

the final issue addressed herein regarding Clunn's claim that objective morality exists.

Conflict #3: Objective Morality is Subjective

According to Clunn, the goal of his work is to establish a simple way for people to make moral choices that do not rely on some deeply esoteric philosophy. While this goal is laudable, Clunn's claim to objective moral reality remains frustratingly subjective. Even if we grant that consciousness is a fundamental axiom and that morality exists in some neo-Platonic form, this says nothing about how we should evince this unobservable moral realm. How does Clunn's foundationalism solve the is/ought problem? Clunn concedes that even given his belief in an objective moral realm, "there is not a physical imperative to adhere to it (45)." In the end, Clunn's morality seems like a philosophically complex version of the equally impractical moral trope, 'follow your heart.'

Clunn's claim to objective morality ends in a confusing subjectivity. He writes, "I don't prescribe here any specific actions that a human should take to be moral or immoral. Specific actions can and should be subjective to each individual (44–45)." Now to suggest that morality is objective, but all individual actions are subjective and beyond judgement from others only begs the question about what it means to value life? Clunn is aware that his dualist morality leads to moral confusion and leaves open the argument that 'might makes right.' To evade this looming problem, he asserts that consciousness is an emergent function of existence, but he fails to show how this claim logically undermines the 'might makes right' philosophy. Even worse, Clunn admits that taking life is unjust, but believes his own willingness to take a human life is virtuous. He writes, "I have no qualms, nor does my morality, with taking a life if that life is deciding to destroy other lives (45)." But if, as he claims, there is no basis to judge the conscientious free moral choice of another person, on what foundation—outside of his own subjective opinion—does Clunn decide it is right to end the life of another person? Maybe the person Clunn chose to kill had a reason within their own mind that justified their choice to take a life. Maybe they killed in the hope that their act would serve the higher virtue of protecting lives. On what ground does Clunn judge their act as an evil? And what if my subjective morality tells me that Clunn's choice to kill is wrong? What would keep me from continuing this same cycle of violence? How can Clunn claim to preserve the general principle of life, without protecting the individual life of each person?

Conclusion

This article offered a brief critique of Clunn's foundationalism which grounds moral decision making in what he calls the three fundamental axioms of existence, consciousness, and identity. It showed how his commitment to neo-Platonism, or possibly pantheism, creates at least three incoherencies wherein *a priori* is a *posteriori*, individuality is an illusion, and objective morality is subjective. For Clunn's moral philosophy to offer practical value, these internal conflicts must be resolved.

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Is Information Content a Single, Static Quantity?

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Information is instinctively and commonly regarded as a single, static entity. For example, upon learning that 'her name is Susan' we would say that we have 'acquired information'. Taken that way, an instance of information naturally leads to a single, static quantity of information. Thus, if asked how much information is contained in learning that a flip of a fair coin yielded a 'heads', the typical answer is '1 bit of information' ($-\log_2(\frac{1}{2}) = 1$ bit).

Seasoned information theorists are, of course, aware that there is more to it than that. Yet even those individuals usually operate within a paradigm that is most often not as comprehensive as it needs to be to address the full information picture. Thus, '1 bit' merely indicates the number of possible states ($2^1 = 2$ states). Alone, this number is indifferent regarding deeper, significant aspects of information such as *meaning*.

There is an attribute about information that is even more fundamental than those considerations. I am specifically referring to the fact that before information may be measured it must first manifest as a specific kind of information, and that manifestation always occurs within a fixed context. If any critical element of the context is changed, the information that is

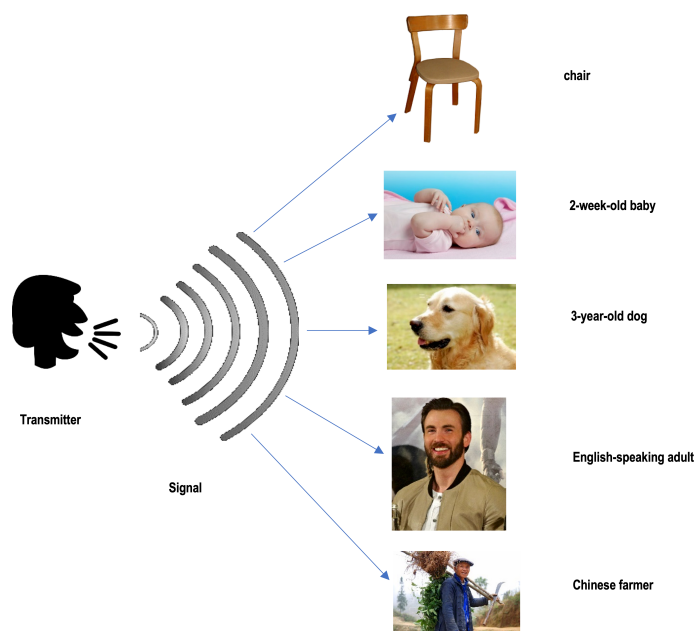


Figure 1: A transmitter emits a signal that is received in different ways by different entities

manifested also changes. The implication of that is significant: information is *not* a single, static entity but instead is a variable, dynamic entity that acquires fixed definition only within a context.

Let us walk through a thought experiment to illustrate some of that. Refer to Figure 1.

Imagine a room that contains five material entities: (1) a wooden chair; (2) a 2-week-old baby, (3) a 3-year-old dog, (4) an English-speaking adult, and (5) an adult Chinese farmer with no comprehension of the English language. Each of those entities is called a *receiver* (of signals).

A person, whom we will refer to as the *transmitter*, is brought into this room and speaks the sentence: “Raise your right hand.” That spoken sentence is the *signal*.

Every entity, every receiver, in the room receives that signal. When any material entity receives a signal there is a receiver-signal *interaction*, i.e., the material entity (receiver) receiving a signal interacts with the signal. All interactions cause a *transformation* to the entities involved.

When that signal-receiver interaction occurs, the signal will always manifest as information to the receiver. The significant point is that the specific type of information that is manifested for each of those receivers will be different. Thus, while the ‘received information’ (the information that *is*—the received signal) is the same, the information that is *manifested* (the

information that *becomes*) for each receiver is different.

For the wooden chair, the signal causes a physical effect (modulated air waves impacting the material). That is a kind of information called *purely material information*. There is not even a possibility for any other kind of information to be manifested for the wooden chair.

For the 2-week-old-baby, the signal also causes a physical effect. In addition, another kind of information, called *material associative information*, is possible. The third kind of information, called *nonmaterial associative information*, is not yet possible at this stage of the baby’s life although the *capability* for that kind of information to manifest exists in the baby. That kind of manifestation is what makes possible formal/syntactic structure and abstract semantic content.

For the 3-year-old dog, the signal also causes a physical effect. In addition, material associative information is *possible*. For instance, the dog may have been trained to raise its right paw upon hearing the *sound* “Raise your right hand.” The third kind of information (nonmaterial associative information) will never be possible for the dog since the *capability* for that kind of information is absent in dogs.

For the English-speaking adult, the signal also causes a physical effect. In addition, material associative information and nonmaterial associative information will be manifested for this individual. The result (if he/she chooses to do so) will be the individual raising the right hand.

For the adult Chinese farmer having no comprehension of the English language, the signal also causes a physical effect. Material associative information and nonmaterial associative information are *possible* (the *capability* is there) but will not be manifested for this individual. The result is that this Chinese farmer will most likely not raise his right hand.

The general idea is that the kind of information that may be manifested, and ultimately is manifested, for an entity (the receiver) will depend on what is called the *comprehensive context* at the time that a signal interacts with that entity. Alternatively, when a signal interacts with a receiver it manifests in different ways depending on the comprehensive context.

Thus, the proximate cause—the signal (the ‘*is*’ of some information)—does not manifest as information (*become* information) in a single, static and unvarying way. That is the basis for stating that information not so much *is* something but rather *becomes* something. Furthermore, this phenomenon always happens for all entities (all receivers)—living or non-living; natural or artificial (technological).