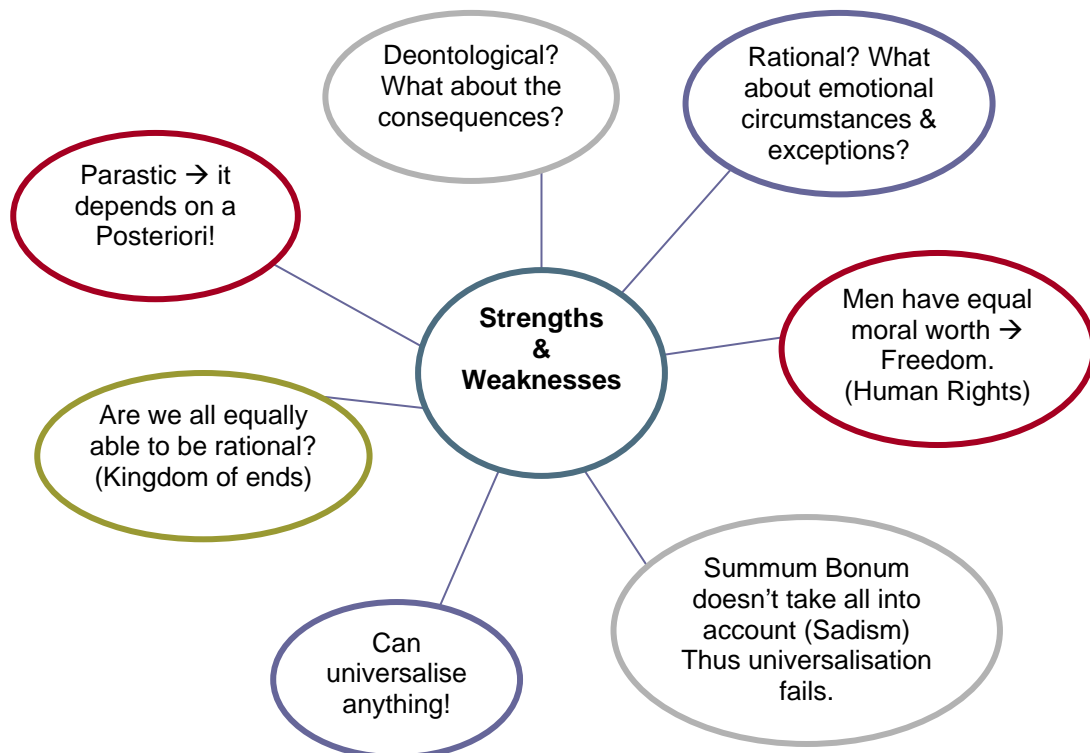


Kantian Deontology

- Deontological (based on duty) ethical theory established by Emmanuel Kant in *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.
 - Part of the enlightenment movement, and sought a rational (a priori) basis for morality that went beyond the dogma and superstition of the time. → “*There is nothing higher than reason*”
 - Men share an innate ability to reason, it defines us... a moral theory based upon this should be truly universal.
 - It is our duty to be moral, and to be moral is to follow our duty. We should not be sidetracked by emotion, etc.
 - “Good Will” → It is having the right intention which makes something good, not the action in itself. “*it is impossible to think of anything ... which can be taken as good without qualification except a Good Will*” “*in law a man is guilty when he violates the rights of others. In ethics he is guilty if he only thinks of doing so*”
 - Kant is realistic though, he says “*ought implies can*”, meaning we are only required to perform duties we are actually capable of.
 - But... what duties should we be following? Kant’s method is his Categorical Imperative.
 - Categorical statements are unqualified and unconditional. They should be followed for duties sake.
 - Our very awareness of these imperatives is a reason to follow them.
 - Kant’s Imperative is → “*it is to act according to the maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become universal law*” → i.e. the principle of Universalisation.
 - Kant gives two exceptions for when this imperative is not to be applied:
 - Contradictions of the Will → If the action could conceivably cause you problems later. This is from his belief in the *Summum Bonum* (that all humans seek good for themselves).
 - Contradiction of Nature → If the action defeats its own concept.
 - Kant’s theory rests on two assumptions:
 - “*Act so as to use humanity always as an end and never as a means to an end*” → Individual Rights (unlike democracy, utilitarianism etc).
 - Assume we live in a “*kingdom of ends*” → i.e. assume all are going to act in the rules of the same framework.
 - Kant is not being strictly authoritarian – he provides a basis for people to determine their own moral judgements, and for Kant it is vital we have this freedom for robotically following rules has no moral worth.
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- Being deontological, we get problems in the consequences of our actions (i.e. Granny in the road.. if we get her run down by a truck by mistake are we still good, or bad?) Similarly, is something *always* wrong? What about emotional factors (i.e. killing Hitler).
 - Kant would argue emotions cannot cloud or judgement for they can distort our view since they are unreliable and unpredictable (unlike reasoning). How could we have known the Granny would get flattened? How do we know Hitler wasn’t about to apologise for his actions?
 - Kant’s thinking is quite in touch with modern views on Human Rights, that each individual has rights which should be protected, unlike a democratic system (or its ethical equivalent ... utilitarianism). Kant maintains that all people have equal moral worth – from their intrinsic ability to reason – but do we all reason the same? Are we all equally able to be rational? Kant himself viewed woman and people from a black race to be inferior in their rational abilities. If we are not all able to act the same, Kant’s assumption of living in a kingdom of ends is clearly compromised.
 - Kant’s other assumption is about the summum bonum, and again we can find fault in this assumption. Is it always the case the humans seek good for themselves? The sadist for example... the universalisations made by a sadist will be different to those made by a non-sadist – as such Kant’s theory is not being truly universal.
 - We can universalise anything in theory if we define it clearly enough – as well as non ethical statements – which brings doubt into the whole system.
 - Parasitic theory → It is based upon the idea that we already know what is right and wrong, all Kant does is test our beliefs, rather than actually establish new ones. When we universalise we have to use a posteriori knowledge to judge the outcomes and manner of the experience, which defeats the point of Kant’s rational theory.
 - Overall it fails to be what it sets out to be.

Kantian Deontology



Objectivity, Subjectivity and Ethical Relativism

Objectivity

- “I know that X is wrong”
- Good is defined by some external source, i.e. God, Rationality, Duty, etc. Independent of Belief.
 - Kantian ethics is objective, as Good = Reason
 - Aquinas’ Natural Moral Law is objective as Good = Natural Purpose
 - Divine Command Theory is objective as Good = God.
- Leads to a rigid, authoritarian culture where people all follow the same rules and commands. No flexibility.
- Universal basis for morality → available to anyone.
- We can be certain of the morality of our actions → But we can do things with good intention and they are still bad.
- Lack of emotion can cause problems → robotic following of rules does not constitute morality → False harmony.
- People are individuals, tests etc oversimplify the process, create conflicts etc.

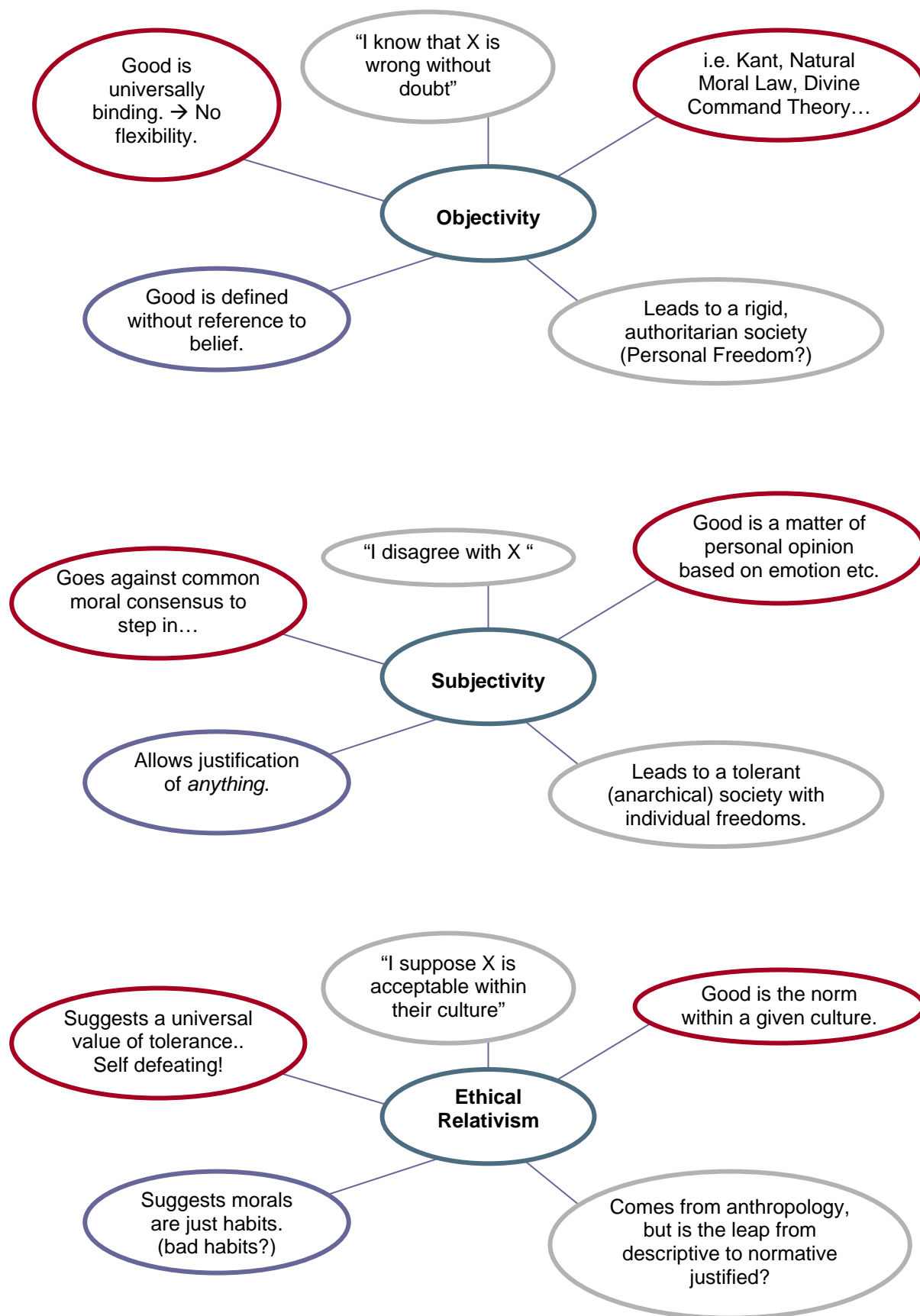
Subjectivity

- “I disagree with X”
- Good is a matter of personal belief based on emotions etc.
- Hume opens the door for such a theory when he says there can be no moral truths (Hume’s Fork, debates about good, etc).
- This can lead to a tolerant (over tolerant and possibly anarchical) society in which no person has the right to impose their beliefs on anyone else.
- Each individual has equal moral worth, and no person’s opinions are any more worthy than any others.
- Good has no universal definitions; it is just a matter of personal belief.
- This can lead to justification of *anything* (holocaust, murder, etc etc) without any ability to challenge what is going on. This can easily conflict with common decency.

Ethical Relativism

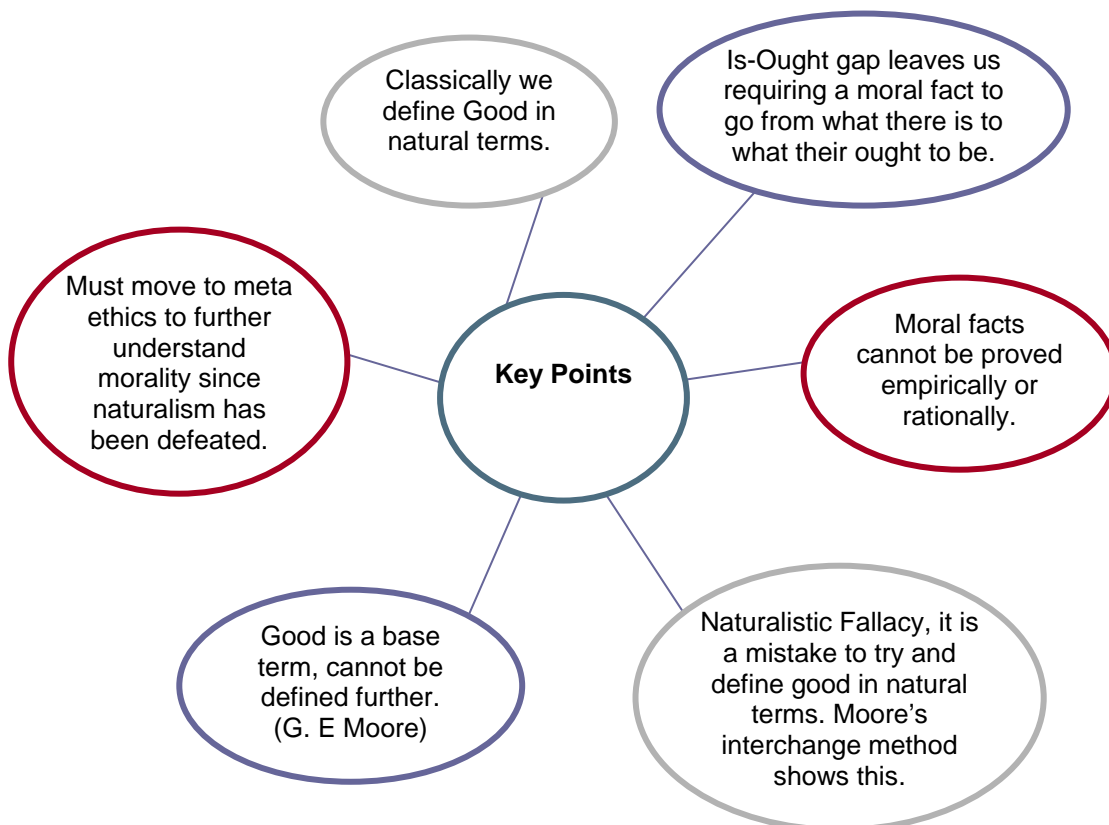
- “I suppose X is acceptable within their culture”
- Good is the moral norm within any given culture.
- Comes from anthropologists such as Ruth Benedict who observed the traditions of many different cultures around the world.
- Within a given culture people should follow the same rules, but cultures have differences and no one culture is any more *right* than any other.
- This system operates on a majority rule – the norm – which can exclude minorities within any culture. Whilst cultures may differ greatly, within each culture there is limited flexibility.
- This principle makes a jump from the descriptive (people in different cultures do things differently) to the normative (people in different cultures do things different and are good to do so). This leap is unjustified.
- It suggests morals are habits, so if we develop bad habits, does doing bad things become right because it is the norm? Flat earth argument → Just because we all believed it, doesn’t make it right.
- This can cause problems when we see the need to step in and assist a foreign country (i.e. genocide, war, etc).
- The whole thing also suggests tolerance is a universal value.... Which makes the argument self defeating!

Objectivity, Subjectivity and Ethical Relativism



Hume & Debates About Good

- The classical response to “What is Good” is to define good in natural terms:
 - Utilitarianism, Good = Pleasure
 - Situation Ethics, Good = Love
 - Natural Moral Law, Good = Natural Purpose
 - Divine Command Theory, Good = God
 - Etc
- But, problems with this start with Hume’s Is-Ought Gap. There is a logical gap between the descriptive, what there *is* and the prescriptive, what there *ought* to be. In order to get from one the other we need a maxim – or a moral statement that defined morality for us.
- Hume goes on to demonstrate that such a maxim can never be proved empirically (morality is not testable) nor rationally (despite Kant’s attempts to demonstrate so). As such, there can be no moral facts.
- G.E Moore continues this attack in his work *Principia Ethica*, where he coins the term Naturalistic Fallacy, for the attempt to define Good in terms of natural things. He says Good is a base definition and cannot be defined further (like a colour). He says if it had a true definition, such a word would be interchangeable with “Good”, and no natural term can be used like that.
- “neither science nor religion can establish the basic principles of morality” (Moore)
- Meta Ethics is the attempt to overcome this dilemma by not actually defining good, merely describing some of its attributes. Theories such as emotivism as intuitionism work in this way.



Intuitionism and Emotivism

Intuitionism

- There are objective moral truths, these are *self evident* to the “mature” mind. Moore contends that just as we know there is a world out there, we know objective moral truths. They are common sense, or intuition.
- These truths are beyond human experience and reasoning, from them we gain our sense of morality. They require no further proof or explanation, they just are.
 - Some moral truths are known
 - To prove a moral truth you appeal to more basic truths
 - Such a process cannot happen infinitely
 - Therefore, basic moral truths are known but not provable.
- This seems a logical conclusion; basic moral truths must be out there we just cannot prove them. But what are these truths?
 - Moore & WD Ross agree Pleasure, Knowledge & Virtue are intrinsically good, and Ignorance, Pain and Vice are intrinsically bad.
 - Moore & Ross disagree however on whether there are basic moral duties. Moore had a pseudo-utilitarian view of maximising good consequences, whilst Ross believed in self evident duties such as keeping promises.
 - The fact there is disagreement holds the argument to question, how can we depend upon it if the key thinkers cannot agree on its objective truths?
 - We are asked to take for granted the existence of these truths, but logical positivism → not correct to assume.
- Truths are “forced upon us”, no individual thought processing, just obeying our intuitions. No chance for debate, argument nor compromise. No flexibility.
- Theory is descriptive → it does not actually tell us how to live our lives. But this does not necessitate a good moral theory.
- We assume the existence of objective facts, and we assume their content → circular argument. Logical Flaws.

Emotivism

- Suggests that the terms “good” and “bad” are merely emotional responses to something.
- Born from the logical positivist movement, Vienna Circle, etc, which said (from Hume’s Fork) since ethical facts are neither a priori nor a posteriori, they are improvable, and therefore meaningless. Since the idea of an ethical fact is meaningless, all there can be is emotional responses to actions.
- AJ Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* → “the presence of an ethical symbol in a proposition adds nothing to its factual content”. → “Right”, “wrong”, “good”, “bad” are all meaningless; they just express emotions of the speaker. To say someone acted wrongly “*I am simply evincing my moral disapproval of it*” – there is no extra fact to the statement, it’s just like saying it in a disapproving voice.
- There are no moral facts to disagree over, and no definition of good to worry about. Good is simply a way of saying “hurray for X”.
- A key point is that this makes no claim to **truth**; people are just expressing their opinions. We can argue with people’s opinions, and we can try to change their opinions. It is not the same as a subjective view where believing something makes it true. We are all within our rights to challenge someone else’s opinions.
- Theory is descriptive → it does not actually tell us how to live our lives. But this does not necessitate a good moral theory.
- “a genuine truth claim is either empirically or rationally justifiable”, the trouble with this view (that of the logical positivists) is that it itself is not justifiable, and so the argument is self defeating.

Intuitionism and Emotivism

