

7. "När vi säger att Napoleon var en stor fältherre, så 'har' storheten' över sig en särskild känslöbetoning som ej går att skilja från ordets betydelse: alldeles som när jag säger: vilket maktigt klippblock, där 'maktigheten' innesluter ej blott storheten över det vanliga måttet utan också en stark känslöbetoning."

8. Maybe one can say that Hägerström here notices the existence of so called "thick concepts". When Bernard Williams introduces that terminology in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (1985: 129f), he characterizes thick concepts as expressing "a union of fact and value". Hägerström would agree to such a description. But he would strongly argue that we in an analysis can separate these components, even if in daily practice we are not aware of the structure. Of course, he would not at all accept the idea that thick concept are examples which prove that the distinction between facts and values cannot be upheld.

9. In Hägerström's own words: "Vid all värdering är uttrycket ett känslöuttryck förbundet med ett jämsides givet uttryck för en föreställning om ett verkligt skeende."

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Chapter 3

Two Kinds of Anti-Objectivism

Thomas Mautner

Moral ideas are neither true nor false—this was Hägerström's bold thesis. He was the first to formulate it, in his inaugural lecture in 1911. This non-cognitivist thesis is in conflict with the thesis, known as "error theory", that moral ideas are false. Later statements of his about the concepts of moral duty and moral value have been interpreted as proposing an error theory. This is debatable, but there can be no doubt that he proposed such a theory for rights and retributive justice. A few observations will be made about the reasons for the difference in treatment.

Naturalism

Let us begin with religion. David Hume, the author of a renowned history of England, wrote that in the early years of the reign of James I:

It had frequently been the practice of the puritans to form certain assemblies, which they called prophesings, where alternately, as moved by the spirit, they displayed their zeal in prayers and exhortations, and raised their own enthusiasm, as well as that of their audience, to the highest pitch, from that social contagion, which has so mighty an influence on

holy fervours, and from the mutual emulation, which arose in those trials of religious eloquence (1778: 12).

A similar gently facetious description of a revivalist gathering in "darkest Småland", inspired by holy fervour, formed the beginning of a talk, "Philosophy as a science", which Hågerström gave in the radical student society Verdandi.² Like Hume, he assumed that his educated readership would be intrigued by the contagious enthusiasm of the participants. But Hågerström wanted to make a point: those tempted to scoff ought to realise that when the excited congregation believes that what they experience is an emanation of a higher realm of being, their belief is on a par with that of many eminent philosophers, including the celebrated Rudolf Eucken. Eucken's philosophical outlook, "an inspirational form of Personal Idealism", was conceived in opposition to the naturalism and secularism that was becoming increasingly influential in his time (Grave 1981).³ His philosophical works were international best-sellers. In December 1908 he received the Nobel Prize for literature.⁴ Early in the new year he gave the Olaus Petri lectures in Uppsala—the last of them on 23 March 1909. So he was a centre of attention, which explains why Hågerström chose him as an example in his talk a few weeks later.

Religious doctrines, and *Welt- und Lebensanschauungen* like Eucken's, had as their opposite the outlook that Hågerström called naturalism;⁵ "the only scientific (*vetenskaplig*) outlook in the sense that there can be no separate reality which is not entirely a part of the natural order [...]. This natural order, the real world, cannot, he argued, be other than the all-encompassing empirical world of space and time. "No knowledge of reality is possible except through relating its object to a systematically interconnected whole" (1953IN: 267 (1928HK)). He at one time called his outlook "critical philosophy", and on another occasion "materialism".⁶ "Anthropocentrism", "superstition", "supernaturalism" and "metaphysics" were words he used for ways of thinking incompatible with his naturalism. The motto he assigned to his philosophical self-portrait (1929AH) was *Praeterea censeo metaphysicam esse delendam*.

Other philosophers have defined naturalism similarly. For David Armstrong it is "the hypothesis that nothing but Nature, the single, all-embracing spatio-temporal system, exists" (Armstrong 1978: 138; quoted

in Nola 2010). Jaegwon Kim explains, following Roy Wood Sellars, that metaphysical naturalism is the view that natural world is the whole world, and "by nature is meant the space-time causal system which is studied by science and in which our lives are passed" (Kim 2011: 217; quoting Sellars 1927). These authors share the outlook they describe, and it has become increasingly predominant among philosophers. Sellars wrote "we are all naturalists now" (1922: vii-ix). According to Simon Blackburn "We nearly all want to be naturalists [...] the problem is one of finding room for ethics" (1998: 49). In 2005, Frank Jackson stated "Some form of materialism is now almost orthodoxy in the philosophy of mind".⁷ The introduction to a recent collection of papers states "Naturalism probably constitutes mainstream opinion in contemporary analytic philosophy" (Corradini et al 2006: 1). Naturalism is frequently identified with physicalism. Crispin Wright characterises naturalism as the view that "the natural coincides with the physical as (best) physics understands it" (2002: 407). According to Peter Schulte, most contemporary philosophers accept that all facts are physical or supervene on physical facts (2010: 102; see also 2012).

So, with his turn to naturalism, about 1905, Hågerström placed himself firmly within what was later to become the mainstream of twentieth-century analytical philosophy. But one difference is notable. Present-day naturalist philosophers try to explain what naturalism (or physicalism or materialism) involves and in what way—if at all—spiritual entities, collective entities, theoretical entities, the mind, values, normativity and much else can find a place in nature. But attempts to give reasons why naturalism should be accepted as the correct ontology are rare indeed. It is in effect introduced as an article of philosophical faith which may need explanation but can do without justification. It is to Hågerström's credit that he tried to argue the case for naturalism. His leading idea was that a many-worlds ontology would undermine the validity of basic principles of logic.⁸

Before proceeding to Hågerström's anti-objectivist meta-ethics, a few historical side-glances may be in order.

One formulation, used by Hågerström to characterise the *pröton pseudos* of metaphysics, was that reality itself is treated as if it were something real. The formulation closely resembles Heidegger's, that *Sein* (Being) itself is not a *Seiendes* (a being, something existing). There

is nothing to indicate influence between the two authors. The coincidence is no doubt due to the common background, i.e., Kant's thesis that existence is not a real predicate. As for the formulation itself, Heidegger took it to express the insight that Being (*Sein*) is both ineffable and the proper object of deep thought, while beings (*Seiendes*) are the proper objects of scientific inquiry, which is in its nature superficial and plodding. "Science does not think." Hägerström's outlook had nothing in common with this.

Another contemporary coincidence is the rejection of metaphysics in Carnap and other logical positivists. Again, there is nothing to indicate an influence either way. Each would have received impulses from Hume, Comte and nineteenth-century positivism. But the reasons for Carnap's anti-metaphysical view, linguistic and verificationist, are different from those proposed by Hägerström. Also, reasons aside, there is a difference in tone. As the title of a famous article by Carnap indicates, he wanted to *overcome* (or refute or eliminate) metaphysics (Carnap [1932] 1959). His rejection was firm: Hägerström's was more than that. Metaphysics had to be *destroyed* (*deländam*). The implacable enmity stems from his view that metaphysical beliefs are more than mere sophistry and illusion. Many of them inspire or justify great evils. In that respect, they are like superstitious beliefs, and, influenced by Auguste Comte on this matter, Hägerström was inclined to regard metaphysical beliefs as superstitions in disguise. In a lecture in the spring term of 1925, he stated that fetishism remains preserved in the transition to metaphysics.⁹

Hägerström turned towards radicalism as a young student in Uppsala from 1886 and onward, away from the piety of the parental home. He discovered and became much impressed by the radical writers of his time: Georg Brandes, Ibsen, Nietzsche, and many others. He even admitted, in a letter to his brother Gustaf, of being "attracted to so-called atheism". These influences soon took hold. He also developed a strong sympathy for the working-class movement and the progressive and secularist intellectual currents of the time. In a letter to his fiancée he expressed strong indignation over an "ignorant and shamelessly dishonest attack"¹⁰ on "a great man", "one of the greatest thinkers of this century" — John Stuart Mill. In lectures years later, he used more than once the famous words "*La vérité est en marche*".¹¹ His audience

understood the allusion. Philosophically, he was by 1905 about to complete the turn towards an uncompromising naturalism.

These preliminary remarks are only intended to supply a few pointers to situate our author historically. We now turn to his anti-objectivist metaethics. First to be considered is his non-cognitivism.¹² Then we consider statements which may suggest an error theory. Whether they do is open to debate. But in respect of certain conceptions, especially rights and retributive justice, he undoubtedly proposed an error theory.

Non-cognitivism

Moral ideas are not true or false.

This is the main thesis of the inaugural lecture.¹³ It was frequently re-stated in other writings. Hägerström concluded that applying "true" and "false" to moral ideas does not make sense, any more than attributing "just" and "unjust" to a merely material substance like gold.¹⁴ What, then, were his notions of a *moral idea* and of *truth*?

What is a moral idea?¹⁵

In the inaugural lecture, Hägerström indicated that in a society dominated by customs, these acquire a *moral* character when it is felt that they are to be observed for their own sake and that they take precedence. He took it for granted that the distinctively moral notions are those of absolute value and a categorical ought. This coincides with what Kant took to be the common concept of morality.

In other lectures and writings, Hägerström frequently emphasised the remarkable heterogeneity of concepts that we think of as moral. They fall into various categories. We have concepts of duty, of rights and the associated notion of personal dignity, of happiness (for the individual or society), of ideals: values worth realising for their own sake, such as, for instance, the glory of one's nation and its culture.

In all these, it is the *existence* of something that is valued. Hägerström, influenced on this point by Meinong, drew attention to the fact that valuing the existence of an object is different from valuing an object simply. In lectures in the 1910s and later, he discussed an important category of valuations which are not of the existence of a person with a certain character, but of the character itself, independently

But values presuppose a subjective element: feeling, and can therefore not be part of a reality which presents itself as something that exists independently of our cognitive faculty. If values are supposed to have objective reality, then that reality is of another kind than that given for theoretical knowledge.¹⁹ (Emphasis added).

This was published in 1904, before Hågerström had fully embraced naturalism. The "if" is important. Some years later he was forever to reject the idea of a "reality of another kind", that is, of atheoretical "reality" and atheoretical "truth". There can be no practical or atheoretical validity analogous to theoretical truth.²⁰ Maier held the opposite view. He distinguished cognitions and judgements from other kinds of thought, maintained that logic had a place even on the non-cognitive side, and that mental acts which belong to that side, although not true or false, can in other ways be valid or invalid. Hågerström firmly rejected similar attempts made by neo-Kantians and pragmatists to find a compromise by acknowledging a concept of validity, distinct from plain truth, for religion, morality, cultural values, and more. Such a concept of validity would be quasi-truth, or rather pseudo-truth. The only objective reality is that which pertains to the realm of theoretical knowledge.

The Main Argument for Non-Cognitivism

Hågerström's main argument for his thesis that moral ideas cannot be true or false is that, as Kant put it, "the ought, if one has merely the course of nature before one's eyes, has no significance whatever."²¹

Insofar as we mean that something is actually the case, that something is true, we mean that this is so, independently of our subjective attitudes towards it, our feelings or interests in regard to it. (The inaugural lecture 1944, see p. 421 below).

The main argument is developed in §§38–42 of the inaugural lecture. Its aim is to show that moral ideas are neither true nor false, or, in other words, that of the concept of a "normative reality" is impossible.²² Those words combine to produce an absurdity in the same way as, say, "square circle". The argument relies on the radical difference between

of existence or non-existence. Hågerström called these moral valuations aesthetic. We take some people to be admirable, or contemptible, courageous, cowardly, generous, mean-spirited. These value-predicates are attributed to the person, not to the existence of the person. We say that a person is noble, but we do not say that the fact that such a person exists is noble.¹⁶ At least one anti-objectivist argument which he proposed later in the 1910s would apply only to existence-valuations but not to the aesthetic moral valuations.

Hågerström could see no valid reason for assigning primacy to one of the several heterogeneous moral categories, and make other ones derivable from or reducible to it. Nor was there any guarantee that our moral thinking, as a whole, is consistent.

What is truth?

Hågerström linked the concepts of truth and falsity with the concept of reality. A true judgement represents reality as it is, a false one fails to do so. It is implicit in the concept of reality that whatever is real is so independently of interests a subject may or may not have. Every judgement is about reality, and only judgements about reality can be true or false.¹⁷

This terminology was by no means idiosyncratic and gives expression to a dualism widely accepted at the time. Heinrich Maier is a case in point (Maier 1908).¹⁸ He made the same connections between the concepts of reality, judgement and truth, but noted that not everything in the mind is a judgement. There are also volitional mental acts and affective mental acts. These mental acts or their contents are not true or false. Maier, differently from Hågerström, felt a need for a term that would cover the vast variety of non-judgemental or non-cognitive emotive and volitive mental states and acts. He explained that, unable to find any really suitable word, he had reluctantly settled for *emotionalitas* *Denken*, which he used in the title of his major work.

In an early work, Hågerström insisted that, differently both from sociology and from jurisprudence, legal philosophy is not theoretical knowledge. His reason is that

The legal norms are considered [in legal philosophy] to indicate, with objective validity, what ought to be done, and thus to determine that a certain action has value relative to what is really the highest human good.

system is not necessarily consistent. The principles and standards may have a fallible origin, and allow for perplexity and contradiction. But no truth properly so called contradicts any other truth.²⁵

So in theoretical contexts, including meta-ethics, a distinction between truth (conformity with reality) and correctness (conformity with a set of standards) is appropriate.

A Moral Argument for Non-Cognitivism?

Proponents of non-cognitivism have often held that adopting their outlook would have a benign influence. People would become less dogmatic and more tolerant.²⁶ This can hardly serve as an argument: beliefs can be wholesome without being true.

At another level, there is an argument that can reasonably be described as a moral argument in favour of the theory. It plays an important part in Hägerström's writings, but seems not to have been much noticed. The argument is to the effect that an objective value cannot be genuinely moral. Moral objectivism falls short not only intellectually, but also morally, in the sense that it cannot accommodate moral worth.

How could this be? In the inaugural lecture, the account beginning at §22 (pp. 416ff below) shows how throughout history, moral ideas have been combined and indeed identified with other conceptions: divine powers, the cosmic order, custom. They have been closely linked to the view that deviations are dangerous for the offender or for his society. Traces of this have remained even in the development of conscience-morality. An agent exposes himself to unpleasant consequences by failing to conform to the demands of morality. The idea of an external order which determines how one ought to act can affect the individual in two different ways. In one way, we have it, for instance, in the adage: "if you do not want to be good, be careful". Counsels of prudence point to possible benefit for the agent, and are in that sense *mercenary*. In the other way, the individual, for the sake of his own peace of mind, strives to be "good" by internalising a way of being that is not his but imposed on him: a *servile* attitude.

And yet, there is another notion of morality, with ancient roots. Cicero's *De officiis* is all about the difference between what is expedient and what is morally right. That good people will pursue virtue for its

the standpoint of an agent and the standpoint of an indifferent observer. "When I contemplate something purely theoretically, I do not find any ought." Reality as such, open to the gaze of an indifferent observer,²³ will provide no "ought" that would have any bearing on the conduct of an agent, and an "ought" makes no sense when the stance of indifferent observation is maintained. The indifferent observer, interested in knowledge about reality but in nothing else, is in that capacity without knowledge about reality but in nothing else, is in that capacity without volitions and emotions.

A hundred years later, the validity of the concept of a "normative reality" continues to be keenly debated in analytical moral philosophy.²⁴

A Challenge for Non-Cognitivism

Although the present chapter is expository rather than critical, it may be of interest to consider an objection frequently raised against the view that moral ideas are not true or false. The objection is that it makes perfectly good sense to say of at least some moral ideas that they are true. So we should reject any view according to which none of them can be. At the very least, an explanation should be given why "true" should not apply to moral ideas. Here is one statement to this effect:

Non-cognitivists [...] often seem curiously immune to the thought there must be some foundation for the fact that ordinary usage applies "true" and "false" to the sentences for which they advocate a non-cognitivist interpretation. [...] it is implausible to tell us that truth does something different in say ethical discourse, without telling us just what it does there, and what it does elsewhere, in supposedly cognitive discourse (O'Leary-Hawthorne and Price 1996: 289).

In reply to this, a non-cognitivist could point to ways in which "true" and "false" are ordinarily used. In one way, a speaker uses "true" to express the opinion that the statement fits the facts, and "false" to express the opinion that it fails to do so. In another way, a speaker uses "true" to express the opinion that the statement—e.g., in ethical discourse—is in accord with a set of presupposed principles and standards to which he is committed. The word for rejection is then rarely "false" but rather "bad" or "wrong". It is important to note that the presupposed

will which determines a purpose for the world. Unless a will outside me creates a world with a purpose which becomes my objective purpose, I have nothing to live for. This is akin to a servile mentality. It is natural for a slave that others give him his purposes, and in order that he has something to live for, others have to set him a task.³²

In many other lectures he returned to this theme,³³ arguing that any objectively highest good would be an external imposition on the person, who would be bound to an ideal to which he might not have given his free commitment. If an unconditional ultimate ground of reality outside ourselves, as proposed in many metaphysical systems, is to determine question about what ought to be the case, we are, in relation to it, means only. This is servility.

Against this, Hägerström insisted on autonomy as a necessary condition for morality. Broad's presentation of Hägerström's analysis of duty and related notions explains:

[...] action from a sense of duty [...] involves an impulse towards a certain action which is felt to be compulsive, because it is determined, not by the agent's likes, dislikes, and valuations, but by something which is so far as concerns them, external to him. If so, the analogy with acting on a command is obvious (Broad 1951: 106).³⁴

Even the morality of duty contains an element of heteronomy. This applies even to Kant's moral philosophy. Hägerström wrote:

Kant elevates our moral interest to an absolute will in ourselves, which then becomes something external to our actual, finite will and makes demands on it. But this means that our moral interest cannot come to expression without sentiments of pressure and apprehension.³⁵

This is from a passage which concludes as follows:

We really have a purely moral will only if we place one thing above all else and commit ourselves to the cause, without any additional fear of bringing disaster upon ourselves should we fail to pursue it. Especially the notions of guilt and responsibility for moral wrongdoing grossly stains the purity

own sake was obvious to ancient thinkers and poets, and in mediaeval times a couplet of Horace was paraphrased as follows:

*Oderunt peccare boni virtuti amore;
Oderunt peccare mali formidine poenae.*

Good people hate wrongdoing because they love virtue; bad people

hate wrongdoing because they fear punishment.

The lines were well-known³⁷—so well-known indeed that Hobbes in 1640 saw no need to spell out his allusion to them (Hobbes 1969: 16.1.54). Bayle illustrated the point in a striking way:

There is this tale about a woman on the highway to Damascus: she carried a torch in one hand, and a pail of water in the other. Her purpose was to set fire to Paradise in order to destroy it, and the extinguish the flames of Hell in order to destroy it: so that people would no longer worship and obey God for mercenary reasons, but solely because of God's perfect nature (Bayle 1683, ch.187: 553; cf. Smith 1928: 98).³⁸

In the same spirit, Lessing saw the education of the human race as a progress to higher levels. In the last and highest stage good would be done not from hope of future reward but for its own sake (Lessing 1780, §85).

What is rejected here is a mercenary or servile conception of morality. It illustrates what Hägerström had in mind. He held that whatever is experienced as external compulsion, however etiolated, will, as it affects the person's motivation, rule out genuine morality. There can be no morality in the proper sense without autonomy. Kant was on the right track, but did not quite make it.³⁹ Hägerström would have agreed with Nietzsche: "Alle feinere Servilität hält am kategorischen Imperativ fest ..."⁴⁰ but he wanted also to condemn other moral theories which make us means for the realisation of a higher good, for an end that need not be ours. This was a theme to which he often returned. In a lecture in the spring term 1911 he said:

In modern philosophy of value⁴¹ it is often said that life is not worth living unless the world has an intrinsic purpose. This presupposes a cosmic

defective. This can explain why the Is-Ought debate in the years around 1970, for instance, could become so passionate. It was a moral issue, rather than a merely logical or conceptual. The frequent use at the time of the curious phrase "the autonomy of ethics" gives a hint of this.

It is not clear, however, that this moral argument, in which autonomy is pivotal, can tell against all varieties of objectivism. One variety, not discussed by Hägerström, takes moral value or moral ought to be properties *sui generis* inherent in whatever they are truly predicated of and discovered by intuition *sui generis* (Moore [1903] 1993). It is not clear that a morality conceived on that basis would involve heteronomy, because the properties *sui generis* are not identified or associated with the "alien" conceptions (divine will, world-order, etc.) mentioned in §§ 31-34 in the inaugural lecture and the sanctions associated with them. One could imagine that this is why members of the Bloomsbury group and the Cambridge Apostles could find Moore's *Principia Ethica*, inspiring, though their enthusiasm might have been very differently inspired (cf. Levy 1980: 234ff.). But even if this intuitionist variety of objectivism is immune to the moral criticism outlined here, it remains of course vulnerable to other objections.⁴¹

An Anti-Metaphysical Argument for Anti-Objectivism

Hägerström's overview of his philosophical outlook, published in 1929, states that it was only some years after the inaugural lecture that he came to realise that the idea of value belonging to the reality of what is valued, was impossible. He argued an attribution of value to the existence of something, e.g., of the form "it is good that such-and-such be the case", if taken to be true, leads to metaphysics.

Exempted from this objection, he wrote, were of course the "aesthetic" moral judgements, which evaluate an object rather than the existence of an object, but which "with regard to their objectivity, are subject to the general criticism which is based on the dependence of value upon feeling or desire."⁴²

With respect to "ought" (it ought to be the case that such-and-such), he used an argument sometimes known as "the ought-to-be argument". It is to the effect that if ought-statements are taken to be true, metaphysical and therefore unacceptable consequences follow.

of the moral will. Be it as it may with the value of the whip as a means of education. But it does not belong to pure morality.³⁶

This passage, like the previous one, was in the manuscript for the inaugural lecture in 1911, but it was not read out, and it was omitted from the printed version, probably because its main point is made later, especially in §55. The deletions in the manuscript (the a free, autonomous pure free pure morality) show how Hägerström struggled to find the best expression. The pivotal notion of autonomous willing being necessary for a "pure" morality kept re-emerging in many later talks, essays and lectures.³⁷ The right kind of morality would be, in the words used by Guyau in the title of his famous book, *une morale sans obligation ni sanction* (Guyau 1885).³⁸

Elaborating on this topic, Hägerström argued that the positive evaluation of a person who is entirely determined by a sense of duty disappears on closer reflection. We are misguided (*fölsyn*) if we admire a person who, independently of his own inclinations, does the right thing only from a kind of inner compulsion.

The state of mind when acting under the influence of [what is expected as an] objective duty is necessarily impure [...] a will primarily determined by duty is mentally a thrall.³⁹

The right kind of morality is different. It is a virtue-morality, in which our moral judgements express our sense of moral beauty or ugliness, our approval of character traits like nobility, generosity, courage and kindness, and our admiration of people who possess them; on the opposite side, disapproval and contempt. Our sense of moral beauty and ugliness is in turn caused by an interest in and commitment to the well-being of others and the welfare of society, as observed by Adam Smith. This way of valuing has no place for any divine wrath or its analogues.⁴⁰

His view can be summed up briefly. Genuine morality is autonomous. Objectivity means heteronomy. Therefore, genuine morality cannot be objective.

To accept meta-ethical anti-objectivism on this basis involves taking a moral stance: morality as conceived by objectivists is morally

Here, "equivalent" is obviously too strong. "Ought", like the original "bot", applies more widely than "duty". So, "duty" is not equivalent to, but can be said to imply, "ought-to-be".

As mentioned, the interpretation and evaluation of the argument just sketched is controversial. But if the interpretation proposed above is correct, the argument shows at least that "ought" and "duty" are not predicates which designate a property of that which is denoted by the subject-term. They are rather akin to modal concepts.⁴⁵ What Hägerström rejected is the idea that a state of affairs, a fact, can itself be regarded like a thing-with-properties or as a logical subject to which a predicate is attributed. On this point, his view resembles Russell's view at that time "You can never put the thing that makes a proposition to be true or false in the position of a logical subject". Russell knew, of course, that ordinary language permits this, since a predicate can be attributed to "the fact that ..." but this was, for him, nothing but one of its many imperfections.⁴⁶

- As a curiosity may be mentioned the only other argument with similar premises, though with quite a different conclusion, which has so far come within sight. In 1937 Pritchard wanted to show that *the obligation to do x* and *the goodness of x* do not imply each other (1949: 163). He assumed, similarly to line (ii), that *x is good* presupposes that there is an *x* which has the quality denoted by "good", and, like G.E. Moore, he regarded *x is good* as equivalent to *x ought to exist*. So, *x ought to exist* implies that there is an *x*. He further assumed, similarly to line (iii), that an obligation to do *x* does not imply that *x* exists. His reason for this was that an obligation to do *x* implies that *x* does not exist: once *x* enters into existence, the obligation is discharged and goes out of existence. The merits or otherwise of this particular argument will not be discussed here.

Hägerström took all judgements to have a non-temporal "is", which connotes reality, as the essential element. A fundamental part of Hägerström's anti-metaphysical ontology was his "reality thesis":

The content of every judgement is that something is such-and-such with an emphatic *is*.

Hägerström took all judgements to have a non-temporal "is", which connotes reality, as the essential element. A fundamental part of Hägerström's anti-metaphysical ontology was his "reality thesis":

The new argument, stated here in truncated form, aims to show "that the 'ought' of duty cannot function as a cognized term in the context of reality".⁴⁵ It has been much debated and criticised (Broad 1951).⁴⁴ Perhaps it can be paraphrased as follows.

- A = the debtor pays the sum owed to his creditor.
 O = ought to be the case;
 (i) O(A) is a judgement attributing the property O to A.
 [Assumption for a reductio]
 (ii) O(A) implies that A occurs.
 (Principle: every judgement asserts the reality of its content.)
 (iii) O(A) does not imply that A occurs.
 (iv) O(A) does not imply that A occurs.
 (v) O(A) is not a judgement attributing the property O to A.
 [True: some debtors do not pay.]
 (vi) (ii) and (iii) are incompatible.
 (vii) O(A) is not a judgement attributing the property O to A.
 [inference from (iv).]

The usual way to reject this conclusion and save the objectivity of "ought", Hägerström argues, is by a metaphysical theory. The idea that something *ought to be* the case (statement (ii)) is taken to be a judgement which represents, truly or falsely, what is the case in another realm of being, an ideal world. On the other hand, statement (iii) is clearly about the natural world. But postulating two worlds in this way runs against the anti-metaphysical naturalism. To be noted is the fact that the conclusion, that O(A) is not a judgement, means that O(A) is neither true nor false. So, interpreted in this way, the argument does not lead to an error theory. It is only the objectivist interpretation of duty-statements, i.e., the belief that they report, truly or falsely, a matter of fact, that can be an error theory.

What has been said about "ought" should, in Hägerström's view also apply to "duty":

"This action is my duty" [...] is exactly equivalent to [...] "This action ought to be undertaken by me" or "ought to be realised by me". So "duty" is equivalent to 'ought-to-be'. (1953IN: 135).

Passion aside, moral error theory is, in accordance with the paradigm, the view that all moral statements are false. A recent definition by a leading proponent is this:

The moral error theorist [...] takes an attitude towards morality like sensible people take towards astrology, like reasonable people take towards talk of witches, and like atheists take towards religion (Joyce 2011: 519).

The term "error theory" is of recent origin. The target of an error theory is a set of beliefs that must satisfy two conditions. The beliefs must imply falsehood, and must be widely held within a society or a culture. Eliminativism in the philosophy of mind—the rejection of the common belief that mental phenomena are non-physical—can be called an error theory, and so can Berkeleyan idealism—the rejection of the common belief that physical phenomena are non-mental (since only minds and mental contents exist). Another instance would be the kind of determinism that rejects the common belief that we are capable of acting freely.

Who were the proponents of moral error theory? Einar Tegen presented a paper defending the thesis that all affirmative moral value-judgements are false in G.E. Moore's seminar at Smith College in 1940 (Tegen 1944).⁴⁹ Others made similar error-theoretical suggestions in the 1940s. The best-known of them, also first drafted about 1940, was John Mackie's: "the great mass of what is called moral thought is, not nonsense, but error, the imagining of objective facts and qualities [...] where there exists nothing but our feelings of desire and approval" (Mackie 1946: 90; Mackie 1977; cf. Robinson 1948). Both authors opposed their theory to non-cognitivism, the view that moral statements are not true or false.

Was Hågerström a moral error theorist? The philosophers who were familiar with his thought certainly did not think so. In the reception of Hågerström's thought and the debate surrounding it he was perceived as the originator of non-cognitivism. This was the centrepiece in the presentations of his meta-ethics by Tegen (1944), Oxenstierna (1938), Hedénus (1941) and many others. In the public debate in the 1920s and 1930s, hostile opponents called it "value-nilism" (*värdenihilism*). Its defenders accepted the label, thereby deflecting the abusive connotation.

Another formulation, in his view equivalent, was this:

Every judgement is a judgement about reality.

This had been a basic principle in his philosophical outlook at least since 1908 and it is re-stated in 1929AH. An explanation is then needed about judgements about possibility, in contrast to reality.⁴⁷ In the event, the "thesis of reality", which he had firmly maintained and presented as a cornerstone in his naturalistic and anti-metaphysical enterprise, turned out not to be immune to revision. Writings from the 1930s contain a major surprise. In them, Hågerström modified his crucial "thesis of reality":

It has been said, incorrectly, that every judgement is a judgement about reality.⁴⁸

He gave as his reason for the change that the earlier thesis, now rejected, would rule out the propositions of pure mathematics and logic, said to be about the possible rather than the real. The new thesis allowed that what is connoted by the *is* of a proper judgement need not be reality (which includes possibility, since everything real is also possible), but can be possibility only. This change is highly relevant for a closer study of his ontological naturalism, but has so far not been noticed in the literature. Still, it may not have a direct bearing on the arguments discussed here.

So far, we have considered Hågerström's non-cognitivism and some of his arguments for it. We now turn to error theories. Some are problematically alleged to be his. They will be discussed first. Other ones were explicitly proposed by him.

Error Theory

Atheism is the paradigmatic error theory: every statement which implies theism (the thesis that God exists) is false.

The paradigmatic atheist is Jean Meslier's (1661–1729). This parish priest, working in a small village in northern France, did not make his words. His condemnation was vehement: the religions are "illusions, erreurs, mensonges, fictions, impostures" (1972: 20, and *passim*).

A paradox

Non-cognitivism and error theory are incompatible: the former one has it that moral ideas are neither true nor false, the latter that they are all false. But complications arose. Bertrand Russell had at one stage tried a variety of anti-objectivist positions and had flirted in passing with the error theory in a talk to the Cambridge Apostles in 1922: ethical judgements all claim objectivity and "this claim, to my mind, makes them all false" (see Pigden 2007). How could this be?

Here is a possible reconstruction. Assume, plausibly, that *It is true that p* is equivalent to *p*. Now, let *p* be a moral judgement, e.g., *Eating people is wrong*.⁵⁶ To maintain that it "makes a claim to objectivity" presumably means that when spelt out, it would be formulated as a conjunction:

Eating people is wrong and it is objectively true that eating people is wrong.

It could then be argued that if the second conjunct is false, then the conjunction is false. And if the conjunction spells out our common view that eating people is wrong, then that common view is also false.

But to argue in that way seems fallacious. A conjunction is false if and only if one conjunct is false and the other conjunct has a truth-value. In the conjunction above, let the second conjunct be false. It remains an open question whether the first conjunct has a truth-value. So we are not entitled to infer that the conjunction is false.

Again, take the moral judgement: *Eating people is wrong*. If asked, "Is that really so?" or "Is it true?", most people will answer yes, and they will answer yes precisely because they believe that eating people is wrong. According to non-cognitivism, *Eating people is wrong* is not true or false, and therefore *It is true that eating people is wrong* is false. On the other hand, *It is true that p* has the same truth-value as the simple *p*, and accordingly, *It is true that eating people is wrong* has the same truth-value as the simple *Eating people is wrong*. Since the first is false, they are both false. Therefore, when people answer "yes, it is true" they say something that is false and equivalent with the moral judgement itself, which therefore is also false. So non-cognitivism collapses into error theory.

This piece of reasoning is also specious. It disregards that "true" can be used in different ways. In one way, it is used to assert that something

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Later, "nihilism" has been used equivalently to "non-cognitivism" e.g. by Gilbert Harman (1977: 11). When Einar Tegen, on whose philosophy Hågerström was the main influence⁵⁰ and who was a contemporary of Hågerström with his work than any of his contemporaries, proposed his error theory (in Tegen 1944), he presented it as an alternative to Hågerström's theory. Hågerström can certainly be regarded as the originator and prototypical representative of non-cognitivism.

"Psychology" without ontological commitment

The terminology that gained currency in the early 1900s gave expression to a mentalistic approach. "Psychology" signified the inquiry into the mind, its workings and its contents, and that included contents of thought. In this sense, it was, *inter alia*, an "investigation aimed at determining the nature of a certain idea, but not the reality of its object".⁵¹ Hågerström defined value psychology as "an investigation into the nature of value-judgements".⁵² He wrote that it is an investigation into what value is, not into what *has* value,⁵³ and that this distinction was insufficiently observed by many eminent authors, while other ones (Comte, Spencer and Mill) neglected the former, formal, question altogether. Today, other words are preferred, such as "conceptual analysis" or "meta-ethics".

This conception of the nature of philosophical analysis fits in with Hågerström's insistence the reality of the content of moral beliefs should no more be taken for granted than the reality of the content of religious belief. In a remark critical of Westermarck, he wrote (emphasis added):

we do not mean by "moral value" a tendency to produce pleasure; we mean something else, even if what we mean should be something fictitious. The possibility that morality rests on fictions should not be ruled out a priori.⁵⁴

He made the same point in a lecture series given in 1908: at the outset of the inquiry it is an open question whether morality is fictitious, and this is re-stated in the inaugural lecture three years later (at §61): "The science of morals can no more be based on moral beliefs than a science of religion can be based on religious beliefs". At the outset of the inquiry the question of validity is open, and error theory is not ruled out.

is objectively the case. Used in another way, it indicates assent more broadly, without ontological commitment.

By distinguishing two levels, one for moral judgements and another for beliefs about the nature of moral judgements, the paradox now discussed is easily disentangled.

Two levels

The following example may show that belief in the objectivity of certain ideas can be false, even if the ideas themselves are not. A young child knows words in the language and believes that they are natural names. That is, the child believes that the name he has been tagged objects of a certain kind belongs to them by nature, as if it were tagged on to them in a quasi-physical way, or by a divine fiat. This belief in the objectivity of names is false. When the child teaches his younger sibling the name that he has himself learnt, what he is saying is not false. But if he tells his sibling that the name belongs to the object by nature or by divine intervention, what he is saying is false. A belief need not be false because a belief about it is.

This was certainly Hägerström's view. These are the words that concluded his lectures in May 1911:

It is the religious element in morality that is false, by no means the moral element.⁷

He would say the same of factual elements other than religious ones, such as, for instance, social custom, or a supposed world-order (as conceived by the Stoics or as conceived in modern biological or historicist theories of evolution).

Hägerström's Error Theories

A fictionalist episode

Curiously, in one series of lectures in 1913, Hägerström did try a curious variant of anti-objectivism. It sounds very much like an error theory of moral judgements, combined with an explanation why their falsity should not prevent us from accepting them.⁸ He distinguished direct valuations, that is likings and dislikings, being pleased or displeas-

which occur in particular situations. We bring to expression our spontaneous admiration for a courageous act. Such expressions lack truth-value. The case is different with general moral valuations, e.g. that courage is admirable. In respect of them, it turns out that he does not argue that we should accept such an idea although it is false. His argument is that we should, indeed that we have to, accept the falsehood that these non-judgements are judgements. These general valuations seem to be judgements, but they are not. The reason is that all judgements refer to reality and are to the effect that something is the case, but the indirect valuations refer not to what is, but to what ought to be, and are therefore not judgements. They cannot stand in logical relations; only genuine judgements can. Still, it is indispensably necessary for us regard these non-judgements, these indirect valuations, as if they were genuine judgements which can stand in logical relations. Our social interaction would be in total chaos, and our individual lives would collapse if we could not carry out reasoning in terms of 1. ends/means; 2. general/particular; 3. value-comparisons. All such reasoning obviously involves logical relations. But these non-judgements are not capable of being in logical relations. All this applies to value-judgements in general. As for the moral ones, Hägerström insists that we also need to treat the highest good, an absolute value, as if they were real. We have to objectify our moral values, and go beyond merely individual desires. Again, this objectification is false, but necessary for the survival of our species.

This is what life demands of us. But scientific truth is independent of our interests, and the contradictory character of objective values remains a fact.

The idea that it is necessary for human and social life to think along objectivist lines despite the absence of a factual basis appears also in other anti-objectivist writers. Alan Gibbard, for instance, argues that the way moral judgements mimic factual ones and create appearances of objectivity promotes social co-ordination. That explains in evolutionary terms our tendency to objectify moral discourse, and provides a reason for judging this tendency useful (Darwall et al. 1992: 146n.). A similar view is part of the fictionalism proposed by Richard Joyce (2001).

The rules are inculcated by parents, teachers, the social environment, religious authorities and the legal system. What began as mere commands becomes internalised and transmuted in one's mind into the idea of the rightness of certain modes of conduct. Words like "must", "shall", "ought", "right" become detached from the sources of influence and become attached to the conduct itself. The words seem to designate a property in the abstract, although we cannot form any idea what that property is (141).⁶⁶ So logical reasoning involving rightness is not different in principle from "scholastic" way of thinking which operates with a pseudo-concept like "*causa sui*". Hågerström belonged to a generation for which "scholastic" had derogatory connotations (like "metaphysics" as used by positivists, or "positivism" as used by sociologists). Now, there is nothing that the expression "*causa sui*" designates, and Hågerström would certainly claim that assertions which imply that something is *causa sui* are not true. He took the same view of rightness. One assumes, incorrectly, that there is something that the word denotes. The belief arises that "must be done" belongs objectively to certain actions (or omissions) (154). "The rightness, according to the presupposed system of norms, becomes ascribed to a certain action as a property, the apprehension of which carries with it an immediately evoked feeling of conative impulse" (154). The right action involved in the consciousness of duty is the one that follows from the system of conduct which has the objective property that it "ought" to be carried out (157). Conscience attributes to an action this "must" or "ought" as an objective property (158). We conceive of the system of conduct as completely devoid of truth" (159). Still, the norm expressed (e.g., that it is right to help those in need, that it is wrong to break a promise) must be a judgement, and yet, the predicate does not designate (162). At this point the argument takes a curious turn. Hågerström introduces the idea that since the norm must be a judgement, the only thing that can be thought of as belonging as a property to the prescribed conduct is the linguistic expression itself ("ought", "must", "right" etc.), as if it were a label. But he stresses that nobody can believe that a system of norms of conduct "has the perceptible expression of command (i.e. words like 'ought', 'right', etc.) as a real property" (170); also, "the expression of command transmuted in the consciousness of the members of a society

In this one lecture series Hågerström had daringly proposed that we have to accept falsehood. He soon abandoned this view. He was, after all, a passionate truth-seeker.

But his argument was not in support of the error theory that all moral judgements are false, and yet have to be accepted. What he suggested, in this one lecture series, was that we have to accept the common belief in their objectivity in spite of its falsehood.

So we have here two different error theories. One is analogous to atheism, and is the thesis that (qualifications aside) *all moral judgements* (or all moral judgements of a certain kind) imply falsehood. The other is the thesis that *all claims to objectivity of moral judgements* imply falsehood. Of course, each of these two theses is properly called error theory only if the alleged error is supposed to be widely made within a society or a culture. If "objectivity" is understood in a certain sense, the second thesis may be cherished by some philosophers, but not by people at large. In such a case, it would be improper to call it an error theory. It would simply be one thesis among many that fail to find favour with philosophers.

An Error Theory about Duty and Rightness?

Hågerström's theory of the nature of duty, rightness and related notions⁶⁹ is set out most fully in 1953IN: 56-256 (1917FO). He noted the similarity—and the difference—between being commanded and having a duty. A point of difference is that a command is not a judgement, but the thought that an action is one's duty certainly seems to be. A point of similarity is that a conative impulse results from a successful command, and the same is the case when we think that a particular action of ours is our duty, or, with an equivalent expression, that is the (morally) right thing to do. Such thoughts, about duty and the right thing to do in a particular situation, relate to a system of norms which in general indicate the difference between right and wrong in the particular situation, my thought that I ought to help someone in trouble, that this is the right thing to do, that this is my duty, involves conative impulse. Here, an internalist account applies. But it does not apply to our contemplation of the general rule that it is right to help people in trouble.

Error Theories

Hägerström did not extend his non-cognitivism to all moral categories. He opted for an error theory for the *idea of rights*, and for the *idea of retributive justice*. They have a common feature: an act contrary to justice or in violation of a right immediately implies the permissibility of coercion and the use of force. This would provide a *moral* reason against the use of these concepts.

Hägerström was not only an analytical philosopher; he was also a radical philosopher. He was not a detached indifferent observer of human affairs. He retained from his strongly religious upbringing a belief in the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, albeit in a modified form: a faith in the ideals of the Enlightenment, a hope for the continual progress of the human race, and a wish to work for the benefit of mankind. He felt with uncommon intensity that this was his vocation.⁶³

Coercion and the use of force cause much misery, and if justified in terms of rights and retributive justice, those notions would be undesirable from a moral point of view, and detrimental to the common good. On these grounds, a strong moral argument could be advanced against them. But a rejection on moral grounds can only convince those with whom there is some shared moral ground. Others would remain unperturbed, but they could be moved, if the ideas were shown to be contrary to reason, shown to be theoretically unacceptable—if, for instance, an error theory were to apply to them. The ideas of rights and retributive justice, which justify violence, could then be shown to be suspect not only morally but also theoretically. The case against these concepts would be strengthened if their use was shown to be not only harmful but also false. The knave would be shown also to be a fool.

Additional support for the view that these notions were theoretically suspect could be found in the new social sciences which were making rapid progress: sociology, social anthropology and ethnography. Hägerström was well acquainted with current work in these fields. Much of it seemed to confirm Comte's theory of historical evolution of human thought and culture through three stages. The first stage is theological: animism/fetishism, polytheism, monotheism. The second stage is metaphysical. It can be regarded as a "rationalised" version of the previous stage: The third stage, which mankind is just entering,

into a real property of the system of norms" (194) The system of conduct has the expression of command connected with it as an objective property (195).

Do the statements assembled above amount to an error theory? In other words, do they imply that statements of the form "x is my duty" "x is the right thing to do", "breaking a promise is wrong", "we ought to help those in need" are false or imply a falsehood? Again, it is not these that are said to be "completely devoid of truth". It is the belief in their objectivity.

If Hägerström had wanted to argue that such statements are all false, he would either have felt obliged to offer an explanation why we must nevertheless use them and accept them, or, more likely, he would, with his ardent commitment to the search for truth, have made it clear with his ardent engagement in falsehood and desist from asserting that we should stop engaging in falsehood.⁶⁴

Some years later, Hägerström wrote ⁶⁵ that *if understood as objective realities*, common ethical notions like personal worth, the ultimately good or desirable, right and wrong, are chimaeras, because they are actually expressions of emotion or volition which are attributed as *they were objective properties*, to a person, an act, or to the realisation of cultural values or general happiness. If we think of them as objective, we feel as compelled by such ideas as by truth itself. We have here a residuum from inherited commands and prohibitions which remain before our minds without any thought of a person commanding. Thus "you shall!" is tied directly to a kind of actions, which are then regarded as right/wrong.

The question is whether we can or would feel compelled, perhaps "as compelled as by truth itself" if we do not think of them as objective. Hägerström's answer would be in the affirmative. Our free commitment to certain values and ideals would inspire us, rather than the mistaken belief in their objectivity.

It seems, then, that there is an error theory in Hägerström, but one that is compatible with non-cognitivism. Moral ideas are not true or false, but belief in their objectivity—which he took to be a commonly held belief—is false.

is that of science. Hägerström found the pattern broadly appealing, and Comte-inspired passages abound. He once said that it certainly applied to the development of ideas of law and justice in European history,⁶⁴ but he took the three-stage pattern to have wider application: the spring semester 1907 he suggested that the nature-philosophies of Schelling, Hegel and Schopenhauer were a refined form of the superstitious anthropomorphism of the savages, and in 1925 he mentioned "the usual path from superstition to metaphysics" with reference to legal concepts and theories.⁶⁵

Rights

Superstition was the topic of a talk by Hägerström in the Verdandi society in 1911 about six weeks after the inaugural lecture.⁶⁶ He wanted to discuss not the explicit superstitions which openly let supernatural powers act in the natural world—e.g. the immaculate conception, or the power of prayer to bring divine power into action—but rather social superstitions, such as the belief in the binding force of the property created constitution of a state, ideas of sovereignty, the sacrosanct character of personhood—and the belief in rights. He argued that abandoning such beliefs was highly desirable for the sake of people's genuine interests and welfare. This is so, because a rights-violation is seen as an attack on the personality of the right-holder and justifies coercion and the use of force against the transgressor.

Beliefs in rights may protect society, but they may destroy it because they leave too much scope for violence. Hägerström had in mind the conflicts between sovereign states. He also had in mind the struggle between parties who, rightly or wrongly, were seen as oppressors and oppressed (workers, ethnic groups, nations). In these conflicts violence, justified in various ways as a response to rights-violations, red or alleged, was a constant threat. The basic principle of respect of rights in their nature non-negotiable, conflict-provoking and leaving no room for compromise, would be replaced by a principle of equitable respect for the welfare of all, which allows for negotiation and adjustments of conflicting interests based on a shared concern for the common good. Within a society, the reduction⁶⁷ of class difference would make this possible. Ideas of rights had been of great historical significance and

like religious doctrines, they had in the past had a civilising influence and contributed to the general progress of mankind. Although mistaken, their social function had at one stage been beneficial. But, he thought, they were now doing great harm and little good in the modern world and should be abandoned in favour of more enlightened ways of thinking. The time had come for a different organising principle for our social and political life, one that directly and explicitly promoted peaceful resolution of conflicts of interest for the sake of the common good.

This amounts to a moral argument against appeals to rights in moral and political theory. But the case against such appeals would be even more compelling by showing they rest on a mistake. Rights cannot have a place in nature, and so we get an error theory: belief in rights is fictitious and akin to religious notions (1963RS: 53, 58f [H 116: 3 HT 1917]). Our ideas of rights originate in superstitious beliefs in invisible powers, now disguised in theories of a more metaphysical kind.

Could the same be said of ideas of duties? Hägerström explicitly distinguished purely moral duties from those which have their basis in another person's right. Non-fulfilment of the latter makes coercion against the offending part morally permissible (1963RS: 19). (In the terminology introduced by Samuel Pufendorf, duties of the latter kind are perfect, the former imperfect.) The discussion of the concept of a right would have no direct bearing on the so-called imperfect ones.

An important set of arguments designed to show that rights and obligations (and such duties as arise as correlates to rights) are non-factual are presented in 1953IN: chapter 1.⁶⁸ Discussing these arguments, Bemm and Peters made a rather surprising statement (emphasis added):

Hägerström is practically admitting that the attempt to elucidate 'X has a right to P' as if it described a set of facts, fails to explain its meaning at least in some of the contexts in which it is ordinarily used.

Here, "admitting" is preposterous. The word should rather be "insisting".

Next, the two authors raise an objection:

But he is surely wrong to conclude on that account that it describes something marginal, which enters the world of reality only when it induces

Retributive Justice

As already mentioned, belief in rights was for Hågerström morally suspect and all the more to be rejected for being false. Rights-violations make the use of force morally permissible. The offender is obliged to compensate for damage caused and to be punished for his violation. This is based on the belief in the sacredness of the human person, which makes any rights-violation a quasi-sacrilege.

Another belief with roots in superstition is the belief in the right of retribution. Hågerström seems to suggest that our concept of retribution has its source in divine vengefulness, and would be another piece of superstition, which has survived in the categorical demand that the offender must suffer. When internalised, the fear of an angry God turns into pangs of conscience. When the god is de-anthropomorphised, the demand is thought to arise from the moral order itself, but the demand remains the same: it is a demand to increase evil by adding on more evil to no purpose and merely because the act took place. These ways of thinking have during millennia been imprinted in the way people think,⁷¹ and there is in this respect no essential difference between religious and non-religious conceptions of retributive justice. He took strong exception to them.

Hågerström also had an error theory about guilt in the sense of deservability of punishment. This presupposes that agents have free will. But there is none unless contra-causal freedom can find a place in nature. And that is not possible. We do not possess a faculty capable of breaking causal chains. The belief in free will is a survival of primitive animism. It is a superstition. In the past, it served important social functions. In our time, it does not.

Concluding Remark

From 1911, Hågerström's meta-ethics was non-cognitivist: moral ideas are not true or false. Some of his later proposals can invite an error-theoretical interpretation, but arguably that which he declares false is not the moral norms and values, but the belief in their objectivity, a belief which he took to be commonly held. For some moral categories, especially rights and retributive justice, he did propose an error theory

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people to act in particular ways because they subscribe to the illusion. Hågerström's search for alternative forms of expression that will describe the same set of facts as 'X has a right to R' is mistaken precisely because it does not describe facts at all: and the problem arises only because of a failure to distinguish normative and descriptive discourse.

At first blush, this is sensational. Hågerström, of all people, failing to distinguish normative from descriptive discourse! The authors misunderstand his "search for alternative forms of expression" when they say that the search is mistaken. In fact, the search aims to establish that the belief in the factual nature of rights is mistaken.

And yet, the quoted statement makes a valid point: Hågerström could have taken the non-cognitivist path, rather than opting for an error theory. In other words, the failed search for facts described by statements of the form "X has a right to R" could have led him on to non-cognitivism and to the conclusion that they do not describe facts. But instead, he took the error-theoretical path, inferring that the expression is descriptive—and false.

In a later essay⁶⁹ Hågerström remarked that when we buy fish in the market, we practise magic, insofar as we follow the popular way of thinking about the right of ownership. As mentioned above, for a theory to be an error theory properly so called, it must have as its target a belief that is not only false but also widely held. In Hågerström's account that condition is satisfied: the belief in rights is an error and it is part of the "popular way of thinking". The popular way of thinking of rights is according to him, to think of them as powers, but not of a kind having a place in nature, in the real world.

Duties which are correlates to a right are likewise theoretically suspect. Many moral duties do not arise from rights, so the error theory of rights does not imply an error theory of duties generally. But especially in the early 1920s, Hågerström may seem to incline towards adopting an error-theory for duties generally. Still, when he wrote that "present-day duty-morality is superstitious—not only a remnant of past superstition"⁷⁰ what he had in mind was primarily the ideas of desert and just retribution which, he claimed, present-day duty-morality associates with failure to do one's duty.

ing. The earliest occurrences of "non-cognitivism" I have found are also from Chicago: William K. Frankena, 1951: 44–55; e.g. at 47, 49, 51, and S. Cavell and A. Sesonkske, 1952, e.g., at 546. Non-cognitivism is usually explained as the view that there are no moral facts and hence no moral knowledge. Knowledge, and truth and falsity, are taken to imply independence of subjective states, such as beliefs and attitudes. Simon Blackburn, whose outlook is anti-objectivist, uses "knowledge" less restrictively and for that reason he prefers "expressivism" to "non-cognitivism", 1998: 50.

13. Since the inaugural lecture is reprinted in this volume (pp. 409–428), there is no need for a full presentation here.

14. Inaugural lecture, §21. Gilbert Ryle (1938) used "category mistake" for this kind of error. This chapter retains the somewhat old-fashioned "idea"; other possible words are "belief", "concept", "conception", "opinion", "proposition", "representation", "sentence", "statement". In context, misunderstanding are unlikely.

16. 1952AF: 22; H 106: 18; 2. 8 Historiska huvudformer av etik och rättsfilosofi (The main historical forms of moral and legal philosophy) VT 1922; H 119: 4; 69 Ethiska problem (Ethical problems) HT 1923; H 111: 58; Den moraliska värderingens grundformer (Basic forms of moral valuation) VT 1929; H 108: 4; 16 Värde- och viljepsykologi (The psychology of valuing and willing) VT 1932.

17. "Endast våra omdömen om verklighet kunna vara sanna eller falska." 1935FR: 1939SV at 115.

18. The work covers much more than the title might suggest. The author was a professor in Uppsala, and later in Berlin.

19. Rättsnormen betraktas då såsom med objektiv giltighet angivande, huru bör handlas, och sålunda äfven såsom bestämmande ett visst handlande såsom värdefullt i förhållande till hvad som är att anses som människans verkliga högsta goda. Värdebestämningar kunna icke handfås på den verklighet som af förståndet sättes såsom något oberoende af kunskapens element, känsla. Antagas de därför äga objektiva realitet, så är denna af annan art än den för den teoretiska kunskapen gifna. 1904SK: 3f.

20. Arguments for this in 1987MG: 185–194 (VT 1911); 109: 108; 4. Den moraliska värderingen (Moral valuation) HT 1933; 66, and in many other writings.

21. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A547, B575.

22. Similarly, there can be no "normative science" (inaugural lecture §6). Cf. L. Lévy-Bruhl, 1906. The book was one which Hägerström recommended for "further reading" at the end of 1934FS, together with Westermarck's major work and Bergson's *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*. (For reasons unknown, the advice was omitted in 1939SV and subsequent reprints.) Lévy-Bruhl held the same view, but a direct influence is unlikely, since Hägerström seems to have become aware of his work only later. Poincaré had insisted that there can be no moral science, arguing that scientific statements are in the indicative but moral ones in the imperative (1912: 225). Again, there is similarity but no direct influence.

23. Såsom mest betraktande finner jag ej något böra. H 109: 1; 2. Boströms och Euckens nämnd spått, 'ought' as well as 'good' and 'bad' would make no sense." H 1061A: 40 Frågor och ömskakelser (Interrogative, exclamatory and optative sentences) VT 1922.

24. See e.g. the list of references in Bedke 2012. The author argues that "natural ontology does not suffice for normative truth".

25. Let those who doubt this be brought to respectful silence by an appeal to authority: Averroes (Ibn Rushd) asserted that truth cannot contradict truth, Abelard agreed, and so did the Lateran Council in 1513. Galileo in 1615, Spinoza somewhat later (*Cogitata metaphysica* 1641), Pope Leo XIII in 1893, Pope John Paul II in 1996.

26. One of the inaugural lectures are very similar to Westermarck 1906: 17–20. According to Bernard Russell, "recognition of the subjectivity of ethics" would lead to "less cruelty,

which served to give added strength to his moral condemnation of the use of these concepts.

Where does this leave Hägerström's concluding declaration in his inaugural lecture that that moral philosophy as a science must be value-free? His lectures and published writings, are on the whole analytical and historical. But many of them reveal nevertheless an intense preoccupation with right and wrong, good and evil, and benefit and harm for the individual, for society, for culture or civilisation, for the human race. He would, I think rightly, claim that there is no inconsistency in this. "It is not scientifically incorrect to make moral evaluations."⁷² One thing that the principle of scientific value-freedom rules out is a view to which he had himself once subscribed, i.e. that the task of philosophical ethics is to establish philosophically and rationally an ultimate highest good. The appeal to this principle is a declaration that our basic moral commitments cannot be theoretically justified.

Notes

1. A rural province in southern Sweden, sometimes humorously supposed to be some what behind the times.

2. H 4: 5 Filosofien som vetenskap (Philosophy as a science). First published as 1907V.

3. Eucken, who was professor in Jena from 1874 to 1920, explicitly attacked naturalism in his Nobel Prize speech. For a brief overview, see e.g. Pietari Luukkonen, "Rudolf Eucken", at <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi>. Grave's article is about W.R. Boyce Gibson (1869–1935) who was a translator, exponent and great admirer of Eucken.

4. The award, and the invitation to deliver the Olaus Petri lectures, no doubt owed something to the influence of Nathan Söderblom.

5. He contrasted his naturalism with the kind of empiricism that find no place for natural necessity. H 109: 1; 156 Boströms och Euckens etik (The ethics of Boström and Eucken) VT 1910.

6. 1949FR: 245, freely translated. Cf 1964FR: 209f.

7. In Canberga, 26 July 2005, when introducing the Jack Smart Lecturer that year, Timothy Williamson.

8. A discussion falls outside the scope of this paper. The three main sources are: (i) 1908PW; (ii) 1929AR; (iii) Manuscripts on logic and epistemology (H 1: 1, H 1: 2, H 1: 3–H 1: 8).

9. H 119: 3; 1. A lecture on Kousseau VT 1925.

10. He did not name the author of the doctoral dissertation in which Mill was attacked as Karl Pira, who, decades later, came to be described as "the last Boströman".

11. *La vérité est en marche, et rien ne l'arrêtera*. (Emile Zola, "l'accuse", *L'Aurore*, 13/1/1907).

The Dreyfus affair was a moral earthquake, with strong aftershocks through the whole of the twentieth century. Hägerström was convinced (letters in H 38) that Dreyfus was innocent and that the conduct of the French authorities was inexcusable.

12. On a terminological point: "cognitiv" and "cognitive" had long been current, but the earliest occurrence of "non-cognitive" I have found is in a paper by Herbert Feigl and Chicago in 1933: 421. Feigl distinguished cognitive from "non-cognitive or emotive" and

42. die aber natürlich hinsichtlich der Frage ihrer Objektivität der allgemeinen, auf die Abhängigkeit des Wertes vom Gefühl und Verlangen fussenden Kritik unterworfen sind. 1925AF: 45; 1964PR: 71.

43. The new argument had been sketched in H 107: 3. *Värdepsykologi* (Value psychology) VT 1915 and in 1917FO (1953IN: 135).

44. Petersson 1973: 175–186 provides a useful discussion.

45. Matthew Christman (2012: 450) suggests that the meta-ethical debate about moral propriety would benefit by thinking of "ought" and related notions as expressing *moral* claims; this would, according to him, be a novel way to pursue the metaethical debates.

46. Lectures held in 1918. See Bostock 2012: 72. Of course, Russell's views about logic and ethics underwent many changes.

47. This was discussed in lectures: H 106:1A Fråge-, utrops- och önskesatser (Interrogative, exclamatory and optative sentences) VT 1922: H 106: 3 Frågens psykologi (The psychology of questions) HT 1927–VT 1928.

48. "Man har felaktigt sagt, att alla omdömen skulle vara omdömen om verklighet", H 102:112.

49. Tegen (1884–1965) was professor of practical philosophy in Lund 1931–1937; and then in Stockholm until 1951. A more refined formulation "All non-negative atomic moral judgments are false" was advanced by Charles Pigden, "Nihilism, Nietzsche and the Doppelgänger Problem", 2007: 451. The search for an adequate formulation of moral error theory is complicated by the fact that error theorists do not want to assert that a moral judgement and its negation are both false.

50. Tegen's letters and notebooks supply strong evidence for this. UUB Okat Einar Tegen 435.

51. "[E]n rent psykologisk undersökning som man endast har till syfte att bestämma en gifven föreställningens karaktär, ej realiteten af dess objekt", 1907MF: 277. Similarly in 1904S8: 49, which emphasises that "psychology" in the context refers to an inquiry into the content of an idea, not its causes.

52. H 107B: 5. Värdeålära och värdepsykologi (Value theory and psychology of value) HT 1917–VT 1918.

53. *Moral och värdeåskådning* (Morality and world-view) *Värdepsykologi* VT 1921 H 11: 4, has that character (*själfrågans*, *den moraliska karaktären*), *ej det som har gudarnas karaktär*, 1897SK: 83. Cf 1952MF: 14 (HT 1917). The distinctiveness of what Hägerström called the "formal" question is stressed in Plato's *Euthyphro* and many other Socratic dialogues.

54. 1907MF: 275. The comment relates to Westermarck (1906), or the German translation by J. Manthey.

55. H 105: 38; 34–35. Rättsrådets sanningsskrift (The truth-value of ideas of rights) HT 1908.

56. This proposition is debated in "The reluctant cannibal" (1960), written and recorded by the English comedian Flanders and Swann.

57. Det religiösa momentet i moralen är det falska, ej all det moraliska. 1987MG: 196.

58. H 109: 109. Den moraliska värderingen (Moral valuation) VT 1913.

59. He took these notions to relate to volitions and conative impulses, and distinct from value-concepts which relate to the emotions.

60. In this paragraph, the parentheses enclose page-numbers in 1953IN.

61. Hesterman (1971) gives a careful and insightful examination of its subject. The author proposes an error-theoretical interpretation of the account in 1917FO (1953IN 56–256). The text is true. Cf MacLeod (1993): 1–28.

62. See the biography by Margit Waller, Axel Hägerström, *människan som fjälvände*, Stockholm: Natur och Kultur 1961; and UUB H 38 (letters to family members).

persecution, punishment and moral reprobation than exists at present" (Charles Pigden 2009: 499f.). Richard Robinson wrote (1964: 28): "As Professor Nowell-Smith [sic] has written, it is no accident that all the great persecutors have been objectivists". *See contra*: Renford Bambrough (1979: 40ff.) argued strongly against the view that moral objectivism leads to intolerant dogmatism.

27. Here is a small sample: Jean Gerson, theologian, (about 1400), Henri IV, King of France (about 1600), Gregory Sayre, Benedictine moral theologian, (1601), Michel de la Roche, journalist (1725), Heinrich Köhler, professor of philosophy (1738).

28. Bayle (1683, ch. 18: 553–) Mr Robert Barnes of the Australian National University kindly informed me that this is a variant of a story told of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya (d. 801 A.D.), cf Margaret Smith 1928: 98.

29. 1952MF: 151–204 (H 111:1B Verkligt autonom moral (Truly autonomous morality) VT 1950).

30. F. Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, I, end of §6.

31. Värdefilosofi: Hägerström regarded Windeband, Kicker, Münsterberg and Bergson as leading representatives.

32. 1987MG: 95f. (Lecture held 6 April 1911). The characterisation of the slave as a tool used to serve others' ends comes from Aristotle, *Politics*, 1254. Aristotle defines a slave as one who does not pursue his own ends, but whose activity is subordinated to the ends of another. (David Hawkes review of Chomsky in TLS (web version) read 6-9-2012.)

33. For example: H 109:108: 11. Den moraliska värderingen (Moral valuation) VT 1915; H 107:3: 31. Värdepsykologi (Value psychology) VT 1915; H 109:5: 28 Historiska huvudformer av etik och rättsfilosofi (The main historical forms of ethics and legal philosophy) VT 1916. Also in a seminar 1 November 1911 which discussed the inaugural lecture. UUB Okat Einar Tegen 453 p. 1, notebook 210.

34. Broad's presentation is based on 1917FO (1953IN: 56–256).

35. This is a somewhat free rendition of a passage in the manuscript for the inaugural lecture, H 11: 2: "I det att det moraliska intresset af honom upplöjes till en absolut vilja i oss, blir det något för vårt verkliga ändliga vilja yttre, som ställer sina krav på den samma. Men under sådana förhållanden kan det moraliska intresset ej göra sig gällande utan källan av allt annat och därmed af fruktan". 1987MG: 39.

36. "Endast då hafva vi i själfva verket en rent moralisk vilja, när vi sätta något högre än tryck och därmed af fruktan" på det för oss själfva föredeliga i att icke verka för det som uppfostringsmedel. Men till d en fria m eronomm verka fria ren moralen hör den icke orenar på det största den moraliska viljan. Den moraliska värderingen (Moral valuation) HT 1913.

37. Etiska problem (ethical problems) HT 1923; 1934FM.

38. Hägerström mentioned Guyau in H 109:108: 6. Den moraliska värderingen (Moral valuation) HT 1913. The insistence on autonomy was widespread: Brentano, för instance was praised for giving a foundation for morality independent of a higher authority (*Academia* 1919: 6).

39. "sinnesbeskaffenheten vid ett av objektiv plikt påverkat handlande är nödvändigt oron." "... en vilja som primärt är bestämmd av plikten är en andlig tral". 1952MF: 201, 204–173 (H 111:1B Verkligt autonom moral (truly autonomous morality) VT 1950).

40. H 112:3: 24–26 Kritik av skuldföreställningar (A critique of conceptions of guilt) probably HT 1923.

41. For instance: it remains unexplained and apparently inexplicable, why that which is intrinsically good, i.e., has this intuitable *sui generis* property, ought to be pronounced promoted or honoured. The objection was raised by Alf Ross, who was at the time strongly influenced by Hägerström. in Ross 1933: 78, by A.J. Ayer 1949: 240. Richard Robinson 1964: 23, and many others.

64. Note dated 1925, at 128ff. of the "blue book" (UUB T 3 k: 106), which consists of 174 typed sheets bound with blue covers with notes from Hägerström's seminars and conversations with him. The notes were no doubt taken by Karl Olivecrona and typed by his wife. The words are in a proof copy of the 1929AH (II 4: 1A), dated 1926. The text of the proof copy was to be published in vol. 6 of the series *Die Philosophie der Gegenwart in Selbstdarstellungen*. Due to changed scheduling by the publisher, it was held over for vol. 7, 1929. In the meantime, Hägerström revised the text radically. But on this point there was no change of opinion.
65. A version of the talk was published as 1935X.
66. In the manuscript H 14: 5 he had originally written "elimination of class differences" but he then replaced "elimination" with "reduction".
67. In the manuscript H 14: 5 he had originally written "elimination of class differences" but he then replaced "elimination" with "reduction".
68. 1952is ch. 1 is a translation of the introduction to 1929AI at 429ff.
69. 1933VK. Hägerström had in 1930 promised to write a paper with this title for *Forum Philosophicum*, but this excellent scholarly journal, edited by Raymond Schmidt, folded too soon.
70. "Den nutida pliktmoralen vidskelplig—ej blott rest av gammal vidskepelse." H 195: 2
71. Hägerström alluded very frequently to Marx's "Die Tradition aller toten Geschlechter lastet wie ein Alp auf die Gehirne der Lebenden". *The 18th Brumaire des Louis Napoleon*, 1852.
72. 1987M6:195 (H 105: 6 kunskapsretensik grundläggning av den praktiska filosofien (Epistemological foundations for practical philosophy, vt 191). He would have agreed with P.F. Strawson (Strawson 1974: 23): "we are not to suppose that we are required, or permitted as philosophers, to regard ourselves, as human beings, as detached from the attitudes which as scientists, we study with detachment."

References

The following lists of manuscripts and publications cover works by Hägerström cited in this chapter with the exception of his published works that are listed at pp. 435-443 under the heading "Axel Hägerström's Published Works: Select Bibliography".

Manuscripts

This list includes call-numbers and short-titles of lectures or talks by Hägerström mentioned in this chapter. (Call-numbers which include a three-digit number indicate a typed transcript of a manuscript.) HT = autumn semester; VT = spring semester.

- H 102:1 Epistemology and theory of relativity (1930s).
- H 105: 5B Rättsiders sanningvärde (The truth-value of ideas of rights) HT 1908.
- H 106: 3 Frågans psykologi (The psychology of questions) HT 1927-VT 1928.
- H 106: 1A Fråge-, utrops- och önskesatser. (Interrogative, exclamatory and optative sentences) VT 1922.
- H 106: 1B Historiska huvudformer av etik och rättsfilosofi (The main historical forms of moral and legal philosophy) VT 1922.

- H 107:1 Värdeåra och värdepsykologi (Value theory and psychology of value) HT 1917-VT 1918.
- H 107:3 Värdepsykologi (Value psychology) VT 1915.
- H 108:4 Värde- och viljepsykologi (The psychology of valuing and willing) VT 1922.
- H 109:1 Bostroms och Euckens etik (The ethics of Bostrom and Eucken) HT 1909-VT 1910.
- H 109: 10B Den moraliska värderingen (Moral valuation) VT 1913.
- H 109: 5 Historiska huvudformer av etik och rättsfilosofi (The main historical forms of ethics and legal philosophy) VT 1916.
- H III: 3B Den moraliska värderingens grundformer (Basic forms of moral valuation) VT 1929.
- H 112:3 Kritik av skuldforesällningar (A critique of conceptions of guilt) probably HT 1923.
- H 119: 3 A lecture on Rousseau VT 1925.
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