Recap: Voluntarism

*Divine Voluntarism About Moral Reasons*

All there is to the fact that there is a moral reason to φ is the fact that God wishes (or commands) us to φ.

*Regal Voluntarism About Moral Reasons*

All there is to the fact that there is a moral reason to φ is the fact that the Queen wishes (or commands) us to φ.
Recap: Voluntarism

*Voluntarism About Moral Obligations*

All there is to the fact that there is a moral obligation to φ is the fact that God (or the Queen) wishes (or commands) us to φ.

*Voluntarism About Reasons*

All there is to the fact that there is a reason to φ is the fact that God (or the Queen) wishes (or commands) us to φ.
‘...since honesty (or moral necessity) and turpitude are affections of human deeds, arising from their agreeableness or disagreeableness to a rule, or a law; and since a law is the command of a superior, it does not appear how we can conceive any goodness or turpitude before all law, and without the imposition of a superior.’


Samuel Pufendorf
1632-1694
Recap: Voluntarism

P1  Moral obligations are legal obligations.

Cf. the ‘jural view of ethics’ in Henry Sidwick’s *Methods of Ethics* (1874).

P2  Voluntarism About Legal Obligations is true.

Cf. John Austin’s ‘command’ theory of law in his *Province of Jurisprudence Determined* (1832).

C  Voluntarism About Moral Obligations is true.
Recap: Voluntarism

‘Whence [i.e. from *Divine Voluntarism*] it follows unavoidably, that nothing can be imagined so grossly wicked, or so fouly unjust or dishonest, but if it were supposed to be commanded by this omnipotent Deity, must needs upon that hypothesis forthwith become holy, just and righteous.’

(Ralph Cudworth, *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, p.119)
Recap: Voluntarism

P1. There is a possible world at which God wishes (or commands) us to torture babies for fun.

P2. If *Divine Voluntarism About Moral Reasons* is true, then any possible world at which God wishes (or commands) us to torture babies for fun is a world at which there is a moral reason to torture babies for fun.

P3. There is no possible world at which there is a moral reason to torture babies for fun.

C. *Divine Voluntarism About Moral Reasons* is false.
Recap: Voluntarism

**Voluntarism** can give us a satisfying answer to the question: Why should we be responsive to moral reasons/obligations?

If we don’t do what God (or the Queen) wishes (or commands) us to do, then we will be made to suffer. (*A reason of self-interest*)

If we don’t do what God (or the Queen) wishes (or commands) us to do, then we are being ungrateful. (*A moral reason*)

**Voluntarism** also gives us a way of avoiding the postulation of *sui generis* facts about moral reasons/obligations.
Rationalism and sentimentalism

‘There has been a controversy started of late… concerning the general foundation of *Morals*; whether they be derived from *Reason*, or from *Sentiment*; whether we attain the knowledge of them by a chain of argument and induction, or by an immediate feeling and finer internal sense…’

(David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, p.562)

‘The moral rationalists… held that morality originated in reason alone. The moral sentimentalists… held that morality originated at least partly in sentiment.’

(Michael B Gill, ‘Moral Rationalism vs. Moral Sentimentalism’, p.16)
Rationalism and sentimentalism

*Cognitivism About Morality*

Moral judgments are beliefs (cognitive mental states). They can be true or false.

*Non-Cognitivism About Morality*

Moral judgments are emotions or desires (or other non-cognitive mental states). They cannot be true or false.

Is the modern debate between *Cognitivists* and *Non-Cognitivists About Morality* the same as the early modern debate between *Rationalists* and *Sentimentalists About Morality*?
Rationalism and sentimentalism

_Metaphysical Sentimentalism About Morality_

Moral facts are (at least partly) facts about our emotions and desires.

The fact that φ-ing is morally wrong is (at least partly) the fact that we have an aversion to φ-ing.

_Justificatory Sentimentalism About Morality_

Moral beliefs are justified (at least partly) by facts about our emotions and desires.

My belief that φ-ing is morally wrong is justified (at least partly) by the fact that I have an aversion to φ-ing.
Rationalism and sentimentalism

*Epistemological Sentimentalism About Morality*

Moral knowledge is dependent upon facts about our emotions and desires.

The fact that we know that $\phi$-ing is morally wrong is dependent upon the fact that we have an aversion to $\phi$-ing…

…either because the fact that $\phi$-ing is morally wrong is (at least partly) the fact that we have an aversion to $\phi$-ing…

…or because our belief that $\phi$-ing is morally wrong is justified (at least partly) by the fact that we have an aversion to $\phi$-ing.

If we had no emotions or desires then we would have no moral knowledge.
Rationalism and sentimentalism

*Epistemological Rationalism About Morality*

Moral knowledge is independent of facts about our emotions and desires.

The fact that we know that φ-ing is morally wrong is independent of the fact that we have an aversion to φ-ing.

The fact that φ-ing is morally wrong is not (even partly) the fact that we have an aversion to φ-ing...

Our belief that φ-ing is morally wrong is not justified (even partly) by the fact that we have an aversion to φ-ing.

We could still have moral knowledge even if we had no emotions or desires.
‘...from the different relations of different persons one to another, there necessarily arises a fitness or unfitness of certain manners of behavior of some persons towards others... For instance: that God is infinitely superior to men; is as clear, as that infinity is larger than a point... And it is as certainly fit that men should honour and worship, obey and imitate God…’

(Samuel Clarke, *Discourse of Natural Religion*, p.226)
Varieties of rationalism

‘We find… that some actions are agreeable, others disagreeable, to the nature and circumstances of the agent and the object, and the relations interceding between them. Thus… we find an agreement between the gratitude of A and the kindness of B; and a disagreement between the ingratitude of C and the bounty of D. The question then is, whether we perceive them by our understanding… And might it as well be asked, how it is that we perceive the agreement between the three angles of a triangle, and two right ones? …If the agreement or disagreement of one sort of ideas be proper objects of our understandings, why not those of another? Especially since, in many cases, they are perceived with equal clearness and evidence. Let therefore our intelligent faculty either be pronounced insufficient In both cases, or in neither.’

(John Balguy, Foundation of Moral Goodness, p.451)
Varieties of rationalism

All there is to the fact that φ-ing is morally wrong in a given situation is the fact that...

...there is a relation of unfitness or disagreement between φ-ing and this situation.

All there is to the fact that failing to do someone a good turn in a situation where this person has previously done you a good turn is morally wrong is the fact that...

...there is a relation of unfitness or disagreement between failing to do someone a good turn and a situation where this person has previously done you a good turn.
‘A true proposition may be denied, or things may be denied to be what they are, by deeds, as well as by express words or another proposition… If a body of soldiers, seeing another body approach, should fire upon them, would not this action declare that they were enemies; and if they were not enemies, would not this military language declare what was false?’

‘…If A should enter into a compact with B, by which he promises and engages never to do some certain thing, and after this he does that thing… his act… must… interfere with the truth of that proposition, which says there was such a promise made… No act (whether word or deed) of any being, to whom moral good and evil are imputable, that interferes with any true proposition, or denies any thing to be as it is, can be right.’

(William Wollaston, Religion of Nature Delineated, p.277-280)

All there is to the fact that φ-ing is morally wrong is the fact that, in φ-ing, we make a false statement.

The soldiers act wrongly in firing on those who are not their enemies, but they do not act wrongly in firing on those who are their enemies.
Varieties of rationalism

Looking forward...

‘Some actions are of such a nature that their maxim cannot even be thought as a universal law of nature without contradiction, far from it being possible that one could will that it should be such. In others this internal impossibility is not found, though it is still impossible to will that their maxim should be raised to the universality of a law of nature, because such a will would contradict itself.’

(Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*)

Immanuel Kant
1724-1804
Arguments for rationalism

‘...it seems an insuperable difficulty in [Hutcheson’s] scheme, that virtue appears in it to be of an arbitrary and positive nature, as entirely depending upon instincts, that might originally have been otherwise, or even contrary to what they now are, and may at any time be altered or inverted, if the Creator pleases.’

(John Balguy, *Foundation of Moral Goodness*, p.438)

‘Whence [i.e. from Voluntarism] it follows unavoidably, that nothing can be imagined so grossly wicked, or so fouly unjust or dishonest, but if it were supposed to be commanded by this omnipotent Deity, must needs upon that hypothesis forthwith become holy, just and righteous.’

(Ralph Cudworth, *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, p.119)
Arguments for rationalism

P1 There is a possible world at which we have an aversion to kindness and generosity.

P2 If *Metaphysical Sentimentalism About Morality* is true, then any possible world at which we have an aversion to kindness and generosity is a world at which kindness and generosity are morally wrong.

P3 There is no possible world at which kindness and generosity are morally wrong.

C *Metaphysical Sentimentalism About Morality* is false.

Hume appears to take *Sentimentalism* to imply a rejection of P3.
Rationalists are keen to stress the necessity of morality (to insist on P3).

‘...these eternal and necessary differences of things make it fit and reasonable for creatures so to act; they cause it to be their duty, or lay an obligation on them, so to do…’

(Samuel Clarke, *Discourse of Natural Religion*, p.226)

‘The same is to be said of right and wrong, of moral good and evil, as far as they express real characters of actions. They must immutably and necessarily belong to those actions of which they are truly affirmed.’

Arguments for rationalism

‘...let any one compare the ideas arising from our *powers of sensation*, with those arising from our *intuition of the natures of things*, and inquire which of them his ideas of right and wrong most resemble... It is scarcely conceivable that any one can impartially attend to the nature of his own perceptions, and determine that, when he thinks gratitude or beneficence to be *right*, he perceives nothing *true* of them, and *understands* nothing, but only receives an impression from a sense.’

(Richard Price, *Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*, p.678)

Richard Price 1723-1791
Arguments for rationalism

P1  The moral facts do not appear to be (even partly) facts about our emotions or desires.

C1  Either the moral facts are not what they appear to be or they are not (even partly) facts about our emotions or desires.

P2  The moral facts are what they appear to be.

C2  The moral facts are not (even partly) facts about our emotions or desires.

The point of this argument is to force *Metaphysical Sentimentalists About Morality* to accept an error theory.
Problems for rationalism

There is deep and pervasive disagreement about moral facts.

This deep and pervasive disagreement is easy to explain if Sentimentalism About Morality is true, because there are deep and pervasive differences in human beings’ emotions and desires.

By contrast, if Rationalism About Morality is true, then it is difficult to explain the deep and pervasive disagreement about moral facts.

Put simply, if morality is like mathematics, then how come there is deep and pervasive disagreement about moral facts, but no deep and pervasive disagreement about mathematical facts?
Problems for rationalism

‘The principal thing that can, with any colour of reason, seem to countenance the opinion of those who deny the natural and eternal difference of good and evil... is the difficulty there may sometimes be, to define exactly the bounds of right and wrong: the variety of opinions, that have obtained even among understanding and learned men concerning certain questions of just and unjust... and the many contrary laws that have been made in divers ages and in different countries, concerning these matters.’

(Samuel Clarke, Discourse of Natural Religion, p.229)
‘But as, in painting, two very different colours, by diluting each other very slowly and gradually, may from the highest intenseness in either extreme, terminate in the midst insensibly, and so run one into the other, that it shall not be possible even for a skilful eye to determine exactly where the one ends, and the other begins; yet the colours may really differ as much as can be, not in degree only but entirely in kind… so, though it may perhaps be very difficult in some nice and perplexed cases… to define exactly the bounds of right and wrong, just and unjust… yet right and wrong are nevertheless in themselves totally and essentially different; even altogether as much, as white and black, light and darkness.’

(Samuel Clarke, Discourse of Natural Religion, p.229)
There is a tight connection between moral knowledge and moral motivation.

If I know that $\phi$-ing is morally wrong, then I am motivated not to $\phi$.

This connection is easy to explain if *Sentimentalism About Morality* is true, because it is clear that our emotions and desires motivate us to action.

If I know that $\phi$-ing is morally wrong, and *Sentimentalism About Morality* is true, then I have an aversion to $\phi$-ing. But if I have an aversion to $\phi$-ing, then I am motivated not to $\phi$.

This connection is not so easy to explain if *Rationalism About Morality* is true.