

# The Nature of Moral Value

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- **J. L. Mackie** (a moral anti-realist) believes that there are **no universal moral values** based on **relativistic arguments**.
- Mackie argues for what he calls **moral skepticism**, which is the view that **there are no objective values**.
  - This is distinguished from **moral objectivism** which involves the view that **there are objective values**.
- Before his arguments, he makes a couple of distinctions first:
  1. He distinguishes moral skepticism from the following views:
    - (a) Our current system of values needs to be replaced with a better system of values.
    - (b) No existing system of moral values is adequate.
  2. He distinguishes second-order moral questions from first-order moral questions.
    - (a) First-order moral questions are concerned with moral values.
    - (b) Second-order moral questions are concerned with the possible existence of objective moral values, independently of any system of values.
  3. He distinguishes moral skepticism from simple subjectivism.
  4. He distinguishes the thesis that **there are objective moral values** from the thesis that **there are inter-subjective values**.
    - One could be a moral skeptic while still believing that there are inter-subjective values shared across both individuals and cultures.
    - These inter-subjective values may still not be objective in the sense that they are true for all time.
- Mackie proposed the following two arguments for his **moral skepticism position**:
  1. The argument from the ontological (what exists) and epistemological (what we know) **weirdness of objective moral values**.
    - Ontological weirdness: If there are objective moral values, they are not visible nor are they tangible. What kind of things are they? How do we know they exist?
    - Epistemological weirdness: Even if there were a plausible ontological account of objective moral values, how could we come to know them?
  2. The argument from cultural relativism:
    - Premise — Societies differ markedly in their moral values.
    - Conclusion — There are no objective moral values.

## Thomas Nagel

- **Thomas Nagel** (a moral realist) admits that there is **at least one very general value** that is **objective**.
- Thomas Nagel's goal is to find **at least one objective moral value** thereby contradicting Mackie's moral skepticism.
- To find at least one **objective moral value**, Nagel uses "the view from nowhere".
- **The view from nowhere** involves **bracketing ourselves off** from the **world** and our **relationships** with people in the world. Essentially we stand back and look at our lives and the world we live in as a whole.

- According to Nagel, **the view from nowhere** abandons the **subjective viewpoint** leaving only an **objective viewpoint**.
- Nagel argues that **a maximally objective value** found by **increasing levels of abstraction** will have **three characteristics**:
  1. The value will be **broad in scope**, it will apply to many different kinds of actions.
  2. The value will be **agent-neutral**, meaning it won't involve any reference to anyone.
  3. The value will be **external**, meaning that it won't refer to anyone's reasons for acting.
- Nagel warns about **the danger of taking the view from nowhere** is that if the value is **too abstract** it becomes **vacuous** (For example: Be good).