

A Defense of the Rationality of the Ideal Observer Theory

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Abstract

The ideal observer theory explains moral affairs on the basis of attitudes in the sense that for the analysis of moral judgments' meanings, the acquisition of moral knowledge, and the ontological explanation of moral properties, one can use ideal observer attitudes. Roderick Firth provided a prominent semantic account and formulation of the ideal observer theory. Believing that many attempts made by philosophers to analyze the concept of the good face fundamental problems, he thinks that the solution is to refer to a theory of absolutism in attitudes. Considering the central components of this theory and the features of the ideal observer, he tries to develop an intuitive approach to analyzing the meanings of moral propositions. The features ascribed to the ideal observer by Firth are in line with their semantic functions. Some philosophers have criticized the central components and the features of ideal observer. In this paper, the ideal observer and its attitudes are considered to be a metaphor for a rational person and rational attitudes respectively. Assessing certain objections, we think that the semantic and epistemological accounts of this theory are reasonable and defensible in general. However, this theory can be made more acceptable by changing some features of the ideal observer.

Keywords

Ideal observer, Roderick Firth, linguistics of ethics, epistemology of ethics, moral absolutism.

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