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Is Morality Subjective or Objective?

Address to *Philosophy Matters* 6:30 pm on
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by Leslie Allan

Subjectivists about morality say that all of our moral judgments are about nothing more than our personal preferences. Objectivists, on the other hand, claim that our moral valuations are based on a human-independent realm of moral facts. Is there a way to reconcile these two opposing views? In this two part series, Leslie Allan presents the case that by properly contrasting different senses of 'objective' and 'subjective', objectivity in moral reasoning can accommodate a necessary subjective element. Here, he draws upon the expressive function of moral language that gives it this subjective character. For morality's objective dimension, Allan argues that this is reflected in the requirement for impartiality in moral reasoning.

Read Leslie Allan's essay online at:

www.RationalRealm.com/philosophy/ethics/is-morality-subjective.html

Download a PDF version of the essay at:

www.RationalRealm.com/downloads/philosophy/IsMoralitySubjective.pdf

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Objectivity and subjectivity in ethics:



OBJECTIVE

recognize human-independent facts



SUBJECTIVE ✓

express human attitudes/preferences



OBJECTIVE ✓

impartially consider others' interests



SUBJECTIVE

hold parochial/self-serving bias

The subjective dimension encapsulates the human-centeredness of morality:

- the evolutionary underpinning of our behaviours, including the writing of kin altruism in our genes and the social learning aspect of reciprocal altruism
- how our moral norms are historically grounded in social contracts, customs and laws

The objective dimension encapsulates the impartial nature of morality:

- our appeal to reason and argument based on general principles
- the barring of appeals to parochial interests

References:

'Is Morality Subjective?' by Leslie Allan

www.RationalRealm.com/philosophy/ethics/is-morality-subjective.html

'Is Morality Subjective? – A Reply to Critics' by Leslie Allan

www.RationalRealm.com/philosophy/ethics/is-morality-subjective-reply-critics.html

'Is Morality a Matter of Taste? – HSV Public Lecture' by Leslie Allan

www.rationalrealm.com/philosophy/ethics/is-morality-matter-taste.html

'Can Morality Be Objective without God? – Discussing Religion Respectfully Address' by Leslie Allan

www.rationalrealm.com/philosophy/ethics/morality-objective-without-god.html

'Meta-ethics: An Introduction' by Leslie Allan

www.RationalRealm.com/philosophy/ethics/meta-ethics-introduction.html

'A Taxonomy of Meta-ethical Theories' by Leslie Allan

www.RationalRealm.com/philosophy/ethics/taxonomy-meta-ethical-theories.html

Suggested reading:

Singer, P. 1981. *Practical Ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Singer, P. 2011. *The Expanding Circle: Ethics, Evolution and Moral Progress*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.