Secular Morality
David O. Brink’s “The Autonomy of Ethics”

Nathan Kellen
University of Connecticut

February 5th, 2015
Table of Contents

Ethical Objectivity vs. Subjectivity
  Objectivity
  Subjectivity

Divine Command Theory and the Autonomy of Ethics
  Divine Command Theory
  The Autonomy of Ethics

Voluntarism and Naturalism
  Three Roles for Gods
  The Euthyphro Dilemma
  Voluntarism
  Naturalism

Arguments against Voluntarism and Naturalism
  Contingency Argument
  Supervenience Argument
  Omnipotence Argument

Epistemological and Motivational Roles
  Arguments against the Epistemological Role
  Arguments against the Motivational Role
The Objectivity of Ethics

Brink has a number of different goals here. One is to vindicate the objectivity of ethics. He defines this as:
The Objectivity of Ethics

Brink has a number of different goals here. One is to vindicate the **objectivity of ethics**. He defines this as:

> A domain $\mathcal{D}$ is objective iff there are facts or truths that are true independently of the attitudes or beliefs of appraisers.
Brink has a number of different goals here. One is to vindicate the **objectivity of ethics**. He defines this as:

\[
\text{A domain } \mathcal{D} \text{ is objective iff there are facts or truths that are true independently of the attitudes or beliefs of appraisers.}
\]

So ethics is objective iff moral claims are true independently of the attitudes or beliefs of appraisers. (think back to **moral realism**)

The Objectivity of Ethics

Brink has a number of different goals here. One is to vindicate the **objectivity of ethics**. He defines this as:

\[ \text{A domain } \mathcal{D} \text{ is objective iff there are facts or truths that are true independently of the attitudes or beliefs of appraisers.} \]

So ethics is objective iff moral claims are true independently of the attitudes or beliefs of appraisers. (think back to **moral realism**)

Alternatively, moral truths are true in virtue of something besides people’s attitudes, beliefs, etc.
Secular Morality

Ethical Objectivity vs. Subjectivity

Objectivity

Normativity

Something is **normative** if it tells us what we should do, or ought to do.
Normativity

Something is **normative** if it tells us what we should do, or ought to do.

Brink claims that our commitment to the objectivity of ethics is part of our commitment to morality’s normativity.
Normativity

Something is **normative** if it tells us what we should do, or ought to do.

Brink claims that our commitment to the objectivity of ethics is part of our commitment to morality’s normativity.

That is, because we define morality as normative, we are committed to its objectivity.
Fallibility

According to Brink, normativity presupposes standards of correctness.
According to Brink, normativity presupposes standards of correctness.

This can be seen when we tell someone that they ought to do something. Implicitly when we tell someone what they ought to do we are *ruling out* other actions.
Fallibility

According to Brink, normativity presupposes standards of correctness.

This can be seen when we tell someone that they ought to do something. Implicitly when we tell someone what they ought to do we are ruling out other actions.

If we believe in standards of correctness then we of course believe in fallibility, the ability to be wrong.
According to Brink, normativity presupposes standards of correctness.

This can be seen when we tell someone that they ought to do something. Implicitly when we tell someone what they ought to do we are *ruling out* other actions.

If we believe in standards of correctness then we of course believe in *fallibility*, the ability to be wrong.

But fallibility, according to Brink, implies objectivity. We cannot be wrong about something unless there is an independent standard according to which we’re wrong.
Objectivity as Default

Because of this argument, Brink says that we ought to hold the objectivity of ethics as our default position.
Objectivity as Default

Because of this argument, Brink says that we ought to hold the objectivity of ethics as our default position.

This could be overridden given circumstances, like if all ethical discourse turned out to be non-factual or false. But that would require serious argumentation.
Objectivity as Default

Because of this argument, Brink says that we ought to hold the objectivity of ethics as our default position.

This could be overridden given circumstances, like if all ethical discourse turned out to be non-factual or false. But that would require serious argumentation.

Note that this is a kind of argument from intuition. Our intuitions about the normativity, fallibility and objectivity of ethics are very strong (or so Brink says). So they should hold fast until we have some very strong evidence to the opposite.
Brink’s opponent here is the voluntarist (more on that soon), who is a type of **subjectivist**.
Subjectivity

Brink’s opponent here is the voluntarist (more on that soon), who is a type of **subjectivist**.

A domain $\mathcal{D}$ is subjective iff what the facts or truths of the domain are dependent on the attitudes or beliefs of appraisers.
Subjectivity

Brink’s opponent here is the voluntarist (more on that soon), who is a type of subjectivist.

A domain $\mathcal{D}$ is subjective iff what the facts or truths of the domain are dependent on the attitudes or beliefs of appraisers.

As we will see, the voluntarist is a subjectivist about ethics because they believe that ethical truths depend on a god’s attitude.
Divine Command Theory

The type of subjectivist position Brink means to attack is called Divine Command Theory (DCT). DCT claims:
Divine Command Theory

The type of subjectivist position Brink means to attack is called Divine Command Theory (DCT). DCT claims:

If a god exists, \( \varphi \) is good or right iff the god approves of \( \varphi \).
The type of subjectivist position Brink means to attack is called **Divine Command Theory** (DCT). DCT claims:

*If a god exists, φ is good or right iff the god approves of φ.*

Where φ stands for some verb, like ‘murder’ or ‘adultery’.
Divine Command Theory

DCT is often taken as a way of vindicating, or proving, the objectivity of ethics. This is because it’s often thought that it could provide universal standards for action.
Divine Command Theory

DCT is often taken as a way of vindicating, or proving, the objectivity of ethics. This is because it’s often thought that it could provide universal standards for action.

As we will see (and has been hinted) Brink will argue that this is incorrect, and in fact that DCT undermines objectivity.
Divine Command Theory

DCT is often taken as a way of vindicating, or proving, the objectivity of ethics. This is because it’s often thought that it could provide universal standards for action.

As we will see (and has been hinted) Brink will argue that this is incorrect, and in fact that DCT undermines objectivity.

The opponent here is the person who claims that “without a god, there could be no moral standards”. This is common amongst both atheists and theists.
The Autonomy of Ethics

Brink’s goal is to defend the autonomy of ethics.
The Autonomy of Ethics

Brink’s goal is to defend the autonomy of ethics.

Ethics is autonomous if its success doesn’t stand or fall with the truth of theism.
The Autonomy of Ethics

Brink’s goal is to defend the **autonomy of ethics**.

Ethics is autonomous if its success doesn’t stand or fall with the truth of theism.

Brink will argue that this is doubly useful:
The Autonomy of Ethics

Brink’s goal is to defend the **autonomy of ethics**.

Ethics is autonomous if its success doesn’t stand or fall with the truth of theism.

Brink will argue that this is doubly useful:

1. Because theism is philosophically problematic (n.b. 73% of philosophy faculty are atheists)
The Autonomy of Ethics

Brink’s goal is to defend the **autonomy of ethics**.

Ethics is autonomous if its success doesn’t stand or fall with the truth of theism.

Brink will argue that this is doubly useful:

1. Because theism is philosophically problematic (n.b. 73% of philosophy faculty are atheists)
2. Because it provides better understanding of theistic issues
The Three Roles Gods Could Play

Brink identifies three roles that a god could play in morality:
The Three Roles Gods Could Play

Brink identifies three roles that a god could play in morality:

1. Metaphysical
The Three Roles Gods Could Play

Brink identifies three roles that a god could play in morality:

1. **Metaphysical**
2. **Epistemological**
Brink identifies three roles that a god could play in morality:

1. **Metaphysical**
2. **Epistemological**
3. **Motivational**
The Three Roles Gods Could Play

Brink identifies three roles that a god could play in morality:

1. **Metaphysical**
2. **Epistemological**
3. **Motivational**

After reviewing the three, we will focus on the metaphysical role.
The **metaphysical** role a god could play in morality is being the source of ethical claims.
Metaphysical Role

The *metaphysical* role a god could play in morality is being the source of ethical claims.

That is, ethical claims could be true in virtue of what some god says (or decides, etc.).
Metaphysical Role

The *metaphysical* role a god could play in morality is being the source of ethical claims.

That is, ethical claims could be true in virtue of what some god says (or decides, etc.).

This is a metaphysical role because it is the nature of ethical claims *existence*. 
Epistemological Role

The **epistemological** role a god could play in morality is being the source of evidence for what’s morally right and wrong.
Epistemological Role

The epistemological role a god could play in morality is being the source of evidence for what’s morally right and wrong.

That is, in this role the god tell us what is morally right or wrong, but need not be the source for its existence.
Epistemological Role

The **epistemological** role a god could play in morality is being the source of evidence for what’s morally right and wrong.

That is, in this role the god tell us what is morally right or wrong, but need not be the source for its existence.

This is an epistemological role because it concerns *knowledge* of ethical standards.
Motivational Role

The **motivational** role a god could play in morality is being the motivation for agents to do the right thing and avoid the wrong thing.
**Motivational Role**

The *motivational* role a god could play in morality is being the motivation for agents to do the right thing and avoid the wrong thing.

For example, the standard Christian view of Hell plays a serious motivational role - being moral results in everlasting happiness, being evil results in everlasting torture.
Motivational Role

The **motivational** role a god could play in morality is being the motivation for agents to do the right thing and avoid the wrong thing.

For example, the standard Christian view of Hell plays a serious motivational role - being moral results in everlasting happiness, being evil results in everlasting torture.

This is a motivational role because it concerns only the *motivations* for why we should do right and avoid wrong, rather than provide the existence for right/wrong or provide knowledge of right/wrong.
Motivational Role

The motivational role a god could play in morality is being the motivation for agents to do the right thing and avoid the wrong thing.

For example, the standard Christian view of Hell plays a serious motivational role - being moral results in everlasting happiness, being evil results in everlasting torture.

This is a motivational role because it concerns only the motivations for why we should do right and avoid wrong, rather than provide the existence for right/wrong or provide knowledge of right/wrong.

Compare governments, which arguably play this role (to a lesser degree).
The Euthyphro Dilemma

Brink recalls the dilemma Socrates poses in Plato’s *Euthyphro*.
The Euthyphro Dilemma

Brink recalls the dilemma Socrates poses in Plato’s *Euthyphro*.

Socrates and Euthyphro both agree that the definition of *pious* is “what the gods love” or alternatively, “what the gods deem good”.
The Euthyphro Dilemma

Brink recalls the dilemma Socrates poses in Plato’s *Euthyphro*.

Socrates and Euthyphro both agree that the definition of *pious* is “what the gods love” or alternatively, “what the gods deem good”.

But this doesn’t uniquely pick out the nature of the phenomenon. That is, there is a dilemma here regarding the nature of piety:
Brink recalls the dilemma Socrates poses in Plato’s *Euthyphro*.

Socrates and Euthyphro both agree that the definition of *pious* is “what the gods love” or alternatively, “what the gods deem good”.

But this doesn’t uniquely pick out the nature of the phenomenon. That is, there is a dilemma here regarding the nature of piety:

1. Something is pious because the gods love it (deem it good).
The Euthyphro Dilemma

Brink recalls the dilemma Socrates poses in Plato’s *Euthyphro*.

Socrates and Euthyphro both agree that the definition of *pious* is “what the gods love” or alternatively, “what the gods deem good”.

But this doesn’t uniquely pick out the nature of the phenomenon. That is, there is a dilemma here regarding the nature of piety:

1. Something is pious because the gods love it (deem it good).
2. Something is loved by the gods (deemed good) because it is pious (or good).
The Euthyphro Dilemma

Brink recalls the dilemma Socrates poses in Plato’s *Euthyphro*.

Socrates and Euthyphro both agree that the definition of *pious* is “what the gods love” or alternatively, “what the gods deem good”.

But this doesn’t uniquely pick out the nature of the phenomenon. That is, there is a dilemma here regarding the nature of piety:

1. Something is pious because the gods love it (deem it good).
2. Something is loved by the gods (deemed good) because it is pious (or good).

This is one of the oldest existing philosophical debates and is central in metaethics and philosophy of religion.
Voluntarism

Taking the first route is what is called voluntarism.
Voluntarism

Taking the first route is what is called voluntarism.

Voluntarism claims that whether something is good, or pious, depends on the will, speech, attitudes, etc. of the gods.
No Good Without God

One famous voluntarist is William of Occam (developer of Occam’s Razor).
No Good Without God

One famous voluntarist is William of Occam (developer of Occam’s Razor).

Voluntarists hold that, were there no gods, there would be no morality as well.
No Good Without God

One famous voluntarist is William of Occam (developer of Occam’s Razor).

Voluntarists hold that, were there no gods, there would be no morality as well.

That is, gods are directly responsible for the existence of morality.
Brink notes that, if one is a voluntarist and an atheist, moral nihilism follows.
Voluntarism and Atheism

Brink notes that, if one is a voluntarist and an atheist, moral nihilism follows.

Recall that moral nihilists are those who deny all morality.
Voluntarism and Atheism

Brink notes that, if one is a voluntarist and an atheist, moral nihilism follows.

Recall that moral nihilists are those who deny all morality.

This quite clearly follows because if one believes that morality can only exist due to gods, and furthermore that no gods exist, one must accept that there is no morality as well.
Naturalism

Taking the second route is what is called naturalism.
Naturalism

Taking the second route is what is called naturalism.

Naturalism claims that whether something is good, or pious, depends on its nature, i.e. what it’s like, independently of agents (incl. gods).
Taking the second route is what is called naturalism.

Naturalism claims that whether something is good, or pious, depends on its nature, i.e. what it’s like, independently of agents (incl. gods).

This is contrary to voluntarism because it holds that gods do not create morality.
Good Without God

Most people are aware of at least one naturalist: St Thomas Aquinas.
Good Without God

Most people are aware of at least one naturalist: St Thomas Aquinas.

Theists who are naturalists hold that although gods do not define what is good, they do have an excellent ability to pick it out.
Good Without God

Most people are aware of at least one naturalist: St Thomas Aquinas.

Theists who are naturalists hold that although gods do not define what is good, they do have an excellent ability to pick it out.

Further, some naturalists/theists believe that gods still do play strong motivational and epistemological roles in morality.
Naturalism and Atheism

Naturalism also fits quite well with atheism, as it allows atheists to deny moral nihilism.
Naturalism and Atheism

Naturalism also fits quite well with atheism, as it allows atheists to deny moral nihilism.

This is because naturalism denies the gods’ metaphysical role in morality.
Contingency Argument

Brink levels two arguments against voluntarism. The first one is noting that voluntarism implies morality is *contingent* (i.e. relies on) what gods approve.
Brink levels two arguments against voluntarism. The first one is noting that voluntarism implies morality is contingent (i.e. relies on) what gods approve.

This is counterintuitive because we often think that what is morally right or wrong is necessarily so. Consider genocide, for example.
Brink levels two arguments against voluntarism. The first one is noting that voluntarism implies morality is contingent (i.e. relies on) what gods approve.

This is counterintuitive because we often think that what is morally right or wrong is necessarily so. Consider genocide, for example.

The voluntarist claim involves saying that, if the gods had not disapproved of genocide, the Holocaust would not have been wrong. Or alternatively: the gods could change their mind, and genocide would no longer be wrong.
Contingency Argument: A Quick Rejoinder

Often it is said that the gods would not approve of things like genocide because they are perfectly good. But Brink makes it clear that this option is not available to the voluntarist.
Contingency Argument: A Quick Rejoinder

Often it is said that the gods would not approve of things like genocide because they are perfectly good. But Brink makes it clear that this option is not available to the voluntarist.

This is because such an argument makes an appeal to the gods’ sensitivity to what is right and wrong. But if that were the case then the gods would be tracking something independently of themselves.
Contingency Argument: A Quick Rejoinder

Often it is said that the gods would not approve of things like genocide because they are perfectly good. But Brink makes it clear that this option is not available to the voluntarist.

This is because such an argument makes an appeal to the gods’ sensitivity to what is right and wrong. But if that were the case then the gods would be tracking something independently of themselves.

But that’s just a naturalist, not a voluntarist, position.
Supervenience Argument

Brink points out another way in which voluntarism is unintuitive. We often think that what is moral depends heavily on the way things are, i.e. on physical, psychological, legal and social facts.
Supervenience Argument

Brink points out another way in which voluntarism is unintuitive. We often think that what is moral depends heavily on the way things are, i.e. on physical, psychological, legal and social facts.

It is common to claim that moral properties satisfy an important property: supervenience. Some property supervenes on natural properties iff:
Brink points out another way in which voluntarism is unintuitive. We often think that what is moral depends heavily on the way things are, i.e. on physical, psychological, legal and social facts.

It is common to claim that moral properties satisfy an important property: supervenience. Some property supervenes on natural properties iff:

...a full specification of the natural properties of the situation fix or determine its moral properties.
Supervenience Argument

Brink points out another way in which voluntarism is unintuitive. We often think that what is moral depends heavily on the way things are, i.e. on physical, psychological, legal and social facts.

It is common to claim that moral properties satisfy an important property: 
**supervenience**. Some property supervenes on natural properties iff:

...a full specification of the natural properties of the situation fix or determine its moral properties.

Said otherwise, two situations cannot differ morally unless the facts on which they supervene differ (e.g. physical, psychological, legal and social facts).
Supervenience Argument

Supervenience is, in a sense, “treating like cases alike”. If we determine that one act is moral and another one is immoral, there must be some grounds on which we do so.
Supervenience Argument

Supervenience is, in a sense, “treating like cases alike”. If we determine that one act is moral and another one is immoral, there must be some grounds on which we do so.

Such grounds might include a difference in physical facts or social facts.
Supervenience Argument

Supervenience is, in a sense, “treating like cases alike”. If we determine that one act is moral and another one is immoral, there must be some grounds on which we do so.

Such grounds might include a difference in physical facts or social facts.

It’s important to note that when we judge that two situations are different morally we must do so on relevant grounds. We don’t want to be saying that something is morally permissible for one person and impermissible for another randomly.
Supervenience and Gods

Note however that, in describing supervenience above, we made no reference to gods. That is, the existence of gods isn’t taken to be a fact over which morality supervenes.
Supervenience and Gods

Note however that, in describing supervenience above, we made no reference to gods. That is, the existence of gods isn’t taken to be a fact over which morality supervenes.

Said another way: whether two actions, \( \varphi \) and \( \psi \) are moral shouldn’t depend on whether gods say that one is moral and the other isn’t.
Supervenience and Gods

Note however that, in describing supervenience above, we made no reference to gods. That is, the existence of gods isn’t taken to be a fact over which morality supervenes.

Said another way: whether two actions, $\varphi$ and $\psi$ are moral shouldn’t depend on whether gods say that one is moral and the other isn’t.

Because we hold supervenience as a very strong moral intuition, it’s harder to give up than voluntarism.
Brink also raises one argument against naturalism, regarding gods and omnipotence. The claim is that, were naturalism true, it would threaten our natural view of gods’ omnipotence.
Omnipotence Argument

Brink also raises one argument against naturalism, regarding gods and omnipotence. The claim is that, were naturalism true, it would threaten our natural view of gods’ omnipotence.

This is because, were naturalism true, the nature of morality would be out of the gods’ control.
Two Definitions of Omnipotence

This relies on a specific definition of omnipotence however. Consider the following two definitions:
Two Definitions of Omnipotence

This relies on a specific definition of omnipotence however. Consider the following two definitions:

1. Omnipotence$_1$: the capacity to do anything
Two Definitions of Omnipotence

This relies on a specific definition of omnipotence however. Consider the following two definitions:

1. $\text{Omnipotence}_1$: the capacity to do anything
2. $\text{Omnipotence}_2$: the capacity to do anything that’s possible
Two Definitions of Omnipotence

This relies on a specific definition of omnipotence however. Consider the following two definitions:

1. Omnipotence$_1$: the capacity to do anything
2. Omnipotence$_2$: the capacity to do anything that’s possible

The difference between these two definitions has been made for at least a thousand years. Consider the question: “Can a god create a rock so heavy that they cannot lift it?”
Brink suggests that we should *all* prefer the second definition, even theists. This is because it seems odd to claim that a god could change the laws of logic, or maths, or perhaps even physics.
Brink suggests that we should *all* prefer the second definition, even theists. This is because it seems odd to claim that a god could change the laws of logic, or maths, or perhaps even physics.

Because many of us (incl. most philosophers) believe that morality is akin to the above laws, it makes sense to claim that gods could not change morality either.
Brink suggests that we should *all* prefer the second definition, even theists. This is because it seems odd to claim that a god could change the laws of logic, or maths, or perhaps even physics.

Because many of us (incl. most philosophers) believe that morality is akin to the above laws, it makes sense to claim that gods could not change morality either.

Thus the argument against naturalism falls apart.
Arguments against the Epistemological Role

As noted above, it is open to naturalists to claim that although gods do not have a metaphysical role in morality, they do have an epistemological one.
Arguments against the Epistemological Role

As noted above, it is open to naturalists to claim that although gods do not have a metaphysical role in morality, they do have an epistemological one.

This is problematic for at least the following reasons:

1. There are multiple religions which contradict one another
2. It is difficult to determine which scriptures are true
3. Scripture doesn’t answer every moral question
4. Scripture may conflict as well
5. It’s not clear whether scripture should be interpreted literally
6. Scripture gives unintuitive results
Arguments against the Epistemological Role

As noted above, it is open to naturalists to claim that although gods do not have a metaphysical role in morality, they do have an epistemological one.

This is problematic for at least the following reasons:

1. There are multiple religions which contradict one another
Arguments against the Epistemological Role

As noted above, it is open to naturalists to claim that although gods do not have a metaphysical role in morality, they do have an epistemological one.

This is problematic for at least the following reasons:

1. There are multiple religions which contradict one another
2. It is difficult to determine which scriptures are true
Arguments against the Epistemological Role

As noted above, it is open to naturalists to claim that although gods do not have a metaphysical role in morality, they do have an epistemological one.

This is problematic for at least the following reasons:

1. There are multiple religions which contradict one another
2. It is difficult to determine which scriptures are true
3. Scripture doesn’t answer every moral question
Arguments against the Epistemological Role

As noted above, it is open to naturalists to claim that although gods do not have a metaphysical role in morality, they do have an epistemological one.

This is problematic for at least the following reasons:

1. There are multiple religions which contradict one another
2. It is difficult to determine which scriptures are true
3. Scripture doesn’t answer every moral question
4. Scripture may conflict as well
As noted above, it is open to naturalists to claim that although gods do not have a metaphysical role in morality, they do have an epistemological one.

This is problematic for at least the following reasons:

1. There are multiple religions which contradict one another
2. It is difficult to determine which scriptures are true
3. Scripture doesn’t answer every moral question
4. Scripture may conflict as well
5. It’s not clear whether scripture should be interpreted literally
Arguments against the Epistemological Role

As noted above, it is open to naturalists to claim that although gods do not have a metaphysical role in morality, they do have an epistemological one.

This is problematic for at least the following reasons:

1. There are multiple religions which contradict one another
2. It is difficult to determine which scriptures are true
3. Scripture doesn’t answer every moral question
4. Scripture may conflict as well
5. It’s not clear whether scripture should be interpreted literally
6. Scripture gives unintuitive results
Arguments against the Epistemological Role

As noted above, it is open to naturalists to claim that although gods do not have a metaphysical role in morality, they do have an epistemological one.

This is problematic for at least the following reasons:

1. There are multiple religions which contradict one another
2. It is difficult to determine which scriptures are true
3. Scripture doesn’t answer every moral question
4. Scripture may conflict as well
5. It’s not clear whether scripture should be interpreted literally
6. Scripture gives unintuitive results
Arguments against the Motivational Role

As noted earlier, naturalists can also claim that gods play a crucial motivational role in morality.
Arguments against the Motivational Role

As noted earlier, naturalists can also claim that gods play a crucial motivational role in morality.

This is problematic because it would be only an *instrumental* motivation for morality.
Arguments against the Motivational Role

As noted earlier, naturalists can also claim that gods play a crucial motivational role in morality.

This is problematic because it would be only an *instrumental* motivation for morality.

That is, one ought to be morally because it benefits you, and for no other reason.
Arguments against the Motivational Role

As noted earlier, naturalists can also claim that gods play a crucial motivational role in morality.

This is problematic because it would be only an *instrumental* motivation for morality.

That is, one ought to be morally because it benefits you, and for no other reason.

Some find this reprehensible and argue that morality ought to be binding regardless of whether it benefits you.
Arguments against the Motivational Role

As noted earlier, naturalists can also claim that gods play a crucial motivational role in morality.

This is problematic because it would be only an *instrumental* motivation for morality.

That is, one ought to be morally because it benefits you, and for no other reason.

Some find this reprehensible and argue that morality ought to be binding regardless of whether it benefits you.

To the extent that this is a strong intuition, we ought to reject the motivational role.
Next Time

We’re done with metaethics! For the rest of this course, we’ll assume, for simplicity, that moral realism of some sort is true, that any type of relativism is false and that ethics is autonomous in the sense shown today.
Next Time

We’re done with metaethics! For the rest of this course, we’ll assume, for simplicity, that moral realism of some sort is true, that any type of relativism is false and that ethics is autonomous in the sense shown today.

Next week we begin our foray into normative ethics, the study of what we ought to do. We begin by discussing perhaps the most intuitive moral theory - utilitarianism, which says roughly that we should maximise the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest amount of people.