

## Normative Disagreement and Practical Direction

Whenever

A judges that  $\phi$ -ing is morally wrong,

and

B judges that  $\phi$ -ing is not morally wrong,

we think that they disagree. The two standard types of accounts of such moral disagreements both presuppose that the class of moral wrong-judgments is uniform, though in different ways. According to *the belief account* the disagreement is doxastic: A and B have beliefs with conflicting cognitive contents. This presupposes “belief-uniformity”: that the cognitive content of moral concepts and beliefs is invariant between judges and contexts in such a way that, whenever A believes that  $\phi$ -ing is morally wrong and B believes that  $\phi$ -ing is not morally wrong, their beliefs have mutually inconsistent contents. According to *the attitude account*, moral disagreements are non-doxastic: A and B have clashing practical attitudes, e.g., desires that cannot be satisfied simultaneously. This presupposes “attitude-uniformity”: that moral judgments are always accompanied by, or consist of, desire-like attitudes.

Each uniformity-claim is philosophically controversial: contextualists and non-cognitivists reject the first; advocates of motivational externalism and many weaker forms of internalism reject the latter. Indeed, a number of theories about moral judgments in the recent literature imply the denial of *both* uniformity-claims, including various forms of contextualism, relativism, pluralism, “variationism” (some moral judgments are desires, some are beliefs), and non-standard forms of non-cognitivism. One might think that such theories gain credibility from the difficulty of providing convincing “uniformist” analyses of types of moral, and other normative, judgments – perhaps being neither doxastically nor attitudinally uniform is characteristic of such judgments. However, a major challenge to such theories is that they face “the problem of lost disagreement”: being unable to account for moral disagreements.

The aim of this talk is to present a new account of moral disagreement consistent with the rejection of both uniformity-claims, and through this also shed light on the nature of moral (and other normative) judgments.

My suggestion is that a non-doxastic account is available also without committing to attitude-uniformity: even if moral judgments are not desires, and are not always accompanied by desires, it is characteristic of them that they have *practical direction* (or satisfaction conditions) in the same way as desires. Intuitively we think of people as *acting in accordance or discordance* with their moral wrongness-judgments. This is to recognize that moral wrongness-judgments have *practical direction* in the sense that they are judgments that can be acted in accordance (or discordance) with. Furthermore, to the extent that we recognize that people can accept moral judgments without accompanying motivation and desires, we speak of them as failing to desire to *act in accordance with* their moral wrongness-judgments. Thus, at least pre-theoretically, we recognize that moral

judgments can have practical direction without being (or being accompanied by) desires. This is the intuitive starting-point of my suggestion.

I argue first that moral disagreement can be accounted for in terms of practical direction (in a roughly Stevensonian manner): When two people (e.g., A and B above) morally disagree, they disagree in the sense that they accept moral judgments such that there is at least some possible action (e.g.,  $\phi$ -ing) which is in accordance with one of the judgments but in discordance with the other.

Next, I argue that we can make philosophical sense of the pre-theoretical idea of moral judgments having practical direction (and satisfaction-conditions) without being (accompanied by) desires. We can do so given the common idea that moral practice and moral judgments have a practical social function: to further cooperation and coordination. I argue in three steps.

1. It makes sense that we *apprehend* moral judgments as having practical direction. Due to the practical function of moral practice, our interest in moral judgments is largely practical: we want people to have certain moral opinions because we want them to adjust their pattern of action in specific ways; we want to know which moral opinions they accept in order to know which act-types they are likely to perform or avoid, and praise or punish. This explains why we *think of* and *treat* moral judgments as being tied to specific courses of actions – that is, as being judgments that one can act in accordance or discordance with.

2. Moral judgments *have* practical direction. Many other phenomena than desires have practical direction: e.g., juridical laws (we can act in accordance with them), shopping lists (we can shop in accordance with them), assembly instructions (we can assemble furniture in accordance with them). Arguably, these phenomena have practical direction only because, or in virtue of, us thinking of and treating them (in our social practices) as having a certain practical action-guiding role. A list of groceries doesn't have intrinsic action-guidingness somehow built into it. Rather, when we start to think of it or use it as something to adjust our behavior (shopping) in accordance with, it is given the property of having practical direction. (In this way, practical direction is constructed in a similar fashion as monetary value.) Correspondingly: even if (some or all) moral judgments are beliefs, and as such don't have action-guidingness built into them, the fact that our interest in them is action-oriented and that we give them this role in our thinking and social practices, make it the case that they have practical direction.

3. Moral judgments *necessarily* have direction. Plausibly, having practical direction has become a necessary condition in our concept of moral wrong-judgments. (Just like it holds by conceptual necessity that x cannot be a shopping list or an assembly instruction if x doesn't have practical direction.) If so, then all moral wrong-judgments have practical direction, and all disagreements about moral wrongness can be construed as disagreement in direction.

This is significant not only because it allows us to explain disagreement, but also because having practical direction (being a judgment that can be acted in accordance with), arguably is a defining feature of moral (and more broadly, normative) judgments.

I end the talk with a discussion of how this account can be generalized to evaluative (in contrast to deontic) disagreements, and non-moral normative disagreements.