

# Cognitivism failed!

By Timo Schmitz, *Philosopher*

Cognitivists think that ethics can be recognised, either independently by nature, or by describing commandments which are universally applicable to everyone! However, at first, all kind of feeling is subjective, this also goes to ethics, thus no one can objectively recognise ethics. Second, a normative ethics based on sentences which tell someone what ought to be or what one ought to do are equally to force. Non-Cognitivists however just suggest ethics. This makes sense, since one can suggest someone else how to act, but it makes no sense to force someone. If I suggest “It would be nice if you care about your environment”, there is a higher chance that people reconsider my suggestion than when I say “Care about your environment!” or “You shall care about your environment!”. In addition, no one has the right to tell others what they shall do, since their ethical understanding is subjective, and thus cannot be enforced universally on anyone. Even further, if one tells others what they shall do and what they are not to do, then one interferes in one’s *liberté complète*, and as a result, one is ethically behaving worse than someone who just gives a suggestion about what one could do or what one should reconsider not to do. Taking away someone’s *liberté complète* is the worst misconduct one can ever do. Therefore, cognitivism already failed! However, even my basic ethics are universally, so why shall they be good? At first, my basic ethics are part of the law of nature, however, since we are subjective beings and since we do not live in a state of nature, we cannot really grasp the law of nature and therefore the natural ethics. Anyways, one can say that something is probably a result of the natural law, if it is empirically observable in all moral traditions in this world. For instance the prohibition of killing other people can be found in all major religions, in all moral tales and in nearly all laws of every state and most tribal societies. Therefore, it must be something of divine quality. But since we can only grasp it through our subjectivity, we cannot even be sure that we grasped the natural law correctly and from time to time, we have to correct the mistakes that we made in our formulation of basic law. The burden to change the *éthique primaire* is very high since it is applicable in all societies and if they were absent, a worldly chaos would break out.

On the other hand, cognitivists give rules that are not explainable by the divine force of natural law, and mostly not by human reason. Indeed, they claim that their ethics is based on reason, but people who have a different view on morality will not share that principle, even through their highly moral understanding. The peak of cognitivist nonsense is utilitarianism,

since the moral quality does not play a role anymore, but the usefulness for the collective. Is it useful to exploit nature and resettle tribes that a capitalist society can continue its luxury life? For an utilitarian, it would probably be no big deal to resettle hundred people and kill tons of wood, just to please the lifestyle of a whole nation and develop their happiness. Is it okay to shoot an airplane that was captured by terrorists? For an utilitarian, hundreds of dead through the shot airplane would be more useful than a resulted attack endangering thousands of lives. Where is the human honour in this process? It vanished! For a deontologist, it would be a no-go to shoot the airplane, just because every life has the same worth, and thus hundreds of lives are same worth than thousands of lives and no life can be sacrificed to save other lives. But the problem that a deontologist faces is the question – who says that his δέον is right? Who says that the rule which the deontologist offers is really a rule worth to follow? Again it is subjective! Cognitivists make the rules for themselves, they create a cage for the society, and therefore

*“morality in fact is not legitimated. No one can say that someone who acts after that person’s moral is ‘good’ while the others are ‘bad’”*

*(Schmitz, Timo: Individualism between Moral and Virtues, Government and Religion, 4. Moral and Virtue (11 February 2015), in: Collected Online Articles in English Language 2013-2016, Berlin: epubli, 2017)*

As our view on the world is totally constructed, morality is constructed, too. Even my *éthique primaire* that I try to absorb out of natural law are based on the subjective empirical observation of the facettes of contemporary ruling of traditional religious law. There is no way to objectively categorise religious law, since one always has to interpret the religious texts and its understanding, and even if one wants to say that it is morally good because people always taught it for thousands of years, who says that we weren’t wrong for such a long time?

The *éthique primaire* is just a suggestion – the try to find objective normative phrases out of subjective moral constructions. These normative phrases can never be the whole truth, but they can be a good basis. The try to enforce morality however is

*“a way to justify something without the need of rationality or legitimation. ”*

*(Schmitz, Timo: Individualism between Moral and Virtues, Government and Religion, 4. Moral and Virtue (11 February 2015), in: Collected Online Articles in English Language 2013-2016, Berlin: epubli, 2017)*

The physical inviolability (see Schmitz, Timo: The dilemma of natural law in an organised society, self-published online article, 8 June 2017) is a suggestion based on the golden rule (don't do something that harms others that you don't want to suffer yourself!) and therefore the absence of killing, stealing/robberies, and physical violence are a good that every ethical human-being pursues. Though it is still a subjective pursuit, we can objectify it by suggesting others to respect these rules. If we enforce others to keep these rules and use violence against people disobeying, we are not any better than immoral people, and thus, we will never be able to stop violence in this world, as long as we see violence as means to stop violence.

The human inviolability (see Schmitz, 8 June 2017) is a suggestion to make the rank of every human-being equal and give them equal opportunity. We cannot enforce respect on elders and disabled, but we can ask or suggest people to show respect towards elders or disabled by telling them that they will become older as well and will be glad when someone helps them. This is an argument on reason and logic; telling someone “you ought to do it and point” gives people neither reason, nor logic. It even takes their freedom to act after a free choice away, and one can only be responsible for something if one has a free choice.

Developing more compassion and love in a society is a suggestion to strengthen the social capital. If we enforce love, we will receive hate! But if we suggest love, we can gain sociability! How shall the world be less ignorant when everybody has to work like a robot?

Social rights (see Schmitz, 8 June 2017) are a very subjective construction, but we can assume that there is an objective form of it in natural law, since social rights ensure that all people shall have the same options. Why shall someone have more rights than another person? However, people who accumulate all the money and who can buy everything are more privileged than those who have nothing and starve to death. A cognitivist just makes statements about how people shall act, it doesn't question sociability. An utilitarian might ask, how much money does one need to be happy in life? But money is not happiness for everyone! Some people rather want love, others want friendships, and still others want to survive. Money is a means, but not the *τέλος*. And some things cannot be bought.

I considered the *éthique primaire* to be of necessity, because it is *la base de l'humanité*. No society can survive if there is no respect, no welfare, and just the power of the might. It is the very human basis, but still I cannot enforce it on a society, because force means pressure, and pressure means that people do not act morally by heart. However, even as a naturalist, I could not be a good cognitivist, because we cannot perceive nature. All our social relations are constructed by mind, our opinions framed by religion, our societal understanding framed by

political attitudes. We cannot find morality through nature, otherwise we could find an objective view of natural law, as far as we could grasp it. But as we can just grasp the surface of it, through a subjective view, we cannot even ensure that these basic ethics are valid for eternity.

*“In many religious traditions, there are rules and normative behavior, such as piety, that should be practised by its adherents, and can either have a real benefit for the community, such as non-violence or prohibition of killing, or create a pseudo-benefit where following or non-following does not make any useful difference for the society, and thus cannot be seen as a causation, but is rather seen as a benefit by the believer, such as reaching its goal (e.g. heaven).”*

*(Schmitz, Timo: Individualism between Moral and Virtues, Government and Religion, 23. The two sides of a divine will and the human role (1 June 2016), in: Collected Online Articles in English Language 2013-2016, Berlin: epubli, 2017)*

The same goes for cognitive normative behavior. Who tells me that there is a real benefit if I follow their norms? Who tells me that they found a real truth?

We can take the basic understanding of Juche philosophy as human frame claiming that all people are free and master of themselves. Human-beings are independent, creative and conscious. Only if all people are free and can shape their own future, and only if they are independent and conscious of their behavior, they can act freely and responsibly.

The *éthique secondaire*, that I based on the very basic worldview of Hannah Arendt, is just a social contract which guarantees that people can satisfy their animalistic, materialistic and individual needs (Schmitz, Timo: The human nature in the face of God, self-published online article, 10 June 2017).

My secondary ethics is of course very subjective and questionable, but it is my suggestion for a perfect society. It is not a cognition by nature, nor by intuition and it gives people free choice to act responsibly. Cognitivism takes the people's freedom away, thus they make them irresponsible even for the misbehavior they conduct according to their teachings, since every cognitivist has his own subjective view on ethics, and one cannot act in a way to satisfy all moral philosophers, which means that there is no universal morality. If there is no universal morality, how does it relate to our cognitive functions?

As a result, cognitivism has to fail, on the other hand, non-cognitivists can describe ethical behavior, such as I did through observing religions and moral traditions. Non-cognitivists

should have the faith to found their νόμος, which shall function as ‘voluntary normative system’ and not as a normative ethics in the sense of the cognitivists. In addition, one shall have the courage to state that there is no real morality, even if one searches for a morality. How to solve this contradiction? Just because I say that moral is not real, it does not mean that I am not allowed to construct my own moral image. All I can finally do is suggest my moral image to others, but I can never blame them for not following it!

**La liberté complète** [Complete Freedom]: The sphere where an individual can act after one’s free will without hurting others

**L’éthique primaire** [Primary Ethics]: The basic law which applies to all people and thus arises out of natural law

**L’éthique secondaire** [Secondary Ethics]: A social contract to ensure solidarity and strengthen the social capital. It is a consequence of the basic ethics and thus probably has a share on the natural law

**La base de l’humanité** [Basis of humanity]: The source to ensure a peaceful living among all human-beings. It consists out of the primary and secondary ethics.

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