

Week 8: A Sensible Objectivism?

The Euthyphro dilemma:

Is what is holy holy because the gods approve it, or do they approve it because it is holy?

Third possibility (see Week 6 for the other two):

‘Siblingism’: things are holy iff they are such as to merit approval by the gods.

John McDowell’s >Values and Secondary Qualities=, in *Morality and Objectivity: a Tribute to J.L. Mackie*, London: Routledge, pages 110-129.

Secondary qualities: Distinguish concept and property: The concept of redness cannot be fully grasped unless you understand what it is for something to look red.

>A secondary quality is a property the ascription of which to an object is not adequately understood except as true, if it is true, in virtue of the object’s disposition to present a certain sort of perceptual appearance: specifically, an appearance characterizable by using a word for the property to say how the object perceptually appears. Thus an object’s being red is understood as obtaining in virtue of the object’s being such as (in certain circumstances) to look, precisely, red.= (p. 111).

Two senses of objective: >... a primary quality would be objective in the sense that what it is for something to have it can be adequately understood otherwise than in terms of dispositions to give rise to subjective states. [Whereas secondary qualities cannot be understood except in this way, so they are subjective in this sense.] Now this contrast between objective and subjective is not a contrast between veridical and illusory experience. But it is easily confused with a different contrast, in which to call a putative object of awareness >objective= is to say that it is there to be experienced, as opposed to being a mere figment of the subjective state that purports to be an experience of it. If secondary qualities were subjective in the sense naturally contrasts with this, naive consciousness would indeed be wrong about them, and we would need something like Mackie’s Lockean picture of the error it commits. What is acceptable, though, is only that secondary qualities are subjective in the first sense, and it would be simply wrong to suppose that this gives any support to the idea that they are subjective in the second= (p. 113-4).

>... colours and shapes figure in experience .... simply as properties that objects are represented as having, distinctively phenomenal in the one case and not so in the other= (p. 115).

>The idea of value experience involves taking admiration, say, to represent its object as having a property which (although there in the object) is essentially subjective in much the same way as the property that an object is represented as having by an experience of redness—that is, understood

adequately only in terms of the appropriate modification of human (or similar) sensibility. The disanalogy, now, is that a virtue (say) is conceived to be not merely such as to elicit the appropriate >attitude= (as a colour is merely such as to cause the appropriate experiences), but rather such as to merit it (p. 118).

>As for the epistemology of value, the epistemology of danger is a good model= (p. 120). Cf, "the bogus epistemology of intuitionism" based on the perceptual metaphor [1988, p. 9]. "Instead of a vague attempt to borrow the epistemological credentials of the idea of perception, the position I am describing aims, quite differently, at an epistemology that centres on the notion of susceptibility to reasons" [p. 9].

Further disanalogies:

- The very idea of moral vision.
- Supervenience relations.
- The normative circle (or triangle: see below) and Moore's open question argument.

At least in respect of some values:

For something to be valuable is for it to be possible for that thing to be the object of an appropriate attitude.

It is not one's attitude that justifies one's thinking something to be valuable, nor is one's thinking something to be valuable sufficient to justify one's having an attitude towards it. The reasons for the attitude are the very same as the reasons for the ascription of value. If these reasons justify, they justify both the ascription of value and the attitude (cf Scanlon's 'buck-passing' account of value in his *What we owe to each other*, Chapters 1 and 2).

The structure is roughly like this:

Ascription of value Attitude-response

Reasons

Dotted lines: justifying relations.

Solid lines: possible epistemological routes.

A difficulty: Might not our 'sensibilities' to, e.g. danger, have been different, in which case wouldn't what is an appropriate object of fear have been different? Reply: distinguish sense and reference of the term 'dangerous' (cf. Wiggins' AMoral Cognitivism, Moral Relativism and Motivating Moral Beliefs@, Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 91, pages 61-85).

A second difficulty: Can something be, for example, funny without it meriting amusement? If so, are there two senses of the term.

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