

Consider this claim:

(OG) If God doesn't exist, then objective morality doesn't exist.

This claim is often expressed by theists but also sometimes by atheists who reject objective morality.

Theists like to use it in an argument for God's existence that looks like this:

(T1) If God doesn't exist, then objective morality doesn't exist.

(T2) Objective morality does exist.

(T3) So, God exists.

And atheists sometimes make an argument against objective morality that looks like this:

(A1) If God doesn't exist, then objective morality doesn't exist.

(A2) God doesn't exist.

(A3) So, objective morality doesn't exist.

Notice both arguments share the same first premise. I think this premise is unjustified, however, since it's based on a false dichotomy. Here's the sort of argument that seems to underly it:

No Standard

(S1) If God doesn't exist, then there's no standard for morality other than people's opinions.

(S2) If so, then objective morality doesn't exist.

(S3) So, if God doesn't exist, then objective morality doesn't exist.

Premise 2 is fine, but we've got no reason to accept premise 1. This assumes that there are only two possible standards for morality:

Possible Standards for Morality

- God (Her nature, will, mind, etc.)
- People's opinions

But really, there are countless other possible standards:

- Happiness and suffering
- Respect for autonomy
- Freedom
- Equality
- Etc.

Now, you might think these standards are implausible. That's fine. I think the God standard is pretty implausible myself.

But the point is, it's a false dichotomy to present two options as the only possible ones when there are others.