

The mathematician George Kreisel once remarked that the problem for the philosopher of mathematics was 'not the existence of mathematical objects but the objectivity of mathematical truth'. How does the distinction between the question of objectivity and the existence of objects apply in the field of ethics?

It was Kreisel's, tutor Wittgenstein (W) who *possibly* influenced this view, W felt that mathematical propositions state truths and make ontological claims, that the truth makers are objects that exist or subsist in a similar manner to Plato's forms (abstract, non-spatiotemporal and language and mind independent). So it is with views of W (taken from his lectures on the foundations of mathematics, 1939) I shall initially go with. Some of his comments were aimed at G.H.Hardy, who had claimed that mathematical propositions 'correspond to reality (it is disputed that Hardy said 'corresponds' but for the purpose of the essay I will take it that he did) and from that W inferred that what Hardy really wanted to say was, 'in the same way empirical features of reality corresponds to empirical propositions'.

Kreisel's (K) aforementioned quote, was also used by Dummett (D) in *Truth and Other Engma's* and his (D) observation that various anti-realisms (i.e. Nominalism) had taken on the form of a reduction, that what is claimed to be the ultimate constituents of reality is not so if they can be reduced to entities of other types. What K, D and W have said we are targeting is the truth and validity of the statements, not whether the statements have an ultimate reference.

So back to W, his point was that following rules as we do in the various language games (or let's say the concepts under discussion i.e. the particular area of discourse) does not necessarily involve a *special* relation to objects platonic like or other. When we think of a reality, we think of something we can point to, it is observable, when we affirm something it can be true or false, but, depending on *how* and *if* something corresponds is relative. Truth or falsity is dependent on matching up with what is the case in a particular region of discourse (the rules or practice to obtain will be different in the regions of physics, mathematics and ethics). So mathematical statements can be objective without pointing to something like a platonic object for reference, the mathematical area of discourse has its own framework to operate within, in other words there is no necessary connection between an abstract object like a form and the truth or falsity of a statement.

So this distinction that K and W point to seems to also apply in the area of Ethics and as a result for example between non-natural and natural properties. Where can one find *good* or *bad*, *right* or *wrong*, *just* or *unjust* in the world? When used in a *moral sense* they a/ either express feelings (aversions or attractions to things) or attitudes, or b/ they refer to strong beliefs that express moral facts (and therefore can be true or false), and are very often accompanied by an *ought* (or its synonyms).

So if W is denying the need to posit objects in a mathematical platonic world, then there is also no need to posit a similar world where good or bad, right or wrong, just or unjust subsist independently to natural properties. Therefore moral statements can be objectively true or false based on the framework they are operating in (not in the case of a/ a view held by non-cognitivists, because there are no objective moral truths or facts), that framework has to be within language and ways of life. So to pace W, with the words good or bad, right or wrong, we can say the reality to which they correspond is that we have a seemingly *moral* use for them in language. But in the case of these words used individually, *good* (W uses 'and', 'or', 'two' to make his point) for example, you would be at a loss as to what to point at.

It is obvious that everyday language is infected with value commitments and claims. When I look out into the world I see things as right and wrong, good or bad, (I think I am stating moral facts and there is the possibility of that being in error i.e. Mackie) that is categorically the way things are for me. When I state something, I am aiming at saying something that is true or meaningful, without thinking about bringing in some extramental reality into play.

For the non-cognitivist, there must be some psychological facts that enjoin me to act as I do, governed by the *determinate* way I am and the way society 'is'. For the cognitivist, there has to be some moral laws, perhaps one that is divine and the words used to express such propositions have a mesmeric force (pace Anscombe) and express truths and facts. I have an obligation and duty to follow these laws, I am *somehow* enjoined to do so,

failure to conform to these *injunctio*ns will have consequences in this life or the next. Irrespective of the nature of this law, they are moral rules and standards that are facts.

People can generally agree on what is good and bad, but when I make an assertion I am not just stating the facts (as they appear objectively (mind independently) in the world) I am clothing reality as it appears to me (mostly we, as we share the same biology and neurology etc.), I am saying what I am seeing, but how much of what I say is my creation?

Aside of these sceptical concerns however, the fact is moral life, beliefs and attitudes are embedded in social forms and ways of life. We follow rules, agree on the importance of things and share sensibilities. A truly objective viewpoint to see the bare facts, would be to sit outside of language and the human condition. But that would miss the point, the reasons behind what is valued, the what it is that is important. My attitude it an attitude towards a soul (W), I treat people as ends in themselves (Kant). And as regards the objectivity of moral judgements (Blackburn, Spreading the word, pg 210), giving assent (or not) to p , we practice under the rule that p is true or false, just as a court of law must do, accepting that there may be some half-truths or dilemmas when we are torn between two difficult choices.

If a statement is true, there has to be something which makes it true, a region of reality that it corresponds to, for mathematics, there are laws and principles that govern that region, for physics it is the laws of nature and for ethics, it is the either a divine or moral law (without a divine legislator) that we are commanded to follow or psychological facts about humans that are characterised (our natural moral sentiments) and governed by evolution and our social framework (containing guiding moral principles, which are useful and helpful in us getting on in the world).

To conclude, as a mathematician, K probably thought questions about the existence of objects was unimportant (Ontological ponderances are after all for Philosophers), what was important was the objectivity of the mathematical statement in that it describes the tangible world truly (or correctly, successfully, helpfully, depending on your viewpoint). Numbers after all, do not have a tangible existence in the world, we invented them, we can dispense with platonic objects or mathematical entities (unless you share Quine's view) and focus on what is important. They can still have a *sort* of an objective existence, in that they are *used* to describe the tangible world.