

Main Idea: We know we should do the right thing but we don't always do it.

Francis Schaeffer writes, "I do not believe there is any one apologetic which meets the needs of all people. And, as I said...I did not (and do not) mean that...[it] should ever be applied mechanically as a set formula. There is no set formula that meets everyone's need, and if only applied as a mechanical formula, I doubt if it really meets anyone's need — short of an act of God's mercy."¹

In other words, as apologist Matt Coombe writes, "There is no *single* argument for God or for Biblical Christianity."²

Following up from the last 2 weeks: if God doesn't exist then life is *ultimately* absurd. Yet many atheists still insist that there is such a thing as good and evil. Yet our culture is very afraid of "imposing" their values on others. Yet most people still believe in moral values of some sort even if it's the rightness of not imposing your view of rightness onto others.

Is it possible to be good without God? Today we're going to have to clarify by what we mean by "good." In our Christian discussions, we usually use "good" in a salvific sense ('you can't be good enough to get into heaven' and so forth). But today we're going to look at a different angle. Can you be a person who *acts* morally without God? Yet the question is not if you can be good without *belief* in God...Rather, is it possible to be good *without* God existing.

Pew Research Poll: *Worldwide, Many See Belief in God as Essential to Morality: Richer Nations Are Exception*, March 13, 2014.

"Many people around the world think it is necessary to believe in God to be a moral person, according to surveys in 39 countries by the Pew Research Center. However, this view is more common in poorer countries than in wealthier ones. In 22 of 39 countries surveyed, clear majorities say it is necessary to believe in God to be moral and have good values. This position is highly prevalent, if not universal, in Africa and the Middle East. At least three-quarters in all six countries surveyed in Africa say that faith in God is essential to morality. In the Middle East, roughly seven-in-ten or more agree in Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, the Palestinian territories, Tunisia and Lebanon. Across the two regions, only in Israel does a majority think it is *not* necessary to believe in God to be an upright person."³

Again, the question was not if you can "be good without *belief* in God . . . The question was: Can we be good *without* God."⁴ Here are two red herrings that often appear in this discussion:

1. Atheists can be moral like theists.
2. Moral claims can be justified apart from theism.

Our question point not to who/what is moral/good, but to who/what is the ground for morality.⁵

The moral argument contends that moral realism exists and that moral values and duties are best explained by the existence of God. Given God's nature as good, it follows that His moral commands to His creation are good in that they sync with His good nature. God is also privy, as the good creator, to both give and take life, a prerogative not available to humans unless divinely ordained by God.

Evidence of the conscience & objective morality in human behavior: Rom. 2:14-16

- Those who don't have a Bible still have their conscience: we intuitively know the difference between right and wrong – 2:14-15

“The Egyptian billionaire had announced that he was interested in buying an island where refugees could be housed until they can return to their own country. In a Sept. 8 Bloomberg TV interview, Sawiris said the proposal was something motivated by a desire “to clear my conscience as a human being, and nothing more.”⁶

C.S. Lewis, “We know that men find themselves under a moral law, which they did not make, and cannot quite forget even when they try, and which they know they ought to obey.”⁷ Lewis also gives a compelling “illustrations of the Tao,” a Lewisian descriptor for universal natural law. He observes various cultural threads such as the laws of beneficence, justice, good faith and veracity, mercy, and magnanimity.⁸

- Those who don't have a Bible still have the moral law of God written on their hearts: the conscience accuses or excuses based on the rightness or wrongness of our actions – 2:15-16. We know we should do the right thing but we don't always do it.

- The reality of guilt

Unresolved guilt is a scourge that psychotherapy is only recently coming to grips with. Findings from psychology and psychotherapy serve as evidence of the reality of the moral law evidenced by human conscience. Roberto Speziale-Bagliacca, professor of psychiatry at the Medical School of the University of Genoa, observes, “The sense of guilt is always lying in ambush.”⁹ For instance, consider the underlying handling of the guilt issue in popular films. Taking human life, even when one does so in defense of oneself or others, goes fundamentally contrary to human moral instincts. This is one reason why films that depict conscience-free killing engender such curiosity. Watching a character who kills with impunity, for a person with properly functioning moral faculties, stirs a number of emotions. One is moral revulsion wherein the killer is despised. Another is a deep sense of pity over a person whose level of morality is so horribly depraved that it appears to be functionally nonexistent. Beneath these internal queries, the driving attraction is the inextinguishable question, “How do they do it?” Even when the “good” killer triumphs over the “bad guys,” amidst the carnage, the hero still carries the weight of a tortured conscience.¹⁰ The polluting power of a burdened conscience can permeate an otherwise circumstantially happy life. Such data suggest a transcendent moral law that persons transgress at the peril of their own moral sanity. Untold amounts of time and money have been poured into unsuccessful attempts to sanitize the conscience from the contamination that inevitably flows from violation of the moral law as reflected in the conscience. Even with the innumerable distractions of the 21st century world, the gnawing sense of the moral law via the conscience drowns out raucous pontificators who claim, whether through the trite smokescreens of arbitrariness, or an anemic philosophical scientism, “There is no God.”

Naturalist critics of theism must give an account for the conscience on naturalism. Where does the moral conscience of regret fit within naturalism? Baggett and Walls argue, “Traditional conceptions of moral freedom, moral duties, moral responsibility, genuine regret, real praise and

blame are all difficult to make sense of in a naturalistic world. Those uncomfortable with watering such conceptions down have reason to take them seriously.”¹¹

Morpheus says to Neo “You've felt it your entire life, that there's something wrong with the world.” – *The Matrix*

Keith Ward, “In the biblical narrative, the first sin is associated with knowledge, obtained in defiance of a divine command (Gen. 3:6).”¹²

Moral Argument for God's Existence

1. If God does not exist then objective moral values & duties do not exist.
2. Objective moral values & duties do exist.
3. God exists.¹³

1. If God does not exist then objective moral values & duties do not exist.

- Moral **values**: Good/bad has to do with something's *worth*.

- Moral **duties**: right/wrong has to do with something's being *obligatory*.¹⁴

Q: Where do moral values and duties come from?

Option 1: Culture – Cultural Moral **Relativism**: Morality is relative to one's culture. Yet, “morality is relative” is an **absolute** statement. So then moral relativism must be true only some of the time.

- “There are no moral absolutes.” This is a logically self-defeating statement because it denies absolutes with an absolute statement.
- If moral relativism is true then murder, rape, arson, and burglary aren't really morally *wrong* they're just out of style or culturally inappropriate. Sort of like wearing bright neon parachute pants with a cut off Tap Out t-shirt while sporting moon boots with a flat bill hat that says ‘Sup.’ It's not wrong; it's just out of style. (Although this may be contested by Hipsters). If God does not exist then humans are merely a higher form of animal. So then there's not an *ultimate moral* difference between what we see on *Sons of Anarchy* and *Animal Planet*.

This raises an important question: Is human ‘morality’ any different than animal behavior? Consider philosopher Mark Linville's parallel:

Had the circumstances of human evolution been more like those of hive bees or Galapagos boobies or wolves, then the directives of conscience may have led us to judge and behave in ways that are quite foreign to our actual moral sense. Our wolfish philosophers defend justice as inequality, and their erudite reasonings take their cue from the fund of judgments bequeathed to them by their genes. Bees and boobies graced with intellect would judge that sibicide and infanticide are morally required under certain conditions.¹⁵

Craig writes, “If God does not exist, then it is difficult to see any reason to think that human beings are special or that their morality is objectively true.”¹⁶

Many leading atheists have come to a similar conclusion. In his book, *God is Dead. Long Live Morality*, Michael Ruse writes, “Now you know that morality is an illusion put in place by your genes to make you a social cooperator.”¹⁷ On a side-note, if God does not exist, then is it possible for humans to actually choose anything? In reference to free will, atheist philosopher Patricia Churchland states, “It’s like the illusion with morality. We know that moral laws are not specified by the gods. We know that they are, first of all, neurobiologically based or evolutionarily based, and, secondly, culturally based, but it’s very useful for people to have the illusion that these are really true.”¹⁸ If God does not exist then we’re left with trying to moralize molecules. Outside of theism, C.S. Lewis notes, “you can hardly imagine a bit of matter giving instructions.”¹⁹

Consider the following:

Example 1: What if the Nazis defeated the Allies and won WWII? The Nazis control all media and education and brainwash the world into believing that the Holocaust was morally right ... *Would the Holocaust still be wrong?* If moral relativism is true, then we could not say what the Nazis did was *objectively* evil.

Example 2: Suttee in India

Example 3: Assyrian torture

Example 4: ISIS beheadings,

Example 5: Child Molestation²⁰

Example 6: Moral Heroism against Culture

If God does not exist, where do human rights come from?

Pure Democracy: Rights come only from government (The “*Ostrakon*” in ancient Athens: Citizens could be exiled based on nothing more than a public vote with no reference to law or rights).

Option 2: Individual Moral Relativism – Judges 21:25, “In those days...everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

What atheists say...

“I can find no ultimate basis for ‘ought.’” - Mihailo Markovic

“Human beings may, and do, make up their own rules.” - Max Hocutt²¹

What atheists do...Moral relativism is not livable²² and most ethical relativists are extremely inconsistent.²³

- Even actions that hurt others may be counterproductive to survival but what makes them *morally* wrong? Moral judgments point to some external reality.
- “Atheistic moral realism” suggests that objective moral values are “brute facts” which exist apart from God.
- It may be simply that because violence hurts another it is wrong.
- What would be the ontological grounding of these “facts”?

- Are they immaterial (and thus naturalism is false)?
- Moral judgments are propositions which point to some external reality (i.e., Murder is “wrong”... but how is “wrong” defined?).²⁴

2. Objective moral values and duties do exist.

Q: Euthyphro Dilemma: Is something good because God commands it (God’s commands are arbitrary), or does God command something because it is good (moral standards are not dependent on God)?

A: God’s moral nature is the **standard** of goodness. Goodness is not a matter of a random command from God but is a matter of the goodness of His character.

Here’s a more detailed analysis of the Euthyphro Dilemma:

Is it possible to ground objective morality outside of God?

- A. Divine Voluntarism - A divine command theory of ethics where the ultimate foundation for morality is the revealed will of God, or the commands of God found in Scripture.²⁵ For example, murder is wrong *only* because God decreed it to be so. God *could* have commanded murder to be a moral virtue and love a vice. The problem here is clear: if divine voluntarism is true then objective morality (stemming from God’s commands) is little more than a divine, cosmic form of relativism! Right is right and wrong is wrong simply because God declares it to be so. Since, if God exists, no one can rival His power, He would qualify for applause from Nietzsche for exerting the will to power!²⁶ On this view, atheist Bertrand Russell claims, "For God Himself there is no difference between right and wrong." The Bible does indicate that there are certain things God can’t do. Hebrews 6:8 “It is impossible for God to lie.” Millard Erickson provides a salient point: God’s inability to do certain things in no way mitigates God’s omnipotence. Quite the contrary, it actually enhances it! Erickson reasons, “Sometimes we say something like, “He just doesn’t have it in him to do that.” This, however, is not a weakness on the part of the person, but a moral strength. So it is with God. He may have all of the abilities, the power, skill, and so on, to do the acts that comprise sin, but not doing them is not consistent with the kind of person he is.”²⁷ If there are no moral or logical parameters on God’s “will” then one is left with divine/cosmic relativism. In one of the most refined versions of the moral argument, David Baggett and Jerry Walls give a very convincing case for the defense of divine command theory yet without the baggage of ethical voluntarism. They maintain, “There are some things that God, if he’s a God of love and righteousness, simply cannot do. His inability to do these things isn’t because he’s constrained by an external moral standard, but by his perfect nature.”²⁸ Simply put, God’s essence or nature, which is intrinsically good, answers the question of whether God could somehow will that rape or murder be moral praiseworthy.
- B. Platonism: Absolute Morality outside of God - “The Good” is outside of God and God recognizes it to be good. Instead of being the ground of morality God is tour guide who points to The Good.” Thus, the Sovereign becomes subject.²⁹
- C. Dilemma splitter: God’s nature *is* good. Morality is grounded in the immutable character of God, who is perfectly good. His commands are not whims, but rooted in His holiness.

It's not a matter of command. It's a matter of character. William Lane Craig explains this dilemma splitter as follows:

I think of God as the embodiment of the moral good. He is the paradigm of goodness. He defines what goodness is. Think by way of analogy of judging music in terms of being hi-fidelity. We used to hear the term that a recording was hi-fidelity, which meant that it approximated to the sound of a live orchestra. But a live orchestra wouldn't itself be hi-fidelity because it doesn't have anything to approximate to – it is the standard. In the same way, moral values are defined by God. He *is* the standard of goodness. His character is the paradigm of goodness. Whether or not our actions are good or bad will be based upon how faithful they are to the standard. Whether they are morally hi-fidelity or not or whether they fall away from the standard and are therefore evil.³⁰

One objection here is from Platonism regarding the goodness of moral abstractions such as love, loyalty, honesty, etc. Moral virtues are “person dependent.”³¹ Love cannot exist outside of a free moral agent acting in love. Furthermore, how can an abstract object establish a moral obligation?

Q: What is your stopping point (for ethics)?

Q: Is your stopping point plausible?

There are two options:

- I. Abstract Object/Reality: God would have to align with and, in a sense, submit to this moral abstraction so that the sovereign becomes the subject. How could “The Good” really be good if it is an abstract object or vacuous virtue?
- II. God: Why #1 because morality is not subjective/relative. Why #2?
 - 1) Virtues/Good ‘person dependent.’
 - 2) Thus, their source (by definition) is personal.
 - 3) God is the greatest conceivable being.
 - 4) Therefore, “The Good” must be God's nature/character.

3. Therefore, God exists. If God exists we have an ultimate standard of goodness. God provides the foundation, God provides the example, God provides the salvation through Christ, and God gets the glory and we get the joy!

Blaise Pascal points out the implications of Jesus on the human predicament:

The Christian religion, he claims, teaches two truths: that there is a God whom men are capable of knowing, and that there is an element of corruption in men that renders them unworthy of God. Knowledge of God without knowledge of man's wretchedness begets pride, and knowledge of man's wretchedness without knowledge of God begets despair, but knowledge of Jesus Christ furnishes man knowledge of both simultaneously.³²

So what happens to the innocent guy in the middle of the rain forest who dies without ever having heard the Gospel? He goes to heaven...but he doesn't exist (See [Romans 2:14-16](#); [10:13-17](#)). All have sinned and all need the Gospel. The Moral Argument isn't just a rational undercutter against atheism but a clarion call for world missions.

For more reading on this topic, see the following works and summaries:

Linville, Mark D. "The Moral Argument." In *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*. Edited by William Lane Craig & J.P. Moreland, 391-448. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

Linville provides a panorama of naturalistic theories of morality and their lack of explanatory power. His section on Darwinian counterfactuals and ethical naturalism is particularly helpful in avoiding caricatures of naturalistic versions of moral realism.

Lewis, C.S. "Book 1: Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe." In *Mere Christianity*. New York: HarperCollins, 1980.

C.S. Lewis' literary and apologetic mastery is on fine display in this work. Lewis uses the all too familiar experience of simple domestic arguments to make his case for moral realism. While highly complex in his arguments, Lewis' logical proficiency is deceptively simple. Apologists would do well to note the adaptability of Lewis' arguments to everyday life.

Baggett, David and Jerry L. Walls. *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Baggett and Walls present a strong case for theistic moral realism by making an appeal to divine command ethics while avoiding the trap of divine voluntarism. The authors also present a highly controversial criticism of Reformed ethics.

Adams, Robert Merrihew. *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Robert Merrihew Adams, in a display of high scholarship, argues for transcendent moral realism from the standpoint of virtue ethics. He presents the reader with a vast array of angles on the "rivers of blood [that] have been shed in obedience to supposed divine commands" (277). Adams also argues for ethics in terms of practical issues such as employment and moral faith.

Hare, John E. *God and Morality: A Philosophical History*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Hare conducts an accessible and scholarly examination of Aristotle, Duns Scotus, Immanuel Kant, and R.M. Hare as their writings relate to ethics and theism. Hare's research is most notable in his final chapter, which focuses on combining the various theories under the auspices of Christian theism.

Hare, John E. *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Hare conducts a rather extensive assessment of the nature of God and the demands of virtue ethics. Hare attempts to bridge the “moral gap” of the high demands of moral realism and the ubiquitous human inability to maintain a moral code. In order to solve this dilemma Hare appeals to the classic Christian doctrines evangelicals know as the gospel.

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- ¹ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who is There: The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1982), in Logos Library System [CD-ROM].
- ² Matt Coombe, THEO 900: Theological Methodology, presentation, *Presupposition and Apologetic Method*, slide 39.
- ³ <http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/03/13/worldwide-many-see-belief-in-god-as-essential-to-morality/>
- ⁴ William Lane Craig, *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), 127.
- ⁵ Dr. Chad Thornhill, APOL 500 notes, Lecture set 4: *Theistic Arguments*.
- ⁶ <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-09-15/egyptian-billionaire-identifies-two-islands-for-refugee-haven>
- ⁷ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 23.
- ⁸ C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Harper One, 2009), 83-102.
- ⁹ Roberto Speziale-Bagliacca, *Guilt: Revenge, Remorse and Responsibility After Freud* (London: Routledge, 2004), 23.
- ¹⁰ The Bourne trilogy presents a powerful case for the buoyancy of the human conscience despite the quickly evaporating reasons of pragmatic justification.
- ¹¹ David Baggett & Jerry Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 26.
- ¹² Keith Ward, *Religion & Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 161.
- ¹³ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 172. <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/media/what-is-the-moral-argument-for-the-existence-of-god-bobby-conway>
- ¹⁴ Craig, *On Guard*, 130.
- ¹⁵ Mark Linville, "The Moral Argument," in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, edited by William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), page number?
- ¹⁶ William Lane Craig, "The Indispensability of Theological Meta-ethical Foundations for Morality," *Foundations 5* (1997): 9-12, accessed August 15, 2014, <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-indispensability-of-theological-meta-ethical-foundations-for-morality#ixzz3ARVLzDbn>
- ¹⁷ Michael Ruse. "God is Dead. Long Live Morality," (accessed November 7, 2011), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2010/mar/15/morality-evolution-philosophy>
- ¹⁸ Patricia and Paul Churchland, "Patricia and Paul Churchland," in *Conversations on Consciousness: What the Best Minds Think About the Brain, Free Will, and What It Means to Be Human*, edited by Susan Blackmore (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 62.
- ¹⁹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 25.
- ²⁰ Child abuse and moral relativism. See, *Reasonable Faith*, 87-88.
- ²¹ David Noebel, *Understanding the Times*, 138-139.
- ²² See the curious account of Dostoyevsky's murdering atheist who commits suicide because he is unable to live with the moral implications of his actions. See, William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* 3rd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 69.
- ²³ Dr. Chad Thornhill, APOL 500 notes, Lecture set 4: *Theistic Arguments*.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ Scott Rae, *Moral Choices-An Introduction to Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 31.
- ²⁶ The German reformer, Martin Luther, and William of Ockham held to this view. Divine voluntarism is also the predominant Islamic view of God and morality in Islam.
- ²⁷ Millard Erickson, *God the Father Almighty: A Contemporary Exploration of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 179.
- ²⁸ David Baggett and Jerry Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality*, 57.
- ²⁹ Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian* (New York: Touchstone, Simon & Schuster, 1957), 12.
- ³⁰ <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/how-are-morals-objectively-grounded-in-god>
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* 3rd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 66.