It is important to note, though, that the realization that the former intuition is in fact mistaken is itself an intuition. Therefore, while intuitions may be faulty, they are inescapable and must eventually be relied on.

9 The term “seeming” is drawn from George Bealer’s “Intuition and the Autonomy of Philosophy”.
any proof whatsoever. Regardless of whether their foundationalism is granted, self-evident propositions must not require proof\(^\text{10}\). As explained earlier, self-evident propositions are validated by intellectual seemings. Since they are already validated by intellectual seemings, any additional evidence is superfluous.

In addition to its self-evidence, moral truth is also non-inferential. The truth of a moral proposition is not arrived at through a deductive process. Instead, moral truth is the axiomatic core to which deductions may appeal. Conceptually, there is an intimate relationship between a moral truth’s self-evidence and its non-inferentiality. It is certainly true that any self-evident proposition must also be non-inferential. Again, if a proposition is prima facie true, no further evidence is required. In other words, if a proposition’s truth is gleaned exclusively through a comprehensive understanding of the proposition, then evidence for the proposition lies in the nature of the proposition itself. The proposition’s truth need not be inferred from anterior propositions. In this sense, non-inferentiality is a necessary component of self-evident propositions.

Another element of ethical intuitionism which begs explanation is the concept of intuition. Intuition can be defined in the following way: the name given to an event during which a truth is grasped by means of its self-evidence and non-inferentiality. This event manifests itself experientially as a magnetic pull towards the relevant truth, referred to as a “seeming” (Bealer, 208) or a conviction (Ross, 41). The definition of intuition can be easily constrained so that it refers only to ethical intuitions by qualifying the relevant “truth” grasped as “ethical truth”. The general definition for intuition has credibility in certain fields like mathematics and logic. Thus, the move to formalizing a specific definition for ethical intuitions demonstrates that ethical intuitions are not totally unprecedented and mysterious phenomena. Rather, they are merely one

\(^{10}\) Of course, whether self-evident truth exists is still up for debate.
variation of a familiar theme. To put it differently, ethical intuitionism and logic intuitionism are
dualistic in the same manner. The only difference between the two is that ethical intuitionism
contends that intuitions can be extended to the field of moral truth.

This dualism, which ethical intuitionists and logic intuitionists share, leads to another
feature of intuitionist epistemology: ethical truths are grasped by the understanding in the same
way that mathematical and logical axioms are grasped. Although this idea is emphatically
espoused by most ethical intuitionists, I find it to be the weakest element in the theory. For now,
I will offer a terse explanation as to why many ethical intuitionists include this element in their
theory. Primarily, ethical truth is situated in the understanding in order to fortify a domain of
absolute truth, impervious to subjectivity. In virtue of its position in the cognitive domain, ethical
truth obtains the same absoluteness and objectivity that logic truths enjoy. The flowing,
torrential, and irrational sphere of emotions, on the other hand, threatens to undermine the
absoluteness of ethical truth. Thus, ethical intuitionists believe that if ethical truth is rendered
emotional, it will be thereby labeled subjective. In other words, many believe that emotions are
merely psychological responses to stimuli and do not possess any normative properties 11.

This feature of ethical intuitionist epistemology—that ethical truth is perceived by the
understanding—bleeds over into ethical intuitionist metaphysics. Most ethical intuitionists
characterize ethical propositions as cognitive. As mentioned earlier, since ethical truth is
cognitive, it is equally as valid as other cognitive propositions, such as logical axioms.
Furthermore, just like logical axioms, ethical truth is non-natural. This feature of ethical truth is
meant to be juxtaposed with other ethical theories that posit that moral phenomena can be
reduced to natural phenomena. For example, some ethical theorists argue that something is

11 The relationship between subjective emotions and objective reason will be discussed in more depth in Chapters 3
and 4.
morally good in proportion to the degree of pleasure it induces. Pleasure, here, is meant as a
natural psychological property. This approach to morality is decidedly unsatisfactory for ethical
intuitionists. If ethical goodness is determined by the degree of a certain psychological sensation
an object elicits, then goodness and the sensation become coextensive. Thus, if an object ceases
to induce a negative psychological response in a subject, it is no longer immoral for that subject.

There are convincing reasons as to why ethical intuitionists find naturalism unpalatable.
As the prior analysis reveals, naturalism is inherently subjective. If moral properties are reduced
to subjective psychological properties, then moral properties must also be subjective. Fringe
cases featuring individuals possessing abnormal psychological frameworks are particularly
problematic for naturalism. Should a psychopath who revels in the thrill of murder be thereby
licensed to commit the abhorrent act? Here, naturalists may protest that everyone’s psychological
interests must be accounted for. Therefore, naturalism is more objective that hitherto portrayed
because it addresses everyone impartially. However, even if everyone shares identically
constituted psychological frameworks, naturalism would remain subjective to the mass of
individuals. Thus, a case can be constructed in which everyone coordinates to execute a heinous
action. For example, imagine a world containing ten people, nine of which enjoy inflicting
gruesome pain and one of which enjoys suffering this pain. In such a world, naturalism would be
coerced to sanction the torture of the one individual by the other nine. The unlikeliness of such a
scenario is irrelevant. The fact that it is theoretically sensible reveals the fallacy inherent in
naturalism.

How does non-naturalism escape these flaws of subjectivism that cripple naturalism? The
answer, already evident earlier in this chapter, is that non-naturalism implies a metaphysical
dualism. If non-natural moral properties exist, then propositions are right or wrong to the degree
to which they satisfy these properties, regardless of a person’s psychological framework. The validity of logical axioms, for instance, is not compromised by a person’s inaptitude in recognizing that validity. Rather, axioms are intrinsically valid, independent of one’s attitude to them.

The monistic perception of the world that naturalism embraces creates another perplexing problem with the ethical theory: it does not seem particularly moral. Naturalists argue that people should behave in ways that satisfy certain natural criteria. Yet, it is unclear where this moral imperative comes from. For example, if good is defined as pleasure, it is unclear how the proposition “singing makes me happy” can be transcribed to “I should sing because it makes me happy”. Granted, if by this latter statement one merely means to suggest the empty conditional: “if I want to be happy I should sing because singing makes me happy”, then the statement is comprehensible. However, if one means to argue that it is a moral imperative to sing, one must include an additional premise: that happiness is morally good.

G.E. Moore makes this point in his well-known open-question argument (Moore, 15). Here, Moore exploits an incoherency in naturalistic statements like “pleasure is good”. If the predicate “good” is defined as “pleasure”, then the statement can be rewritten as “pleasure is pleasure”. This, of course is a completely uninformative and vacuous statement. An example will help illustrate the absurdity of the naturalistic definition of morality. Suppose you are considering adopting a child because loving the child will dispel your aching loneliness and enrich your life, thereby increasing your happiness. You decide to seek help from an ethical naturalist to inform your decision regarding whether you should adopt a child. Upon hearing your position, the naturalist recommends that you adopt the child because it will increase your happiness which, of course, is pleasurable. Unsatisfied, you may press the philosopher to explain
why, given that it will be pleasurable, you should do it. The naturalist will have no further
response except to insist that it will be pleasurable. In order to offer a meaningful answer, the
naturalist would have to propose that pleasure is good and that goodness is a property distinct
from pleasure. However, since the naturalist rejects any such properties at the outset, this
meaningful answer will prove hopelessly elusive.

Before moving on, I must address one of the most pressing questions hounding ethical
intuitionism: how can ethical intuitionism accommodate disagreement and arrive at correct moral
decisions? I lump these two questions together because they both revolve around doubt
concerning ethical intuitionism’s implementation. Even if intuition is accepted as potentially
grasping ethical truth, doubts regarding the ability to verify the veracity of intuitions remain. The
problem of confirming intuitions is directly linked to the problem of moral disagreement. In
other words, moral disagreement can occur for the following two reasons: (1) absolute ethical
truth does not exist (2) some of the moral opinions are invalid. Ethical intuitionism rejects the
former explanation and espouses the latter. However, critics of intuitionism object that, even if
the latter is true, ethical intuitionism fails to supply any method for weeding out invalid ethical
beliefs.

In order to begin answering the question, I would like to propose an analogy. When
questioned about his strategy, chess prodigy Magnus Carlsen remarked that most of his moves
arise from intuition. Carlsen went on to clarify that although he quickly intuits his moves, he then
spends a significant amount of time and laborious effort verifying them. In practice, ethical
intuitionism proceeds similarly. Although people are frequently seized by powerful ethical
intuitions, they must undergo a thorough and arduous process of confirmation before acting
accordingly.\textsuperscript{12} Huemer lists fifteen sources of error which intuitions, just as any other source of knowledge, are susceptible to: bias, miscalculation, confusion, misunderstanding and lack of understanding, oversight, hasty judgements, false or incomplete information, unarticulated assumptions, stubbornness, fallacies, forgetfulness, intrinsic difficulty of issues, inarticulate evidence, and mental defects (Huemer, 137-139). Sidgwick acknowledges many of these sources of error and insists that ethical intuitionists must guard against biases and inconsistency. Thus, ethical intuitionism is in no way a dogmatically naïve ethical theory. However, no ethical intuition can be verified with certainty just as no ordinary sense perception can be verified with certainty. Rather, one’s trust in an intuition is rooted in the strength of that intuition.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12} Such a demand on intuitions would make quick ethical decisions susceptible to error.

\textsuperscript{13} By strength, here, I mean the extent to which one’s intuition appears self-evident and indisputably true.
Chapter 2- Criticism of Ethical Intuitionism

Now that I have presented the case for ethical intuitionism, I wish to enumerate some of its most common and convincing criticisms. Intuitionism, as an ethical theory, is often neglected by philosophers. When it is addressed, it usually suffers copious scorn and contempt. Many of the assaults against ethical intuitionism revolve around common themes and the borders between arguments are often tenuous. One of the goals in this chapter is to suggest a heuristic for parsing the mass of critical perspectives. Another goal is to flesh out the best arguments for these criticisms. Thus, this chapter, along with the previous chapter, should give a sense of the debate between ethical intuitionists and their adversaries.

Arguments against philosophical theories can assume several forms, prominent among which are the inductive and deductive. Inductive arguments are probabilistic ones which set out to establish a theory’s low likelihood of being true. There are several reasons why a theory could be improbable. The most obvious cause for a theory’s improbability stems from lack of evidence. As the category “evidence” implies, this is an empirical test for hypotheses. The empirical inductive test is a familiar method since it is employed assiduously in scientific interrogation. A scientific hypothesis gathers and forfeits credibility insofar as it satisfies available evidence. Alternatively, a theory’s improbability may also stem from its complexity. This method, which can be termed Ockham’s inductive test\(^\text{14}\), proposes that that a theory’s accuracy and its complexity are inversely proportional. Therefore, if two hypotheses explain phenomenon with equal precision, the hypothesis with fewer assumptions and less complexity should be favored.

Deductive arguments, on the other hand, are strictly unempirical forms of arguments. When applied to a hypothesis, a deductive test scans the flow of an argument and judges whether

\(^{14}\) “Ockham” here refers to “Ockham’s Razor”, a theory proposed by the 14\(^{\text{th}}\) century philosopher and theologian William of Ockham which states that the fewer assumptions a hypothesis makes the more credibility it attains.
each step is sufficiently justified by prior established steps and premises. The deductive test operates based on logical principles. Deductive tests are only effective in evaluating an argument’s elements which can be transcribed into formalized symbols. However, it is incapable of evaluating the soundness of the argument’s content, especially regarding foundational assumptions. In short, whereas deductive tests deal with an argument’s logical validity, inductive tests deal with an argument’s semantic, content-based soundness.

First, I shall lay out the arguments against intuitionism which fall under the “empirical inductive” category. This species of arguments usually pressures the ethical intuitionist claim that intuitions can serve as a reliable source for ethics. For example, in Ethical Intuitionism, W.D. Hudson proposes two criteria for awareness of an object: knowledge and belief. According to Hudson, ethical intuitionists commit the grave error of conflating these two categories so that belief is recast as knowledge (Hudson, 58). To offer an analogy, suppose a woman, Jane Smith, is suffering persistent, excruciating anguish from terminal cancer. Unable to tolerate the pain any longer, Jane pleads with her husband, John, to disconnect the current medical assistance she receives from the hospital. Although John hates to see his wife endure so much pain, he cannot bring himself to sever the medical aid. John informs his wife that he believes it is wrong to kill regardless of the circumstances despite her protestations that it is a merciful act. An ethical intuitionist may argue that John glimpses some sort of absolute ethical truth when he decides not to euthanize his wife. However, Hudson would counter trenchantly that John is not intuiting anything. Rather, he is merely confusing his belief that he should not euthanize his wife with some arcane knowledge that it is absolutely wrong.

There are a few possible routes Hudson’s complaint can take. One possibility would deny that intuition constitutes knowledge since the supposed realm of absolute ethics is nonexistent.
Such an approach preemptively rejects the possibility of intuitionism and, therefore, becomes circular. Another approach denies the possibility of knowledge altogether. However, this approach is unsatisfactory because it requires further argument for widespread skepticism and, furthermore, it grants that there is no special difference between intuitive knowledge and other sorts of knowledge. Finally, one could also deny the possibility of distinguishing between intuition-rooted knowledge and intuition-rooted beliefs. This is the most substantive of the possible claims. It proposes that there is no evidence one can appeal to in order to ensure that one’s intuition transcends a subjective belief. In fact, according to this argument, intuitionism licenses people to embrace spontaneous flares of emotions and validate them as ethical intuitions. Richard Brandt has this complaint in mind when he claims that "no coherent explanation or epistemological account has ever been offered to explain why these intuitions are reliable guides to answering our questions" (Brandt, 5). In addition, Sinnott-Armstrong refers to this problem when he points out: “If Thelma could be noninferentially justified in believing that eating meat is wrong, then Louise could also be noninferentially justified in believing that eating meat is not wrong, even if neither can infer her belief from any reason” (Sinnott Armstrong, 10). Since one cannot appeal to any evidence to substantiate an intuition, there is no way to adjudicate the validity of warring intuitions.

Thus, the argument against the reliability of ethical intuitions naturally evolves into the argument against the possibility for verifying intuitions. Hudson, again, argues that "there are no agreed tests for deciding whether or not a man is morally 'blind', as there are for deciding whether his eyesight is defective." (Hudson, 58) In other words, there is no verification method
to which one can appeal when justifying one’s supposed intuition. A. J. Ayer, the champion of emotivism\textsuperscript{15}, explicitly addresses this verification problem:

"When such differences of opinion arise in connection with an ordinary empirical proposition, one may attempt to resolve them by referring to, or actually carrying out, some relevant empirical test. But with regard to ethical statements, there is, on the 'absolutist' or 'intuitionist' theory, no relevant empirical test" (Ayer, 106)

Here, Ayer mentions the empirical nature of his critique outright. It is clear that the criticism belongs to the empirical inductive category. At this point, Ayer is not trying to establish the impossibility of intuitionism. Rather, he means to stress that a theory that cannot arbitrate between contesting ethical opinions is an implausible ethical theory.

These empirical doubts all gravitate to the most common and crippling blow: moral disagreement. Moral disagreement is the focal point for criticisms against intuitionism. Tara Smith delivers the blow of moral disagreement blisteringly: “seemingly, to defend their position, Intuitionists would have to assert that half the world's population is suffering from a defective conscience—impaired abilities to appreciate the self-evident” (Smith, 25). Smith’s devastating point suggests the following multi-step argument

(1) Individuals have contradictory opinions concerning moral issues. (Premise)

(2) Contradictory ethical truths cannot both be correct. (Premise)

(3) At least one of the individuals’ opinions must not be an ethical truth. (From 1 and 2)

(4) Both the individuals claim their opinions are ethical truths. (Premise)

(5) Ethical intuitions cannot be trusted. (From 3 and 4)

\textsuperscript{15} Emotivism, also called non-cognitivism, is the ethical theory which states that moral propositions are nothing more that value-less expressions of emotions.
The first step is a premise granting the assumption underlying the argument from disagreement. The second step applies the principle of excluded middle to ethical truth. The third step follows from the first two: if contradictory ethical truths cannot both be correct and people experience contradictory ethical truths, at least one must be incorrect. The fourth step is a premise granting the assumption of the scenario. The fifth step concludes that intuitions cannot be trusted because at least one person must have fallaciously claimed that he/she intuited ethical truth.

In order to defend themselves, intuitionists must debate one of the steps in this argument. Obviously, intuitionists cannot cast doubt on the first step since it is merely a restatement of their theory. Many intuitionists have objected to the empirical point made in the second step. They suggest that most moral conflicts result from the circumstantial complexity involved in the application of moral principles rather than their foundation. Some moral conflicts, though, are difficult to deny. Consider the case discussed earlier concerning Jane, who suffers extreme pain from cancer, and her husband, John. In one sense, intuitionists are correct: John and someone in favor of euthanasia will probably agree that murder is wrong. However, when the case is further specified so that it asks whether it is morally justifiable to kill a terminally ill individual who suffers terrible anguish, moral disagreement follows. Thus, if half of the world population believes euthanasia should be condemned and the other half believes it should be extolled, although everyone may agree with the general claim that murder is wrong, they disagree over the particularized claim that ending someone’s life prematurely is always wrong. This would imply that half the population experiences faulty intuition.

Moral disagreement, compounded with unreliability of intuitions and unavailability of evidence, emerges as a nightmare for ethical intuitionists. By itself, moral disagreement already

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16 Huemer makes this point on 129-131.
renders intuitionism less plausible. Further, other fields which rely on intuitions tend to attract more unified agreement. For example, most people agree on the validity of foundational logic principles. Inductively, then, intuitionism loses some of its appeal in the face of moral disagreement. On top of this, no methodology exists by which clashing parties can muster evidence that their intuitions should be awarded preeminence over conflicting intuitions. Even if intuitions exist, it would be difficult to disentangle legitimate intuitions from mere attitudinal expressions grounded in culture or genetic disposition. Ethical Intuitionism’s prospects also blanch when ideals of diversity and pluralism are considered. The theory seems to recommend a forced consensus of opinions under which attempts to impugn the dominant moral principles of the time are summarily repelled because they are hostile to the zeitgeist. The zeitgeist can always claim that their opinions reflect unassailable moral intuitions. Prejudice against minorities, for instance, has often assumed this character. Together, these worries about intuitionism create devastating problems for an inductive empirical approach to validating theories.

Empirical inductive problems mark only one instance of the inductive problems which swarm intuitionism. Problems pertaining to Ockham’s inductive test of theories are also often hurled against intuitionists, specifically the problem of “queerness”. Mackie, perhaps the most passionate advocate of this criticism, explains: "if there were objective values, then they would be entities or quantities of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe" (Mackie, 38). When one tries to discern the nature of moral values, one immediately recognizes the absurdity inherent in the task. Are ethical values concrete phenomena a person experiences via a sense organ? Are they phenomena that exist in our physical world, and, if not, where are they located? These questions all point to problems for ethical intuitionist metaphysics.
Such a problem invariably poises itself against any theory which asserts a fundamental dualism in the world. For example, in philosophy of mind, the problem of “queerness” undermines mind-body dualism. Mind-body dualists deny that mental phenomena can be reduced to purely physical or functional descriptions. Instead, they argue that the mind consists of sensory qualia which cannot be identified with corresponding physical or functional characteristics. However, the assertion of these enigmatic qualia immediately makes dualists vulnerable to the same critique of “queerness” launched at intuitionists. Whenever the chartable empirical world is ignored in favor of qualities which are essentially impervious to measurability and observation, skepticism is sure to abound.

Mackie also attacks the plausibility of intuitionist epistemology: "If we were aware of [moral intuitions], it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing anything else" (Mackie, 38). Here, Mackie momentarily grants the intuitionist claim that moral properties exist. But, if they exist, they must map to a faculty which can intuit them. When demanded to account for such a faculty, intuitionists become flustered.

So far, I have discussed the best arguments which belong to the category of inductive arguments. First, the argument from disagreement, which relies on the empirical inductive, and next, the argument from queerness, which relies on Ockham’s inductive. As mentioned earlier, in addition to inductive arguments, deductive arguments are hurled at intuitionists. Deductive arguments, if valid, represent a stronger type of arguments than their inductive counterparts. This is because inductive arguments at most prove that a theory is unlikely to be true and therefore should be approached skeptically. However, deductive arguments say something stronger.
Deductive arguments prove definitively that a theory is false and therefore must be rejected. They do so by uncovering a contradiction in a theory which renders it logically invalid.

The most prominent deductive argument employed by critics of intuitionism is the argument from practical reasons. This argument begins by making a basic distinction between two types of reason: normative reason and motivating reason\(^{17}\). The thrust of the argument from practical reason seeks to maintain the integrity of the normative/motivating distinction. Thus, it emphasizes the incapacity of pure normative reason to impel action.

The argument can be stated more technically. The following formalization of the argument from practical reason borrows heavily from Huemer’s formalization (Huemer, 157).

1. Motives for actions require desires. (Premise)
2. A normative belief does not entail a motivating desire. (Premise)
3. Therefore, no normative belief by itself should constitute a motivating desire. (From 1 and 2)
4. Moral attitudes entail the presence of motivating desires. (Premise)
5. Therefore, since moral attitudes entail the presence of motivating desires and normative beliefs by themselves do not constitute motivating desires, moral attitudes must be distinct from normative beliefs. (From 3 and 4)

The first step is an intuitive premise. In some ways it even seems tautological. For instance, it could be interpreted: if you want to do an action then you must desire to do an action. But, since “want” and “desire” are synonyms, this amounts to: if you desire to do an action then you must desire to do an action. However, this interpretation is misleading. The first step is really trying to establish what constitutes a motive. According to the Humean conception, motives are constituted by desires. The importance of the first step manifests itself in

\(^{17}\) This distinction is made by Huemer in his discussion of practical reasons (155).
juxtaposition with the second step, which proposes that normative beliefs (as opposed to motivating beliefs) do not entail desires. Normative reason, then, must be reduced to a retrospective, reflective role in which it merely assesses desires. Thus, normative reason is categorically distinct from motivating desires and cannot, on its own, generate them. At this point, the fourth premise asserts itself. Since moral attitudes must motivate actions, they also must entail motivating desires. If moral attitudes are determined solely by normative reason, they must be incapable of galvanizing action. Thus, as step 5 concludes, moral attitudes must be distinct from normative reason\textsuperscript{18}.

This argument can be clarified by again considering the case of Jane and John. As a reminder, Jane suffers agonizing pain from terminal cancer and John must decide whether to euthanize her. Suppose John makes a normative judgement that euthanasia is always wrong or, in a more concrete formulation, that one is never justified to end an innocent person’s life. If this judgement stems purely from normative reason then it is difficult to see how it translates into a corresponding action. Suppose that Jane’s brother cannot bear the immensity of pain his sister experiences, so he decides to do everything in his power to euthanize her. Now, if John is motivated by his normative judgement, he should take measures to prevent Jane’s brother from euthanizing Jane. However, if John’s decision is purely normative and intellectual, how does it motivate John to act accordingly? In fact, it seems that the motivating force here is John’s overpowering feeling that ending his wife’s life would be an abhorrent action. This emotive language, though, is utterly estranged from normative reasoning. An intuitionist might argue that

\textsuperscript{18} The argument from practical reasons relies on the notion that a metaethical theory should enable ethical considerations to generate ethical actions. While denying this premise may immunize ethical intuitionism from the argument, it also pays the following steep price: ethical intuitionism can only account for the nature of ethical truth and must reject the common perception that intuitions can be implemented in ethical behavior. The relationship between the argument from practical reasons and ethical intuitionism is further expounded in Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{18} This distinction is made by Huemer in his discussion of practical reasons (155).
John’s decision is comprised of compounded reasons. The normative judgement that euthanasia is morally reprehensible is accompanied by the motivating judgement that one’s actions should correspond to moral values. However, if this is true, normative reason must ultimately make a foundational appeal to motivating reason. Needless to say, this hybrid theory of normative reason fundamentally relying on motivating reason would be anathema to an intuitionist seeking a purely cognitive account of ethics.

In order to debate the argument from practical reasons, intuitionists would have to either question premises 1, 2, or 4 or the conclusions drawn from these premises in steps 3 and 5. Huemer does just this in his defense of intuitionism (Huemer, 157-168). However, even if particular details of the premises or the logical flow of the argument can be questioned, the thrust of the argument retains its force. There is something phenomenologically unsound in characterizing ethics as a dispassionate series of unassailable rules. As Jane’s case illustrates, many ethical judgements seem intrinsically connected to the living experience fraught with explosive passion. This phenomenological disingenuousness evident in ethical intuitionism will be elaborated more thoroughly in the following two chapters.

The best argument against intuitionism, in my opinion, is a combination of the three categories of criticism: empirical inductive, Ockham’s inductive, and deductive. The empirical inductive arguments deal with the unreliability of intuitions and the prevalence of moral disagreement. These concerns establish the problems surrounding the concrete application of ethical intuitionism and its dearth of empirical evidence. Ockham’s inductive considerations deepen these concerns by pointing to the implausibility of intuitions and their incommensurability with the empirically charted world science records. Finally, the deductive argument from practical reason insists that even if one is willing to overlook intuitionism’s
implausibility, an unbridgeable gap separates normative reasons from motivating reasons. Moreover, even if one believes intuitionism can recover from this logical stumble, one must confront the phenomenological incredulity besetting a purely normative account of ethics.
Chapter 3- The Logic Analogy

Now that I have set out the case for intuitionism as well as criticisms of that case, I will focus in on one of intuitionism’s primary features: the analogy to logic. I will argue that while the analogy to logic is useful to clarify and bolster some intuitionist claims, it runs amok to the extent that ethics becomes a species of the “understanding” or “reason” or “mathematics” and ethical intuitionism becomes unsound. By circumscribing the intellectual components of intuitionism, this chapter seeks to clear space for a phenomenologically sensitive account of dualistic meta-ethics. I will call this theory affective intuitionism. In this chapter, then, I will criticize aspects of mainstream intuitionism, which I will call cognitive intuitionism. In the next chapter, I will martial a case for affective intuitionism which bridges the gap between emotivism and cognitive intuitionism.

Before engaging in an examination of cognitive intuitionism, it will be helpful to sketch the development of logic’s position within the theory of intuitionism. An early intuitionist, Richard Price (1723-1791), states in his A Review of the Principle Questions in Morals: “What is the power—or faculty—within us that perceives the distinctions of right and wrong? My answer is. The understanding.” (Price, 6) Already, here, ethical intuitionism begins to identify itself with logic, which operates within the province of the understanding.

Henry Sidgwick (1838-1900) reinforces Price’s claim in his seminal The Method of Ethics,

But ‘sense’ suggests a capacity for feelings that may vary from one person to another without either being in error, rather than a faculty of cognition; and I think it’s very

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19 This account of the development of logic in the theory of intuitionism is not a comprehensive history but a conceptual sketch.
important to avoid this suggestion. So I think it is better to use the term ‘reason’, with the explanation given above, to name the faculty of moral cognition (Sidgwick, 17) Sidgwick emphasizes that morality must be situated within the realm of reason in order to establish its objective nature. Reason, of course, is also the domain to which mathematics and logic are traditionally attributed.

In his influential essay, “Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?”, H. A. Prichard (1871-1947) proposes that certain moral obligations are “immediate, in precisely the sense in which a mathematical apprehension is immediate, e.g. the apprehension that this three-sided figure, in virtue of its being three-sided, must have three angles” (Prichard, 8). Building on Price and Sidgwick, who position ethics within the camp of logic, Prichard identifies ethics with the self-evident nature of mathematics, specifically geometry.

Similarly, W. D. Ross argues that ethics is axiomatic in The Right and the Good (1877-1971):

That an act…is prima facie right, is self-evident; not in the sense that it is evident from beginning of our lives, or as soon as we attend to the proposition for the first time, but in the sense that when we have reached sufficient mental maturity and have given sufficient attention to the proposition it is evident without any need of proof, or of evidence beyond itself. It is self-evident just as a mathematical axiom, or the validity of a form of inference, is evident. (Ross, 29)

Ross builds on Prichard’s analogy of geometry but broadens the comparison from a specific branch to mathematics in general. Furthermore, Ross suggests an additional comparison: inferences, or, in other words, logic. With Ross, ethical truth firmly ensconces itself within the
domain of the understanding as a strand of logical truth. Here, cognitive intuitionism is crystallized.

Before engaging in a critique of the prominent position reason assumes in intuitionism, I will discuss the truth undergirding the relationship. Perhaps the most important feature that intuitionism and logic share is their intrinsic necessity. Indeed, principles of logic are often cited as the most unequivocal instances of necessity. Logic concerns itself with dictates of reason that are nonsensical to impugn. Consider the following example of the rule of inference known as universal instantiation: (1) All philosophers are intelligent (2) Socrates is a philosopher (3) Therefore, Socrates is intelligent. If someone accepts the first two premises and rejects the conclusion, that person is necessarily committing an error. To put it another way, there is no possible world in which the premises are true and the conclusion is false.

From the perspective of moral absolutism\textsuperscript{20}, the same necessity that applies to logical truth must apply to ethical truth. To illustrate why this is the case, I will temporarily assume that ethical truth is contingent. If ethical truth is contingent, then an ethical truth in one possible world could have a contradictory correlate in another possible world. Thus, once could say: “I believe that torturing an innocent person is ethically wrong in my world but in another possible world, where ethics are differently configured, torturing an innocent person may be ethically right”. However, a moral absolutist must reject such a proposition on the grounds that ethical truth cannot contain a contradiction\textsuperscript{21}. Of course, if one subscribes to ethical subjectivism, this statement may appear reasonable. After all, the act of relegating ethics to contingency forms a kind of modal subjectivism. Modal subjectivism is basically cultural subjectivism extended to

\textsuperscript{20} The following argument—that ethical truth must be necessary—only concerns metaethical theories that endorse moral absolutism.

\textsuperscript{21} The thesis that moral absolutism entails the necessity of ethical truth resurfaces in my discussion of a modal test for affective intuitionism expressed in Chapter 4.
possible worlds. Instead of every culture wielding its own ethical truth, every possible world wields its own ethical truth. Clearly, any theory which endorses moral absolutism must unequivocally reject the idea that moral truth is contingent, whether on culture or on possibility.

One may argue here that there is a disanalogy between cultural subjectivism and modal subjectivism. Whereas culture subjectivism deals with realities that are actually manifest, modal subjectivism deals with conceptual possibilities that may never come into fruition. However, in this case, even a conceptual subjectivism seems problematic for realists because it implies that the truth of ethical propositions derives from some accidental property of the proposition, such as empirical circumstance. Conversely, if ethical propositions are intrinsically true, they should remain so in every possible world. But, if ethical truths could assume different shapes in alternate possible worlds, then ethical truths are malleable. It is this malleability which a realist would emphatically deny. According to moral absolutism, ethical truth is accepted because it is intrinsically good. If it is even possible for an ethical truth to forfeit its goodness, then it is not really an ethical truth at all.

In order to avoid confusion here, I should note that I am referring to an object’s inherent goodness rather than its desirability in terms of implementation, which may vary depending on context. For example, suppose Bill volunteers with a food drive every day for an hour. One day, Bill’s daughter breaks her leg playing soccer and needs someone to drive her to the hospital. Unfortunately, this incident occurs at the same time that Bill usually volunteers at the food drive. Most people would agree that, in this case, Bill should be ethically encouraged to skip his volunteering for the day and bring his daughter to the hospital. Your instinct might compel you, then, to argue that, in this case, volunteering forfeits its goodness. If this were true, it would contradict the premise that ethical truths are necessary and immutable. However, once analyzed
more closely, the problem dissipates. In this scenario, Bill is confronted with two conflicting ethical truths: (1) helping out strangers in need (2) helping out a daughter in need. When Bill opts to assist his daughter over a stranger, he does not thereby deny the goodness of helping out strangers. Rather, he merely demonstrates that the goodness of caring for his daughter outweighs that of caring for strangers in this particular situation. Throughout, the respective goodness of the alternatives remains fixed\(^\text{22}\).

The concept of necessity hints to another property shared between ethical intuitionism and logic. Both intuitionism and logic cannot be accommodated by a univocally empiricist or evolutionary philosophy. In general, necessity proves jarring for a Darwinian evolutionary framework of reality\(^\text{23}\). Evolution seeks to explain the natural world without any reference to unobservable or unexplainable phenomena. However, the natural world is essentially contingent\(^\text{24}\). Thus, since evolution explains the world exclusively through application of natural phenomena and natural phenomena are contingent, evolution only accommodates contingent phenomena. The argument can be stated more formally as follows:

1. Reality can be explained entirely from the standpoint of evolution. (Premise)
2. Evolution only validates the existence of observable phenomena. (Premise)
3. At least some necessary phenomena are not observable. (Premise)
4. Evolution does not validate the existence of at least some necessary phenomena. (From 2 and 3)

(5) Evolution denies the validity of at least some necessary phenomena. (From 1 and 4)

\(^{22}\) Again, ethical intuitionism will not provide a resolution as to how to adjudicate contesting intuitions. Such a task is reserved for first-order ethical theories.

\(^{23}\) Darwin, himself, believed that the evolutionary explanation of the universe was incomplete and that existence required explanation.

\(^{24}\) Most philosophers agree that the natural world is contingent. However, some philosophers, like Spinoza, who endorse a variation of pantheism, may contend that the natural world is necessary.
Step 1 proposes a strong evolutionary approach to reality that denies the existence of anything that cannot be captured within evolution’s constraints. Step 2 defines evolution’s constraints as only admitting phenomena which can be observed\textsuperscript{25}. Step 3 argues for the modest claim that some necessary phenomena are not observable. Logic and ethical truth are both instances of this type of necessary phenomena. Logic, in this case, would be considered conceptual as opposed to empirically observable. In fact, it may be the case that all necessary phenomena are not observable. If this were true, evolution would discount all necessary phenomena instead of only some\textsuperscript{26}. Step 4 follows from steps 2 and 3; if evolution only validates observable phenomena and some necessary phenomena are not observable, evolution must not validate those necessary phenomena which are not observable. Step 5 follows from steps 1 and 4; if evolution cannot account for some necessary phenomena and evolution accounts for all reality then evolution rejects the reality of those necessary phenomena.

Some possible modifications of the arguments should be noted here. Step 1 may be altered such that it argues that evolution partially explains reality as opposed to exhaustively explaining it. In this case, the conclusion would weaken drastically. Instead of claiming that some necessary phenomena do not exist, it would claim that some necessary phenomena cannot be accounted for from an evolutionary perspective. However, due to evolution’s success in the natural sciences in explaining empirical reality, many deem phenomena which cannot be accounted for by evolution as highly suspicious\textsuperscript{27}. Furthermore, pure philosophical empiricists would preemptively reject any theory that asserts the existence of unobservable phenomena.

Indeed, “empiricism” could be substituted for “evolution” throughout the argument, without the

\textsuperscript{25} The term “observe” here requires elaboration. Does the phenomenon itself need observation or only its effects? Is an object’s corporeality a necessary condition for its observation?

\textsuperscript{26} Then, the “at least some” qualifier could be removed from the argument.

\textsuperscript{27} The skeptical attitude toward phenomena that cannot be explained from the purview of evolutionary theory is sometimes referred to as “Scientism”.
argument’s meaning or force mitigating. In this sense, evolution and empiricism as philosophical perspectives are practically interchangeable.

Since evolutionary theory is widely respected as the most evidentially satisfactory account of the development of the world as we know it, any theory which cannot be explained through its categories at once loses credibility. Ethical intuitionism, which asserts non-natural properties and unobservable intuition, is hostile to an exclusively naturalistic account of reality. Therefore, intuitionism will inevitably be an unpopular theory amongst Darwinians and empiricists. At this point, the analogy to logic becomes indispensable for ethical intuitionists. The ability to intuit axioms of logic and the nature of those axioms are just as difficult to account for in a Darwinian framework as ethical intuitionism is. However, principles of logic are almost universally accepted as valid. Thus, by leaning on the validity of the principles of logic, ethical intuitionism finds support (in virtue of a conceptual precedent) for its own brand of unempirical necessity—ethical truth.

Now that I have described some of the ways in which the analogy to logic is invaluable for validating intuitionism—specifically regarding necessity and non-naturalness—I will focus on the problems that afflict cognitive intuitionism. Again, cognitive intuitionism, which is the most commonly promulgated form of ethical intuitionism among philosophers, situates ethics within the domain of reason. Thus, for cognitive intuitionists, logical truth and ethical truth differ referentially, not categorically. While logic deals with axioms that govern reason, morality deals with axioms that govern behavior. However, logic and ethics are axiomatic in the same exact sense. Ethics can be characterized as elements of rationality which vault the borders of reason and reign in the realm of human behavior. The actors remain the same—elements of rationality—but the stage changes.
When represented in this fashion, the misconceived nature of cognitive intuitionism becomes clear. Ethical truth does not manifest itself phenomenologically in the same way that principles of logic do. Since this is a phenomenological point, no argument can be constructed to prove its accuracy. Rather, one must reflect on personal experience with both sorts of phenomena in order to discover their incongruence.

Since the experience of ethical truth, here, assumes central importance, it is necessary to entertain a thought experiment. Take the earlier example of Jane Smith who suffers intolerable pain due to terminal cancer, and her husband, John. Although Jane pleads with her husband to disconnect the medical devices sustaining her life, John decides it is unethical for him to do so. What transpires in John’s mind? Perhaps, he imagines a summer day when he picnicked with his wife in a park and sunlight filtered through the trees and dappled her face as she smiled. To him, this memory courses with life. Even now that Jane is haggard and pale, John recognizes that same life pulsing in his wife. Whenever John considers his wife’s request, he imagines clamping out that light forever. Immediately, at the thought, he is struck by a powerful intuition: euthanizing his wife would be ethically reprehensible, regardless of the solace it would provide her.

It is not difficult to anticipate how cognitive intuitionists might respond to the emotive elements evident in the above scenario. They might argue that John’s decision is merely a psychological one, in that it is intended to alleviate psychological anguish. A genuine intuition—unlike John’s emotionally charged inclination—outstrips any emotional content and is a purely impartial phenomenon. However, if this rejoinder were true, then cognitive intuitionism would be compelled to argue that, in order for John to experience a valid ethical intuition, he must
maintain emotional distance from his wife. In other words, since emotional considerations muddle the clarity of intuitions, one must discard them in order to arrive at legitimate intuitions.

There are critical reasons to label such a rationalistic position not only undesirable but practically impossible. In order to understand why such an approach is practically impossible, one must delve into the theory’s ramifications. Suppose John happens to subscribe to cognitive intuitionism. When his wife begs him to euthanize her, he immediately thinks the action is abhorrent. However, he reasons to himself that his abhorrence could be emotionally motivated as opposed to rationally grounded. So, he tries to approach the situation from a neutral perspective. What would a stranger do if Jane had pleaded the stranger to euthanize her? Maybe the stranger would wonder: what would I do if Jane were my wife? Clearly, this course would be circular. John initially assumes a stranger’s perspective in order to attain impartiality but then the stranger reverts to John’s former intimate perspective. On the other hand, the stranger may maintain distance and try to access a cognitive ethical truth regarding euthanasia. But then, by approaching the question from a neutral perspective, the stranger overlooks an integral factor of the question: namely, Jane’s particular qualities that only someone intimate with her could fully appreciate. Thus, if emotional content is stripped from ethical decisions in an attempt to attain neutrality, some of the content of the relevant ethical proposition is thereby surrendered.

Cognitive intuitionists may argue that this scenario represents a practical rather than conceptual problem. While practically it may be impossible to disentangle cognitive intuitions from subjective emotions, conceptually one must do so. Ideally, in Jane’s case, a valid cognitive intuition would require intimate knowledge of Jane without that knowledge manifesting itself in emotion. It is important to note that this version of cognitive intuitions implies that emotions should be conferred respect as manifestations, and thus indicators, of an object’s worthiness.
Hence, they should not automatically be dismissed as moot or deceptive, though they might sometimes be accordingly deleterious.

However, such an objection ignores the brunt of the blow to cognitive intuitionism inflicted by phenomenology. It is not just that someone must be intimate with another to fully appreciate that person’s worthiness. Rather, the ethical conviction itself is steeped in visceral emotionality. If John were to approach the question of euthanizing his wife from a cold, rational perspective, John would be neglecting the heart of ethical truth. Of course, this does not imply that all emotions are ethical intuitions, just that ethical intuitionist are inherently emotive.\textsuperscript{28}

Jane’s scenario illustrates that intuitions cannot be classified as purely cognitive phenomena without purging them of a portion of their ethical content. Thus, any robust theory of ethical intuitionism must accommodate the centrality of emotions. Of course, reconciling emotion with ethical intuitionism is an arduous task. Any inclusion of emotion within morality rings of emotivism and subjectivism. However, I believe that the question of emotion’s position within intuitionism has been skirted as a kind of shortcut. Ethical intuitionists need to establish the necessity and objectivity of ethics on a firm basis and any intrusion of emotion threatens to undermine this goal. As a result, emotion has often been either exploited or neglected by metaethical theories. Non-cognitivists have exploited emotion in order to advance a brand of subjectivism and ethical intuitionists have anathematized it in order to secure a brand of absolutism. I believe a new path to ethical truth, which incorporates the analogy to logic as well as the visceral phenomenology of emotions, must be explored. Though this is the path less traveled, it can make all the difference.

\textsuperscript{28} This position will be discussed at length in the upcoming chapter.
Chapter 4- Affective Intuitionism

Ethical intuitionists have been reckless in identifying ethical truth with logical truth due to the advantages that such a relationship offers. The truths of logic are non-inferential, non-natural, self-evident, and necessary—all properties shared with ethical intuitions. Moreover, logical axioms enjoy widespread legitimacy, notwithstanding their empirically unaccountable features. However, the impulse to intellectualize ethics must be resisted. At the base of the impetus for this resistance lays a phenomenological thesis. We do not experience ethical truth like calculating automatons but like impassioned humans. The human emotional realm cannot be drained away without withering the moral system. Unlike logic, ethics cannot be reduced to a rigid series of rules or imperatives. The world of ethics is not the world of the unbridled animal (emotivism) or the cold computer (cognitive intuitionism). Rather, the world of ethics is a human world: a concoction of emotion and intellect\(^{29}\). What, then, is the relationship in ethics between emotion—the paradigm of subjectivity—and intellect—the paradigm of objectivity?

Before advancing any further, I must make an important distinction between emotion and affection. The primary difference between emotion and affection is that the latter possesses ethical content while the former does not. Phenomenologically, emotions and affections manifest themselves similarly. They are both fundamentally visceral, capable of racking a person’s entire physiological and psychological apparatus. No analog can be found among logic intuitions. Although an intuition about a valid inference may impress its intellectual attraction upon the thinking subject, it cannot overcome the subject with any visceral sensations. Of course, intellectual discovery may galvanize excitement. However, such excitement is an emotive response to the purely intellectual discovery. Therefore, logic intuitions bring clarity and

\(^{29}\) Of course this is a phenomenological point and may be disputed. However, I believe that most people do not experience ethics as emotivists, who indulge emotions, or cognitive intuitionists, who excise emotion.
precision, but forgo passion. An affection, then, refers to a proposition that is visceral and yet normative in that it describes an independently objective truth. Affective intuitions encapsulate emotions, but subjective emotions are blind to affections.

Just like logic intuitions, affections entail dualism. Subjective emotions can be characterized as psychological responses to natural stimuli. The whole subjective emotional process can be captured with naturalistic language\(^\text{30}\). Furthermore, affective intuitions are descriptions of independent ethical truth. Thus, the existence of affective intuitions presupposes an ontological substratum which the intuitions apprehend. If affective intuitions did not describe an independent ontological reality, then they would be just as subjective as standard emotions. In fact, this same need to secure objectivity for ethical truth motivates Huemer’s emphasis on ethical intuitionism’s dualism\(^\text{31}\). In the same way that logic intuitions must describe an independent objective reality, affective intuitions must do so.

An example should help clarify the emotion/affection distinction. Suppose Andrew is an avid football fan. Every week, he invites his friends over to watch the games on his television. When his favorite team loses its last game, Andrew becomes infuriated and hollers at the TV. In this case, Andrew vents a purely subjective emotion. The anger he projects at his favorite football team fails to describe any independent ethical truth. Rather, the anger is merely a reaction to the stimulus of his favorite football team losing. Contrast this with a different type of emotion. Suppose Annie is sexually assaulted by a man when she is jogging in a park. Naturally, Annie harbors intense repulsion towards this man. Surely, Annie’s repulsion at the man who

\(^{30}\) The claim that the whole emotional process can be captured with naturalistic language is not meant to reject Cartesian dualism. Even if the essence of psychological properties evades physical or functional reduction, the properties themselves are dependent upon the subjective mind. As I will suggest later, psychological properties are supplied by the mind whereas affective intuitions are apprehended by the mind. Thus, the relevant dualism here obtains between subjective mind and objective reality, not psychological properties and their qualitative essences.

\(^{31}\) See Chapter 1 for more in-depth discussion of why Huemer’s emphasizes dualism.
assaulted her is not purely subjective. It is more than a mere response to a stimulus. Rather, her repulsion describes a normative truth: that sexual assault is an abhorrent act that warrants repulsion\(^\text{32}\). “Abhorrent act”, in this context, does not mean that the sexual assault elicits feelings of abhorrence in those who survive it. Though this statement is true, it leaves out the most important feature of the abhorrence. What abhorrence means, here, is that the ethical wrongness of sexual assault— which the survivor experiences as profound repulsion—describes an ontologically distinct ethical truth\(^\text{33}\).

Phenomenologically, affective ethical truth usually manifests itself as a conviction\(^\text{34}\). The term “conviction” is helpful in that it may imply something objective which is laced with strands of emotionality\(^\text{35}\). Linguistically, “conviction” can be used in reference to a purely cognitive phenomenon as well as objective emotional phenomenon. However, it cannot be used in reference to purely subjective emotional phenomenon. To take the example above, suppose one were to propose that Andrew’s anger at his favorite sports team is a conviction. This odd

\(^{32}\) Here, a cognitive intuitionist might object to the idea that the warranted hatred is a component of the ethical truth. Rather, the cognitive intuitionist would claim that the proposition “sexual assault is an abhorrent act” comprises the entire ethical truth. Any emotive disposition toward that cognitive truth is merely subjective and ancillary. Alternatively, a cognitive intuitionist might argue that the proposition “sexual assault is an abhorrent act which warrants hatred” does comprise the whole ethical truth. However, the hatred itself is subjective. Only the cognitive notion that hatred is warranted has a claim on objectivity.

\(^{33}\) The importance of moral repulsion has also been advocated by Leon Kass in “The Wisdom of Repugnance”.

\(^{34}\) I say usually, here, because they are cases in which ethical truth, though belonging to the realm of an affective conviction, is not experienced as such. Some factors that can attenuate a conviction are repetition and abstraction. If one repeatedly involves oneself in an ethical endeavor, the force of one’s conviction in that endeavor may be tempered. For example, a doctor who saves patients’ lives day after day for years may experience a dulled conviction that saving lives in morally good. In this case, the doctor may perceive the ethical duty to save lives as a cognitive ethical truth even though it is truly a visceral, affective truth whose force mitigates with repetition. This phenomenon can be likened to Aristotle’s discussion of moral habits. Another factor which impedes one from experiencing the brunt of a conviction’s force is abstraction. That is, one can fail to appreciate an ethical truth on an intimate level due to one’s distance from it. For example, although one may agree that aiding the poor is a moral duty, it is not till one directly experiences the suffering of the indigent that the visceral core of the ethical truth reveals itself.

The characterization of moral truth as an affective phenomenon demands that people experience ethical truth on an intimate level, not merely as an abstract obligation. Of course, this imperative does not contradict the virtue of cultivating moral habits but supplements it. A robust moral life entails constant ethical behavior which, inevitably, formalizes into habit. However, moral life will ossify if it is not periodically refreshed with the intimate content of its constitutive ethical properties.

\(^{35}\) W.D. Ross also uses terminology of “conviction” to describe ethical intuition. However, Ross intends “conviction” to refer to cognitive phenomena.
suggestion implies either that Andrew believes that his anger is morally motivated, or that Andrew’s anger is actually morally motivated\textsuperscript{36}. Most of us would conceive both of these suggestions as false. The terminology of “conviction” cannot be used to convey the idea that Andrew harbors a subjective, reaction-based anger against his favorite sports team. If one meant to imply such subjective anger by using the term “conviction”, one would be misusing the term. So, when discussing ethical truth, cognitive intuitionists would interpret convictions as purely intellectual propositions whereas affective intuitionists would interpret convictions as normative/emotive hybrids. By interpreting convictions in this fashion, affective intuitionists would not be making any linguistic error.

The primary inhospitality to affective intuitions traces back to a commonly conceived bifurcation between the subjectivity of emotion and the objectivity of reason. Conventionally, emotions are characterized as subjective constructs which do not correspond to ontological reality. This conception of emotions implicitly asserts that emotions are essentially dependent upon physiology/psychology whereas intellectual intuitions are not. Thus, emotions rely essentially on mental construction while intellectual intuitions merely rely accidentally on mental construction\textsuperscript{37}. Of course, this characterization of emotions depends upon the denial of ontological dualism\textsuperscript{38} in relation to the affective realm. Thus, cognitive intuitionists only confer validity to an ontological realm consisting of cognitive truth, whether ethical or logical. However, they reject any analogous ontological realm consisting of affective truth. Emotivists, on the other hand, reject both cognitive ethical ontology and affective ethical ontology.

\textsuperscript{36} Again, this conception hinges on the way that the word “conviction” is employed colloquially.

\textsuperscript{37} It is likely the case that it is impossible for humans to experience emotion or cognition without reliance on the mind. However, the question here is whether the reliance on the mind is accidental or essential. In other words, the question is whether the fact that experience of emotions and cognition depends on the mind is a contingent fact or a necessary one. I believe that both cognitive intuition and affective intuition depend only contingently on the mind.

\textsuperscript{38} To reiterate, Cartesian dualism is not relevant here.
Here, the key question asserts itself: with what justification does a philosopher approve of a cognitive ethical ontology and reject an affective ethical ontology? At first this may appear like a pseudo-question. A philosopher need not even address affective ethical ontology because emotions are essentially subjective. Thus, it is categorically erroneous to speak of an affective ontological realm. However, this response depends upon the presupposition that all emotions are subjective—the same presupposition which affective intuitionists impugn. Of course, emotions are not characterized as subjective haphazardly. Even affective intuitionists must confess that some emotions are subjective in that they are constructed by the mind without describing any ontological truth. But there seems no reason to suppose that this should exhaust all emotive phenomena. Affective intuitionism proposes a more nuanced approach to emotions. While some emotions are essentially subjective, others are essentially objective. Again, these emotions are objective because they describe ontological truth. Admittedly, it seems odd to speak of emotions as objective because they are predominantly considered the paradigm of subjectivity. However, in order to treat affective intuitionism justly, one must expunge oneself of this prejudice.

In fact, affective intuitionism does not contain any premises which should be unpalatable to a cognitive intuitionist. If cognitive phenomena can exist ontologically independent from the thinking subject, why can emotive phenomena not enjoy the same dualistic validity? As suggested above, complaints against affective intuitionism seemed steeped in a prejudiced approach to emotive phenomena. As noted earlier, this prejudice traces back to cognitive intuitionism’s impulse against subjectivity and its willingness to take shortcuts in order to secure objectivity for the theory. This prejudice may also stem from the fact that one experiences emotions as internal phenomena. However, the internality of emotion only proves exactly what it stipulates: that emotion is experienced internally. It determines nothing about an emotion’s
origin. Indeed, there is way to experience something other than internally. Thus, although emotions may be subjective mental constructs, they may also be objective mental apprehensions.

The preemptive dismissal of emotive ethical truth is akin to a dismissal of realism in perception. It is as if one were to argue that, since vision depends upon internal cognitive interpretation, vision is essentially subjective. There seems no grounding for favoring this gloomy proposition over the more attractive possibility that people see genuine, ontologically distinct objects. In fact, this analogy can be extended to account for moral fallibility. Visual perceptions and emotions can be subjectively constructed in the same exact sense. However, fallibility should neither invalidate the entire enterpris of visual perception nor affective intuitions.

So far I have enumerated at least two obstacles to affective intuitionism: (1) the incentive for cognitive intuitionists to cut corners in order to secure objectivity (2) the notion that emotions are essentially linked to contingent physiological/psychological apparatus. The second point is the more important of the two and requires elaboration. One source of the common misconception that all emotions are essentially subjective is the difficulty inherent in perceiving emotions as ontologically independent of physiology. It seems that once an emotion is conceptually extracted from its physical/psychological location and planted in ontology it forfeits its emotive force. As Mackie would phrase it, the existence of emotive phenomena ontologically distinct from the physiological/psychological experience of them seems queer. Indeed, emotions seem to absorb their visceral content from their psychological/physiological context. Therefore, if they are extirpated from these sources, they surrender their emotive content. Thus, it seems

39 One instance of subjectively constructed perception is a hallucination. One instance of subjectively constructed emotion is Andrews’s non-normative and reaction-based anger at his favorite sports team’s loss.
absurd to imagine an emotion floating in some aloof ontological realm independent of spatiotemporal physical location.

In other words, emotions are characterized as phenomena which are supplied by the mind instead of apprehended by it. In contrast, cognitive intuitions are characterized as phenomena which are apprehended by the mind instead of supplied by it.\(^4\) Therefore, cognitive intuition appears objective while emotion appears subjective. It is not clear, however, why this monistic approach to emotions should be accepted. In fact, there seems no evidence to which one can appeal in order to substantiate the notion that cognitive intuitions are apprehended by the mind whereas all emotions are merely supplied by it. To reiterate, it is clear that some emotions are mere subjective reactions and are supplied, and not apprehended, by the mind. Just as clearly, some cognitive phenomena—like the axioms of logic—are apprehended, and not supplied, by the mind. However, it is not clear that it is impossible for the mind to apprehend, rather than supply, emotions. Indeed, according to affective intuitionism, affections are defined as emotions which are apprehended by the mind and, thus, embedded in ontology.

At this point, the question still remains: why should one bother to consider affective intuitionism when ethical truth can be satisfactorily accounted for by cognitive intuitionism. As mentioned previously, the basic answer to this question lies in phenomenology. To use an analogy, the cognitive intuitionist’s portrait of ethical truth bleaches ethics of its animating color. Purely intellectual cognitive intuitions are disingenuous to the way people experience ethics. The field of ethics seems more vivid than a cold, abstracted framework of ethics allows. Again, I must emphasize that, as a phenomenological conjecture, this point hinges on personal experience.

\(^4\) In both cases of supply and apprehension, the mind plays a pivotal role. Still, this fundamental distinction must be addressed: does the mind apprehend an independent truth or does it simply manufacture a subjective reaction? Can the phenomenon be comprehensively captured as a stimulus-reaction formula or must it reference independent ontological truth.
of ethics. If people experience ethics as a series of rigid rules isomorphic to logical axioms, then my phenomenological thesis can be disputed.

However, there is another reason why affective intuitionism is more reasonable as an ethical theory than cognitive intuitionism. Ironically, this reason traces back to Hume’s essay “Moral Distinction are not Derived from Reason”. In the essay, Hume draws a categorical bifurcation between reason and passion. Reason and passion, argues Hume, occupy conceptual arenas which cannot communicate as equal partners. Thus, it is impossible for rationality to overcome or counteract emotional impulses. In fact, many metaphysicians have mistakenly misinterpreted the battle raging between “quiet” and “loud” emotions as a battle raging between emotions and rationality. Although, I believe that Hume’s account must be tweaked in order to provide for the possibility of free will, he is correct in diagnosing the conflation of quiet emotions and reason. Moreover, Hume correctly perceives that no rational proposition, by itself, constitutes a motivating desire. Emotionality must be superimposed on rationality in order for said rationality to motivate action.

Here, affective intuitionism provides a simpler explanation for ethical motivation than cognitive intuitionism. Since affective intuitionism asserts that intuitions are essentially emotive, there is no mystery involved in the capacity of moral intuition to motivate ethical decisions. This consideration should be perceived against the backdrop of Ockham’s inductive approach for adjudicating contesting theories. In this context, affective intuitionism demands a tradeoff. As suggested above, affective intuitionism resolves the mystery besetting ethical motivation. However, affective intuitionism also asserts an ontological realm of affective truths in addition to an ontological realm of cognitive truths. In this sense, affective intuitionism is more complex than cognitive intuitionism. It is difficult to gauge how this complexity of multiple ontologies
competes against the complexity introduced by enigmatic ethical motivation. It is important to remember, however, that cognitive intuitionism’s phenomenological unsoundness must also be taken into account.

At this point, cognitive intuitionists might object that their theory need not supply a case for moral motivation. As a metaethical theory, cognitive intuitionism must only explain the fundamental nature of ethics. It is not required to account for moral motivation. However, a metaethical theory which does not do so is a weak theory because it preemptively rejects all first-order theories. First-order theories rely on the premise that it is possible for someone to engage in ethical behavior anchored in correct moral beliefs. If this premise is denied, so that all behavior is declared to be motivated by non-moral considerations, first-order theories become practically effete. In short, since first order theories are concerned with ascertaining the correct moral route of action in given scenarios, a second order theory which denies the possibility of practically implementing moral intuitions thereby precludes the possibility of first order ethics. In fact, I believe that most cognitive intuitionists would agree with the assessment that a practically impotent metaethical theory is deeply unattractive. Rather, cognitive intuitionists want to provide an objective basis underlying moral propositions which renders a person capable of acting morally. Most cognitive intuitionists would likely agree that a metaethical theory should account for moral motivation and would argue that their theory does so⁴¹.

Regarding practicality, cognitive intuitionists may level the following accusation against affective intuitionists: how can affective intuitionism distinguish between valid affective ethical truth and subjectively constructed emotions dissembling as affective ethical truth? Before delving into a more elaborate response, I want to mention that this problem afflicts cognitive

⁴¹ Huemer, for example, discusses the problem of moral motivation for ethical intuitionism and some possible solutions (Huemer, 155-198).
intuitionists equally as much as it afflicts affective intuitionists. The same epistemological difficulties which becloud the distinction between valid cognitive intuitions and subjective opinions becloud the distinction between valid affective intuitions and subjective emotions. I already illustrated in Chapter 2 how cognitive intuitionists are susceptible to this criticism.

In fact, affective intuitionists would respond to the accusation in the same way that cognitive intuitionists respond. There are certain steps which one can take in order to winnow out false intuitions masquerading as ethical truth. For example, one can investigate whether one’s opinions have been significantly molded by one’s culture. Of course, the fact that one’s culture heavily informs one’s moral doctrines does not invalidate those doctrines. However, it does cast a shadow of skepticism upon the trustworthiness of the relevant intuition. Another method one can implement in order to weed out faulty intuitions concerns approaching the intuition from multiple perspectives and attending to all its consequences. A moral proposition which initially struck someone as self-evident may lose credibility once its various consequences have been attended to more intimately.

I also want to propose a modal test that one can apply to ethical propositions in order to validate them. One can ask: could the relevant moral proposition coexist with its negation in a possible world without producing a contradiction? For example, suppose a woman, Karen, is debating whether to buy running shoes or tennis shoes. She can imagine both a situation in which she purchases the running shoes, which I will call $R$, and one in which she does not purchase the running shoes ($\sim R$). In neither of these situations would Karen conclude that she is doing something ethically wrong. Therefore, both $R$ and $\sim R$ are ethically permissible. However, by the law of excluded middle, $R$ and $\sim R$ cannot simultaneously be true. Therefore, $R$ must not be an

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42 The modal test only definitively demonstrates an ethical proposition’s invalidity. An ethical proposition that passes the modal test can still be a subjective emotion masquerading as an affective intuition. However, an ethical opinion that fails the modal test is ruled out as an affective intuition.
objective proposition and can thereby be ruled out at as an affective intuition. Put simply, this test rejects the possibility of ethical disagreement regarding affective intuitions. Of course, since such intuitions are often misapprehended and muddled, moral disagreement still occurs.

It is important to note that this modal test only works when applied to fully spelled out ethical propositions. For example, someone might misuse the modal test to label the question of abortion as subjective. On the one hand, pro-life advocates argue that abortion is ethically wrong because it cuts short human life without justification. On the other hand, pro-choice advocates argue that abortion is ethically permissible because a woman has the right to judge what happens to her body. Since both of these claims seem accurate but are contradictory, abortion must be classified as subjective.

However, in truth, pro-life and pro-choice ideologies each contain a hidden premise. As the name suggests, pro-life arguments hinge on the notion that a fetus should be warranted the status of a living human. In contradistinction, pro-choice arguments hinge on the fact that a fetus is simply an extension of a mother’s body without any independent identity. Thus, the debate ultimately revolves around whether the fetus should be considered an independent human life. Since the abortion argument operates on conflicting assumptions regarding this basic question, the opinions are at odds. However, the contradiction between the opinions does not stem from a genuine moral disagreement about a basic ethical proposition. Instead, the contradiction stems from divergent sets of facts. One may argue that there is still a genuine moral conflict regarding whether fetuses enjoy independent, human life. However, this seems to be a case in which no clear intuition can be ascertained. There seems no intuitive justification for determining the status of a fetus with any certainty.
Furthermore, the modal test only applies to a confined moral proposition and its negation. Consider the well-known trolley problem in which someone must choose between allowing a train to stay its course and kill five people or pulling a lever so that it veers off course and only kills one person. In such a situation, one might argue that not pulling the lever is wrong because it results in five deaths while pulling the lever is also wrong because it actively results in one death. Since the two propositions are opposites and both are wrong, a contradiction ensues. Therefore, the trolley problem is inherently subjective.

However, this would be an invalid application of the modal test. The modal test considers moral propositions in a vacuum. Therefore, the negation of the proposition being evaluated must have no relation to other propositions. In the trolley case, the negation of allowing five people to die is meant to be pulling the lever so that one person dies. However, the modal test only permits the strict negation of a proposition; it does not accommodate alternative propositions. So, in the trolley case, the negation of “allowing five people to die” would be “not allowing five people to die”, rather than “killing one person”. Thus, “allowing five people to die” is clearly preferable to “not allowing five people to die”, and can be cast as the following ethical truth: all things considered, one must prevent five people from dying rather than allowing them to die\(^{43}\). A solution to the conflict proposed by the trolley problem requires first-order ethics. A metaethical theory must only evaluate the ethical status of a confined proposition. It need not provide any method for adjudicating distinct clashing propositions.

\(^{43}\) Of course, this ethical truth is confined to the fully specified situation in which all one must do to prevent five people from dying is pull a lever. Thus, the ethical truth does not pass judgement on a situation in which someone must constantly pull a lever for the rest of that person’s life in order to save others. In addition, the ethical truth cannot be generalized to the proposition that one must always do everything one can in order to prevent death. These are distinct scenarios which must be addressed independently from the original scenario.
Conclusion

Before concluding, I wish to review what I have sought to accomplish in this essay. At the most fundamental level, I intended to emphasize the distinctive importance of ethical absolutism in moral conversation. In this vein, ethical intuitionism advances a deeply illuminating framework of ethical absolutism. I hope to have demonstrated the theory’s profound elegance and insight into ethical truth in Chapter 1. However, ethical intuitionism is a highly controversial metaethical theory that generates important questions. Therefore, in Chapter 2, I enumerated the most incisive criticisms of ethical intuitionism. In Chapter 3, I placed particular emphasis on one of intuitionism’s most distinctive features: the analogy to logic. I argued that, although the analogy to logic is indispensable for securing the necessity and objectivity of ethics, it misdiagnoses the nature of ethical truth. Finally, Chapter 4 established the phenomenology of ethical truth as emotive and visceral while maintaining its necessity and objectivity. I referred to this phenomenologically sensitive theory as affective intuitionism.

One final thought: there is perhaps no field of endeavor as critical as that of ethics. It is inextricably bound up with the most fundamental problems of philosophy. Is life invested with meaning? Is existence a mere accident? Must we treat others with respect and dignity? What is our role in a boundless universe we can only barely comprehend? While I cannot pretend to have offered comprehensive answers to any of these questions, I hope I have contributed in some way to the indefatigable pursuit of truth that fuels philosophy. The voyage to meaning is barbed with thorns and encroached everywhere by darkness; but the peril must be penetrated, till the shadows flee and the garden of truth and beauty hums with light.
Works Read


