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Morality Without Objective Value

Moral Anti-realists hold that everyday moral concepts and moral judgments are implicitly committed to the existence of objective facts about what individuals should do and what states of affairs are better or worse, independent of any subjective standards or evaluations. Thus according to these theorists, the validity of moral judgments requires the existence of categorical imperatives (what should be done, simpliciter) and objective values. Since, according to these theorists, objective facts of these kinds do not exist, Moral Anti-realists hold that common moral concepts are in error. Contrary to the claims of the error theorists, it seems that we can disaggregate moral evaluations with the commitment to objective values or categorical imperatives; although some individuals' use of moral concepts necessarily implies these objective facts, the commitment to the existence of objective values and categorical imperatives is not a necessary requirement of any moral theory. To demonstrate this, I will develop an evaluative anti-realist position, which rejects the existence of both objective values and categorical imperatives, yet maintains the existence of morality as a set of evaluative standards. According to this evaluative anti-realist position, all reasons for actions are indexed to particular subjective values, standards or ends. Moral concepts contain explicit or implicit sets of standards on which to judge actions and states of affairs, just as scientific practices contain norms about what counts as a good theory. Yet the application of either of these sets of norms does not require one to hold that these norms reflect an objective evaluative truth. If the commitment to evaluative realism is not ubiquitously implicit in moral evaluations, the Moral Anti-realists are wrong to conclude that Evaluative Anti-realism implies Moral Antirealism.