

# PHILOSOPHY 101

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# MACKIE'S ERROR THEORY (II)

# THE ARGUMENT FROM DISAGREEMENT

1. There is an enormous amount of variation in moral views, which leads to disagreement concerning what to do/value
2. Moral disagreement is intractable in a way that other kinds of disagreement are not
3.  $\therefore$  The best explanation of the intractability of moral disagreement is that there is no objective fact of the matter concerning what to do/value

# SUMMARY: AGAINST MACKIE ON DISAGREEMENT

- Reject premise (1)
  - The extent of moral disagreement is exaggerated
- Reject premise (2)
  - Moral disagreement is no more/less intractable than other forms of disagreement
- Reject conclusion (offer an alternative explanation)
  - One or more of the interlocutors may be systematically and irredeemably mistaken
  - Some moral disputes may have no uniquely correct answers

# THE 'QUEERNESS' ARGUMENT

1. If there were objective values/ethical facts they would have to be intrinsically prescriptive or action-guiding
2. Intrinsically action-guiding entities are strange—they are unlike any other entities that we think exist
3. It is possible to explain ethical behavior without appeal to the existence of such strange entities as objective values/ethical facts
4.  $\therefore$  There are no objectively and intrinsically action-guiding values/ethical facts

## AN EXAMPLE – PLATONIC FORMS

*In Plato's theory the Forms, and in particular the Form of the Good, are eternal, extra-mental, realities. They are a very central structural element in the fabric of the world. But it is held also that just knowing them or 'seeing' them will not merely tell men what to do but will ensure that they do it, overruling any contrary inclinations (64)*

# AN EXAMPLE – PLATONIC FORMS

- Objective values as both
  - *knowable*
  - *intrinsically motivating*



*An objective good would be sought by anyone who was acquainted with it, not because of any contingent fact that this person, or every person, is so constituted that he desires this end, but just because the end has to-be-pursuedness somehow built into it (77)*

# MACKIE'S "INTERNALIST" ASSUMPTION

## Internalism:

objective values must be intrinsically motivating — knowledge of a moral requirement entails being motivated to follow that requirement

# REJECTING INTERNALISM

- Why might we reject Internalism?
  - Amoralism is a coherent possibility
    - perfect understanding of moral requirements
    - total lack of motivation to act morally

# THE ALTERNATIVE TO INTERNALISM

## Externalism:

The motivational force of value is a contingent psychological fact, depending on the psychological structure of an agent

- Normal human agents share common psychological features
  - e.g. capable of sympathy and empathy
- Widespread possession of a particular set of psychological features explains uniformity in the motivational structure of different agents

# REPLYING TO THE QUEERNESS ARGUMENT

- Reject premise (1) of the argument
  - Opt for an "Externalist" theory of motivation

# SUMMARY

- Should we accept Mackie's error theory?
  - Neither the argument from disagreement nor the argument from 'queerness' shows that moral values/facts do not exist
  - Absent further argument we might be justified in accepting moral realism/objectivism as the 'default' position

