



# IS THERE ANY REAL RIGHT OR WRONG?

## IS MORALITY OBJECTIVE AND OBLIGATORY?

Statistics tell us that most of us claim to be moral relativists, yet I suggest our behaviour reveals otherwise. While it is very easy to say there are no objective moral obligations, it is much more difficult to live as if there are none. Our reactions when we are mistreated reveal what we really believe about morality.

What do we mean by objective moral obligations? We mean objective in contrast to subjective. If morality were merely subjective and nothing more, then moral judgments would be like judgments of personal taste, nothing more. For instance, in matters of personal taste, I may like basketball, you may like hockey: I may like pie, you may like cake: I may like rock music, you may like classical. These are matters of personal taste, strictly subjective. Two of us can make conflicting statements and both be correct. If morality were strictly subjective, then moral judgments would be exactly like judgments of personal taste. There would be no question of them being right or wrong. Conflicting opinions about rape, for example, would be no more right or wrong than conflicting opinions about Big Macs vs. Whoppers, because the truth or correctness would simply depend upon the attitude, opinion, or belief of an individual subject or person.

**M**aybe you've heard the true story about a philosophy student who wrote a research paper arguing that there are no objective, universal moral principles. Judged by its research, scholarship, documentation and argumentation, it was easily an "A" paper. The professor, however, took one look at it, pulled out his red felt pen and wrote "F- I do not like blue covers." When the student got his paper back he stormed into the professor's office, "This is not fair! This is not just! I shouldn't be graded on the colour of my cover, but on the content of my paper!" The professor asked if the student was referring to the paper which argued that there are no objective moral principles such as fairness and justice. The student replied, "Yes, yes, that's the one!" The professor responded, "Well... I do not like blue covers. The grade will remain an 'F.'" Suddenly the student realized that he really did believe in objective moral principles like fairness and justice, and he was expecting them to be applied to his situation right then and there.

by Michael Horner

On the other hand to say that morality is objective is to say that the truth of moral judgments does not depend upon the attitude, opinion or belief of an individual or group. Objective moral principles are true independent of anyone's opinions. For example,  $2+2=4$  is objectively true whether anyone thinks so or not. To say that morality is objective is to say that we don't invent it, we simply recognize it.

The statement that "there are 100 people in this room" is either true or false in an objective sense. One can't justifiably claim that it's true for you that there are 100 people in this room, but that's not true for me. If someone stood up and said, "No I think that there are only three people in this room", how would the rest of us respond? We might say it's a free country: go ahead and disagree. We might even defend his right to disagree, but we would never say the person is right or telling the truth. He just happens to be plain wrong on this point. This is because the number of people in this room is an objective fact independent of anyone's agreement or disagreement with it.

Now the question is "Are there any objective moral principles that are obligatory in nature and binding on all people?" Because of major disagreements in our society over ethical questions like abortion, euthanasia, pre-marital sex and capital punishment, many people think that ethics is subjective, that is, relative to the opinions of individuals or cultures. I have found, through the numerous public debates I've had on the subject, that the vast majority of philosophy professors are not willing to publicly defend moral relativism. They tend to agree that there are objective moral obligations, even if they can't provide a foundation for them. Why is that? Because, as I said earlier, it is very easy to say there are no objective moral obligations but it is much more difficult to live as if there are none. Our reactions when we are mistreated reveal what we really believe about morality.



## OUR REACTIONS AND JUDGMENTS



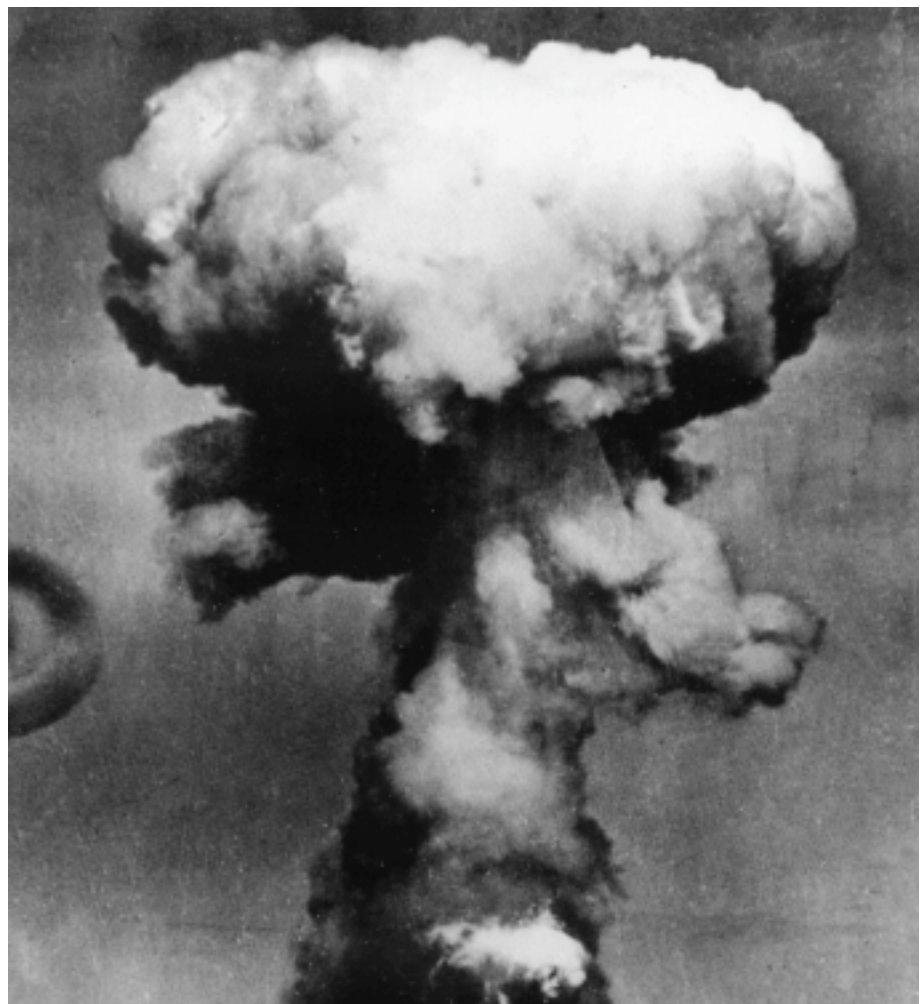
Most people cannot help believing that when someone else wrongs them the act is really wrong. If we are beaten and robbed, it will seem to us that the person has truly abused us. We simply would not accept the claim that the assailant felt the actions were "right for him." These actions were wrong. He should have recognized this and regretted his actions. And even more telling, the perpetrator would feel the same way if someone did it to him.

Our true ethical position is further betrayed by our judgments about the way others are treated. For example, we believe that it was morally wrong for the Nazis to perform medical experiments on Jews. And not only do we think it is wrong, we think everyone should think it is wrong, including the Nazis. We think apartheid was unjust, that white Afrikaners should not have oppressed black South

Africans. But not only do we think it was unjust, we expect everyone to agree especially white Afrikaners.

All of us believe that torturing babies and raping four year old girls is morally reprehensible, and that everyone should agree. Despite the fact that there are areas of disagreement among us, examples abound that show we do believe some actions are objectively evil and others objectively good. Our reactions show that we do not believe that ethics are just relative.

If we still claim to be ethical relativists, we must be willing to concede that it's morally acceptable for people to physically attack us and steal our belongings, for our papers to be graded on the basis of the colour of the cover and for Nazis to kill Jews. We need to be willing to say that it's quite all right for white Afrikaners



to oppress black South Africans and for sadists to abuse children and torture babies. If we are not prepared to affirm these actions, then we are not ethical relativists.

I am not claiming that morality is objective just because there is widespread agreement about the evil of these atrocities. Rather I am appealing to each of us to admit that deep down we think these actions are horribly wrong and that we also think everyone should agree. Therefore, regardless what we say our position on morality is, we actually do think objective moral obligations exist.

The way out of the argument is to simply deny that these atrocities are truly evil. I'm confident though, that an honest person will not be able to do that. The honest person is faced with a dilemma. If there is no objective morality, then our deepest intuitions which tell us these acts are evil, are delusions! We are mistaken! We may feel very strongly about the evil of these actions. We may even all agree, but we are wrong! Now, how likely is that? How likely is it that these intuitions are incorrect and that killing Jews, oppressing blacks and torturing babies is really not wrong?

John Healy, the executive director of Amnesty International, a non-religious organization, in a recent fund-raising letter, displayed the same confidence in people's true beliefs about morality that I am, "I am writing you today because I think you share my profound belief that there are indeed some moral absolutes. When it comes to torture, to government-sanctioned murder, to 'disappearances' - there are no 'lesser evils.' These are outrages against all of us."



Many people think that since we find different moral principles in different cultures, there cannot be objective moral principles binding on all cultures: morality must be culturally relative. This argument, however, begins with a misleading use of data, is logically fallacious, does not allow us to make what we would normally consider to be legitimate moral judgments, and leads to bizarre conclusions.

A closer look at the data shows that moral commonalities among cultures are much more abundant than moral differences. The differences are actually a small minority. We study them in anthropology classes because they are the exception, but in fact the vast majority of moral principles are held in common. Moreover, many of the dissimilarities are merely variations in moral reasoning and application of the common principles. The ethical disparity between cultures is far less than we are led to believe.<sup>2</sup>

Second, it doesn't follow logically just because there are some differences between cultures that transcendent moral principles do not exist. What follows from the fact that culture X says action A is wrong and culture Y says action A is right? Not very much! It does not follow that there is no objective moral truth regarding action A. It may very well be that culture X is correct and culture Y is wrong about action A, or vice versa. Relativity in moral belief does not entail relativity in moral truth.<sup>3</sup> Belief doesn't change truth. Not believing in gravity does not change the objective fact, that if you step off the tenth floor balcony, you will fall to the ground. Likewise not believing in a moral law does not render it inoperative or non-existent.

Furthermore, if ethics were culturally relative it would be impossible to evaluate cultures morally. One could not condemn as immoral what another culture approves, even if that is racism, infanticide, ethnic cleansing or wholesale genocide. If cultural relativism is true, the Nuremberg war trials following the Second World War were nothing more than a kangaroo court - a farce. Nazi war criminals defended themselves by claiming that they were just following orders within the framework of their culture and legal system. But Robert Jackson, chief counsel for the U.S. at the trials responded by saying that: there is a "law beyond the law" of any individual nation, permanent values which transcend any particular society.

Furthermore, if ethics were relative to culture, any declaration of universal human rights would be nonsense. You can't have it both ways. If ethics are just relative to culture, there are no universal human rights: and if there are universal human rights, as the United Nations believes, then ethics are not relative to culture.

But, as we have already seen, our reactions and judgments show that we do think that there are moral principles that transcend cultures and justify our condemnation of such occurrences as apartheid, ethnic cleansing and the Nazi atrocities.

The furor over the caning of the American teenager, Michael Fay, by Singaporean authorities in the early nineties is a good example of the fact that people do think morals are transcultural. If ethics were just culturally relative North Americans would have no basis for claiming the caning was just or unjust. Yet both those who support

or condemn the Singaporean law, reveal that they think the moral principles at stake are transcultural in nature.

Another problem with cultural relativism is that one seeking to reform society from within would find oneself in a real dilemma. If whatever a culture does is right for that culture, it would be immoral to try to initiate change, no matter how awful the practices are, whether slavery, child labour and abuse, or denial of women's rights. None of this is consistent with our moral sensibilities or practices regarding making moral judgments.

Furthermore, cultural relativism leads to bizarre conclusions. Imagine an island of 100 people. They take a vote on whether murder is right or wrong and the results are a 50/50 split. The next day some of the "murder is right" side kill one of the "murder is wrong" side. Now the count is 50 to 49 in favor of the "murder is right" side, and murder becomes morally acceptable.

Now let's say the "murder is wrong" side slay two of the other group. The vote is now 49 to 48 in favor of the "murder is wrong" proponents. So now murder is wrong even though it was right when they did it, and so on! A view that leads to such absurd conclusions cannot possibly be true.<sup>4</sup>



## SELF-REFUTING

## FOUNDATIONS

One final damaging criticism of ethical relativism is that it is self-refuting. Many ethical relativists say or think, "There are no objective morals and you shouldn't act as if there are," or "You ought to be a moral relativist." The moral relativist thinks relativism is universally true, and that everyone else should agree. But if relativism is true, then there are no moral "oughts" that apply to everyone, including that one.

So relativism may be fashionable, but it's not livable. It's self-refuting and leads to bizarre conclusions. Moreover, our reactions and judgments about the mistreatment of others and ourselves betray our real position on morality. We do not act as if morality is relative to individuals or cultures. We act as if there are objective moral principles that are obligatory and binding on all people. The Roman philosopher Cicero succinctly summarizes what we have found: "Only a madman could maintain that the distinction between honourable and dishonourable, between virtue and vice, is only a matter of opinion."<sup>5</sup>

Having acknowledged that objective moral principles exist, the obvious questions arise:

How could such principles exist? Where do they come from? What makes them objective, binding, and obligatory, especially on those who disagree? These are questions about foundations.

At this point many people, both at the popular and scholarly levels, have this intuition that, if God does not exist it is difficult to see how there could be any objective foundation, any universal standard for good and evil. How do you get ethics from different arrangements of space, time, matter and energy? A purely materialistic universe would be morally indifferent. Moral judgments would be just relative and subjective, merely expressions of personal tastes. Or they might be just social conventions that society has agreed upon so that people can live together without chaos. But in neither case would they be objectively binding moral obligations! The atheistic ethicist, Richard Taylor, captures this intuition when he writes,

"To say that something is wrong because... it is forbidden by God, is... perfectly understandable to anyone who believes in a law-giving God. But to say that something is wrong... even though no God exists to forbid it, is not understandable. The concept of moral obligation [is] unintelligible apart from the idea of God. The words remain but their meaning is gone."<sup>6</sup>

There would be no real objective right and wrong! The concept of objective morality loses all real meaning in a universe devoid of God.

The brilliant philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein candidly admitted that if there are ethical absolutes they would have to have come to man from outside the human situation - "Ethics, if it is anything," he wrote, "is supernatural..."<sup>7</sup>



## MATERIALISM AND DETERMINISM

J.L. Mackie, one of the most outspoken atheists of this century agrees, "Moral properties are most unlikely to have arisen without an all-powerful god to create them."<sup>8</sup>

The atheist philosopher of science, Michael Ruse, confirms this point: "The position of the modern evolutionist is that humans have an awareness of morality because such an awareness is of biological worth. Morality is a biological adaptation, no less than our hands and feet and teeth. Considered as a rationally justifiable set of claims about an objective something, ethics is illusory. I appreciate that when someone says, "love thy neighbor as thyself," they think they are referring above and beyond themselves. Nevertheless such reference is truly without foundation. Morality is just an aid to survival and reproduction, and any deeper meaning is illusory."<sup>9</sup>

But if Ruse is right, then our strong intuitions that rape, selfishness, discrimination and hate are objectively wrong, even outrageously immoral, are just delusions. So, unfortunately for the atheist, there is no basis for objective morality in a universe without God. As the Russian author Dostoyevsky put it, "If there is no God, then all things are permitted."

The problems for atheism, when it comes to morality, go even further, for if there is no God, what are human beings other than just accidental arrangements of atoms? If a human being is purely a physical organism with no immaterial aspects to his being like a soul or mind, then he is not qualitatively different from other animal species. Therefore, to regard human morality as objective would be to fall into the trap of speciesism. Given materialism, there is no reason to think human beings are objectively more valuable than rats, mosquitoes, or any other life forms.<sup>10</sup>



But also, with no mind or soul distinct from the brain, everything a human thinks or does is determined (not just influenced, but determined) by one's genetic make-up and the input of the senses. There is no personal agent who freely chooses. Everything one does is nothing but a result of chemical reactions. We are like a marionette whose actions are beyond its control. What moral value does a marionette or its movements have?<sup>11</sup> And clearly, such a being would not be morally responsible for any of its actions.

It is critical to note what I am not saying. I am not saying that an atheist cannot be moral, only that if there is no God there are no objective, obligatory moral principles, which is contrary to what we have already established. The question is not, "Can we formulate a system of ethics without reference to God?" If the atheist assumes that human beings have objective value, there is no reason to think that he cannot work out a system of ethics, and possibly one with which the theist would largely agree. Nor is the question, "Can we recognize the existence of objective moral principles without belief in God?" We don't need to believe in God to recognize, for example, that we should love our children. It is not the absence of belief in God, but the absence of God that is the problem for objective morality.

The outspoken atheist, Paul Kurtz, focuses the issue clearly when he writes,

"The central question about moral and ethical principles concerns their ontological foundation" [that is to say, their foundation in reality]. "If they are neither derived from God nor anchored in some transcendent ground, are they purely ephemeral?"<sup>12</sup>

## ETHICS WITHOUT GOD?

One might be persuaded at this point that moral relativism is likely mistaken and that there are objective moral obligations that are binding on all people at all times. But do we really need God? As we consider this alternative, however, we must take seriously the question of what makes these moral principles objective, obligatory and morally binding. How could they be more than just personal preferences or social conventions?

Some have suggested that we can provide an objective foundation for morality without appealing to God. Morality has just evolved over the centuries because it “works”, they suggest. That is, morality promotes individual or social benefits and survival for humans. Whatever promotes human flourishing and survival is good. Whatever doesn’t promote human flourishing and survival is bad. That is all we need for objectivity in morality, they claim. There is no need for God.<sup>13</sup>



## CRITICAL ASSUMPTION UNAVAILABLE TO THE ATHEIST



But the problem with this suggestion is that it is based on the necessary assumption that human beings are objectively valuable. Remember earlier I acknowledged that if we assume that humans are objectively valuable, we could probably develop a coherent system of ethics.<sup>14</sup> But if God does not exist we do not have access to that assumption. Humans, like everything else in the universe, are just accidental arrangements of atoms, and therefore, we cannot justifiably claim that they are objectively valuable. This assumption is usually adopted uncritically by most people, including moral philosophers. I have found that virtually all attempts to provide a foundation for objective morality apart from God make this assumption that humans are objectively valuable, but that assumption is not available to the atheist.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, if morality evolved because it produced survival benefits, we would not have a justification for objective morality, but merely an explanation for how moral beliefs arose. In fact it would be difficult to see how these beliefs or behaviors could even be considered morality anymore. They would be mere suggestions for survival, a far cry from objective moral principles. Does self-preservation really capture what we mean when we say something is moral?

Does mere prudence really capture what we mean by morality?

On this evolutionary model we would feel that objective moral principles exist, but they really wouldn’t. Are you really willing to accept the idea that while rape, murder, and discrimination feel wrong, they really aren’t? And once we’ve figured out that our feeling of morality with regard to say, rape, is just a biological adaptation inculcated into us over millions of years, then we would have no reason to regard rape as objectively wrong anymore.

There are additional problems with the claim that morality promotes individual and societal benefits and survival. To deal with these it is helpful to consider the two categories of the individual and society separately.

### SOCIETAL BENEFITS AND SURVIVAL

First, let’s consider that it is social welfare or survival of the species that is the basis for objective morality. We agree to a social contract - certain rules that help society function better and promote benefits for society and the human species. It is important to see that survival and flourishing of the individual and survival and flourishing of the society or the species can’t both be the basis of morality. Clearly they can be in conflict. It is not always the case that the survival of the species is in an individual’s self-interest. Survival of the species could clearly require personal sacrifice or even the death of individual members.

Even though the idea of a social contract could be helpful to a society, it can’t provide us with what we are looking for, an objective basis for morality. There is nothing that would make the rules objective and morally binding on those who disagree. A contract is not binding on one who doesn’t ‘sign’ it, on one who is committed solely to his own welfare. Ethics based on social contract is still relative ethics.

And why should one be committed to the general welfare of society? Why should one sacrifice for others’ well being? If the answer is that human beings have intrinsic value and that is why we should be committed to the welfare of society, the response is that there is no basis for this on the atheistic world-view as we’ve seen. We’ve seen that we just can’t assume the objective value

of humans in a universe where everything is the accidental arrangement of atoms. We may be “higher” on the evolutionary scale, but this only means we are more complex, not more valuable. What could we say to an alien race that valued humans as the latest in *nouveau cuisine*? There is no objective basis in the atheistic world-view that would make it wrong for aliens to eat humans.

Furthermore, if whatever promotes the survival of the species is the basis for morality, then it follows that it would be morally right to exterminate the sick, the aged and the handicapped who could be a drain on society or contaminate the gene pool. Deep down, however, we know this is wrong.

And why should one sacrifice one’s own interests for the sake of billions of other people (or even sentient creatures) who will live in the future? There is no objective basis for asserting that sacrifice is the right thing to do.

Lastly, a social contract does not seem to be an adequate explanation for the depth of our moral revulsion over some of the atrocities we see human beings perpetrate. Imagine that you had a daughter who was brutally tortured, raped, mutilated and murdered. Would your response to the perpetrator be an appeal to some social contract that he has violated? On the contrary, we would all agree that something far deeper than a social convention has been transgressed. The depth of our response would suggest that we think something outrageously immoral has taken place, not that a mere contract has been broken! Social benefits and survival of the species, therefore, as an objective foundation for morality, is wholly inadequate.

But maybe one will respond that the reason an individual should be committed to the general welfare of society is that he or she will benefit from such a society. Thus, the basis for morality now becomes self-interest. I will benefit from a society that is flourishing and surviving without chaos and therefore, I should be committed to the social contract.

## SELF-INTEREST

Although at first glance it might seem to make some sense that individual self-interest and survival could be the foundation of objective morality, upon closer scrutiny we see that it fits neither our notion, nor our practice of morality. First, don’t we expend a lot of time and energy teaching children not to look out for their own interests only, not to be self-centered? Yet here we are suggesting that self-interest is actually the basis for morality!

If one can benefit from doing physical harm to another without getting caught, is it right? Clearly not! And yet if self-interest was really the basis for morality, it would not only not be wrong, it would be the morally right thing to do.

If self-interest is the basis of morality then we should do good to others, not for their sake, but for our sake. This smacks of manipulation, not what we normally consider noble behavior.<sup>16</sup>

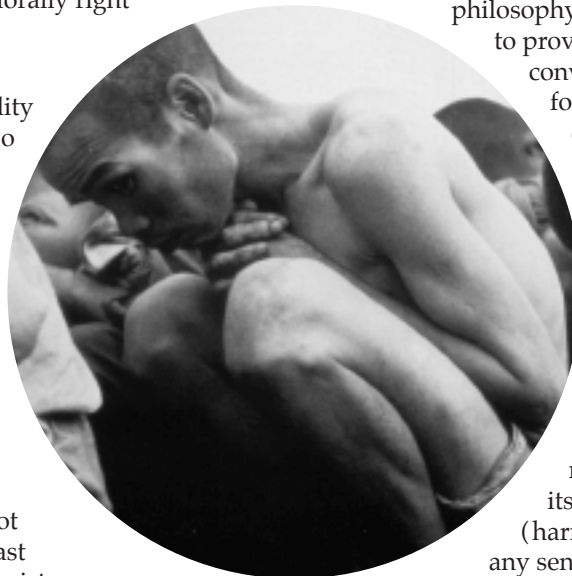
Furthermore, self-interest cannot substantiate at least one action both theists and atheists agree is morally good and noble, namely the sacrifice of one’s life for another. Why should I sacrifice, especially my life, for the sake of someone else? In the atheist world-view, there can be no good reason for adopting such a self-negating course of action. The sacrifice of one’s life is the complete and final sacrifice. In the atheistic world-view death is simply not in an individual’s self-interest, because death is the end of one’s existence and thus self-interest!

Again, imagine that your four-year-old daughter is brutally tortured, raped, mutilated and murdered. Has the perpetrator done something outrageously

immoral, or has he merely done something that is not in his self-interest and does not aid his survival (assuming he gets caught), and that is what is wrong with his action?

It is clear that acting out of self-interest may often be inconsistent with acting morally. To build our moral lives on a foundation of self-interest doesn’t fit our experience and understanding of morality. Self-interest as well fails as a foundation for objective morality.

There just doesn’t seem to be a winner in this search for a non-theistic foundation for morality. Duke University’s D. Stephen Long’s summary of this problem is certainly consistent with what we have found:



“The malady visited upon philosophy is its inability to provide a convincing foundation for ethics. Thus, both popular and academic accounts of morality slip into relativism and subjectivism. These two options render morality itself innocuous. (harmless, without any sense of moral obligation)”<sup>17</sup>

I have found that most people end up with a confused and inconsistent mix of objective and relative ethics. They cannot deny the objective wrongness of the atrocities we’ve mentioned, but they struggle with the idea that morality actually is objective and that God is the necessary foundation.

The God hypothesis succeeds precisely where the non-theistic hypotheses fail. If God exists, and if this God is holy and good and unchanging (much like the Judeo-Christian God), then this type of being adequately supplies the needed foundation for objective moral obligations. God's holy and good nature itself is the objective basis for morality. God's laws proceed necessarily from his perfectly good nature. The good is that which is consistent with God's nature; the bad is that which is inconsistent with God's nature. The widespread human knowledge of the basic moral principles is accounted for by this God infusing them into our psyches along with the basic laws of logic and inference. Human beings are valuable because God created them in love with value, purpose, and the capacity to relate to Him. Thus it is wrong to harm, and good to promote the flourishing and survival of humans.

We have seen that ethical subjectivism and relativism are not consistent with our moral intuitions and judgments, and that we do think there are objective moral obligations that are binding on all people. We have also seen that attempts to provide a foundation for these objective moral obligations apart from God are inadequate. Finally, we have seen that the God hypothesis does adequately supply the necessary foundation.

One of my former professors, the philosopher R.Z. Friedman of the University of Toronto summarizes this analysis well when he writes,

"God must be accepted as one of those conditions without which morality cannot exist. Man knows the death of God spells the death of morality but he chooses not to notice."<sup>18</sup>

Some people believe the idea that God is the basis for moral principles is defeated by what's commonly called the Euthyphro Dilemma - "Either a moral principle is good because God wills it, which would make God arbitrary, or God wills it because it is good, which would imply a standard independent of God." The solution to this alleged dilemma is that God wills a moral principle because it is good, yes, but it is good because it is consistent with God's essentially good nature. Therefore, there is no independent standard. God's will is subject to his own unchangeably good nature. God can only do and will that which is in accordance with his own nature which is goodness itself. Thus, there is no dilemma.

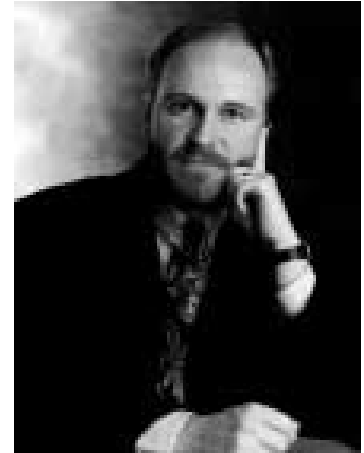
© Campus Crusade for Christ of Canada,  
Inc. Revised October 2003 ANS2IS  
ISBN 1-894605-03-9





## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Norman Geisler, "The Collapse of Modern Atheism" in *Intellectuals Speak Out About God*, edited by Roy Abraham Varghese, (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1984) p.147
- <sup>2</sup>In the Christian hypothesis the commonality of most moral principles is explained by the moral law having been written on our hearts or infused into our psyche by God (Romans 2:15). The few differences between cultures is explained by the human tendency to be independent of God and His laws, and to subsequently rationalize and justify our independent moral choices. God revealed further moral details and applications in the Scriptures.
- <sup>3</sup>C. Stephen Evans, *Philosophy of Religion - Thinking About Faith*. (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985) pp.70-71.
- <sup>4</sup>This illustration was presented by Professor Peter Horban in a philosophy class at Simon Fraser University, in fall of 1993, and related to me by a colleague who was present, Brad Warner.
- <sup>5</sup>Cicero cited in George Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*. (Copp Clark, 1966) pp.35-36.
- <sup>6</sup>Richard Taylor, *Ethics, Faith and Reason* (Prentice Hall, 1985), pp.90, 84.
- <sup>7</sup>Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Wittgenstein's Lectures on Ethics," *Philosophical Review*, 1965, 74:7
- <sup>8</sup>J.L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1982), p.115.
- <sup>9</sup>Cited by Craig in an audio tape of a debate between Dr. W.L. Craig and Dr. Henry Morgentaler at the University of Toronto, January 21, 1993 entitled "The Foundation of Morality: Natural or Supernatural?"
- <sup>10</sup>Cited by Craig in Craig/Morgentaler debate
- <sup>11</sup>Cited by Craig in Craig/Morgentaler debate
- <sup>12</sup>Cited by Craig in Craig/Morgentaler debate
- <sup>13</sup>Some will include the principle of utility at this point. But notice that the "the greatest good for the greatest number" is assuming that it is the "good for humans and for the greatest number of humans", but why humans? What makes them objectively valuable?
- <sup>14</sup>Coherence is not a sufficient condition for objective truth. It is possible to be consistent, yet false. An internally consistent system of ethics would not necessarily be objective, obligatory, and morally binding on those who disagree. The Nazi ethic was internally consistent; it needed a vantage point from outside to judge it.
- <sup>15</sup>The one exception that I can see as logically possible is the Platonic system where the Good exists as an abstract principle as part of the metaphysical furniture of the universe. I know of very few modern moral philosophers though who hold this position. This also means that the moral argument for God's existence that follows from this article is not deductively certain. The premise "If God does not exist, then objective moral obligations do not exist", cannot be affirmed because of the logical possibility of moral obligations being Platonic forms. Just because it is a logical possibility, though, does not mean it is plausible, or probable, or more probable than the alternatives. The argument, therefore, must be an argument to the best explanation, where the theism of a Judeo-Christian type is shown to be a better explanation than Plato's forms.
- <sup>16</sup>It does no good to enhance the concept by calling it enlightened self-interest, since this means little more than being cleverly self-centered.
- <sup>17</sup>D. Stephen Long, in a review in *Theology Today*, VOL. XLIX. NO.4, January 1993, p. 553, 11. *The Shape of the Good: Christian Reflections on the Foundation of Ethics* by C. Stephen Layman.
- <sup>18</sup>R.Z. Friedman, "Does the 'Death of God' Really Matter? - A Critique of Kai Nielsen's Humanistic Ethics," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 1983, 23:321-332.



The author, Michael Horner, has an MA in Philosophy from the University of Toronto.

As an itinerant philosopher with Campus Crusade for Christ, Canada, he has participated in over 60 debates and delivered thousands of lectures on University campuses around the world. Mr. Horner is a member of the Society of Christian Philosophers, the Evangelical Philosophical Society, and is an adjunct instructor in Philosophy at Trinity Western University.

# Knowing God

## 1 God's perspective:

God loves you and created you to know Him personally. He has a wonderful plan for your life.

God created you. Not only that, he loves you so much that he wants you to spend eternity with him. Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Jesus came so that each of us could know and understand God in a personal way. Jesus alone can bring meaning and purpose to life.

**Q** What keeps us from knowing God?...

## 2 Our Condition:

People are sinful and separated from God, so we cannot know Him personally or experience His love and plan.

The fact is, we need Jesus. The Bible says, "...all fall short of God's glorious standard" (Romans 3:23). Though God intended for us to have a relationship with him, we naturally want to do things our own way.

Deep down, our attitude may be one of active rebellion toward God or passive indifference, but it's all evidence of what the Bible calls sin. The Bible tells us that "All of us like sheep have gone astray; each of us has turned to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6).

The result of sin in our lives is death—spiritual separation from God (Romans 6:23). Although we may try to reach God through our own effort, we inevitably fail.

This diagram shows the great gap that exists between us and God. The arrows illustrate that we might try to reach God through our own efforts. We may try to do good things, or earn God's acceptance through a good life or a moral philosophy. But our good efforts are insufficient to cover up our sin.

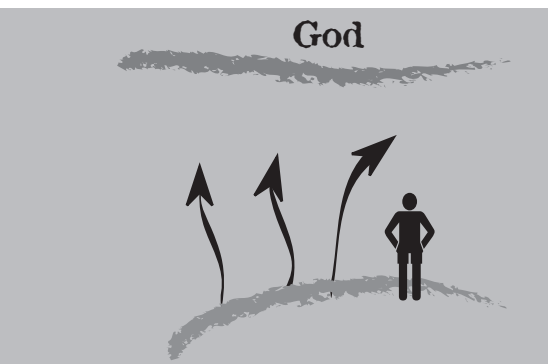
**Q** How can we bridge this gulf?...

## 3 God's Response:

Jesus Christ is God's only provision for our sin. Through Him alone we can know God personally and experience God's love and plan.

Jesus Christ is God's solution to the problem of human imperfection and evil. Because of Jesus' death on the cross, we don't have to be separated from God any longer. Jesus paid the price for our sin and in so doing, bridged the gap between us and God. "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:8).

Instead of trying harder to reach God, we simply need to accept Jesus and his sacrifice as the one way to God. "I am the way, the truth and the life," Jesus said. "No one can come to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). He also said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die like everyone else, will live again. They are given eternal life for believing in me and will never perish" (John 11:25-26).



# and Personally

## 4 Our Response:

We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord; then we can know God personally and experience His love and plan.

But not only did Jesus die for our sin, he rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:3-6). When he did, he proved beyond doubt that he can rightfully promise eternal life—that he is the Son of God and the only means by which we can know God. He said, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Yet just having knowledge about God’s plans and purposes isn’t enough. We need to consciously accept Jesus Christ as the payment for our sin and welcome him into our life.

!It is not enough just to know these three truths....

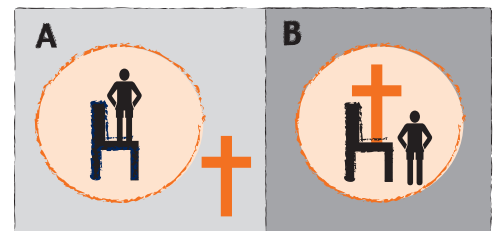
The Bible says, “But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12).

We accept Jesus by faith. The Bible says, “God saved you by his special favour when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it” (Ephesians 2:8,9).

Accepting Jesus means believing that Jesus is the Son of God, who he claimed to be, then inviting him to guide and direct our lives and make us into new people (John 3:1-8).

Jesus said, “I’m standing at the door and I’m knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in” (Revelation 3:20).

How will you respond to God’s invitation? What will you do with the claims of Jesus Christ?



Consider these two circles.

### A- Self-Directed Life

- Self is on the throne
- Jesus is outside the life
- Interests are directed by self, often resulting in frustration

### B- Christ-Directed Life

- Jesus is in the life and on the throne
- Self is yielding to Jesus
- Interests are directed by Jesus, resulting in harmony with God

Q Which circle best represents your life?

Q Which circle would you like to have represent your life?

## Begin a relationship with Jesus...

## If I asked Jesus into my life, how do I know that He is now really there?

You can receive Christ right now. Remember that Jesus says, "I'm standing at the door and I'm knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in" (Revelation 3:20). Would you like to respond to his invitation? Here's how.

The precise words you use to commit yourself to God are not important. He knows the intentions of your heart. If you are unsure of what to pray, this might help you put it into words:

**"Jesus, I want to know you. I want you to come into my life. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sin so that I could be fully accepted by you. Only you can give me the power to change and become the person you created me to be. Thank you for forgiving me and giving me eternal life with God. I give my life to you. Please do with it as you wish. Amen."**

If you sincerely asked Jesus into your life just now, then he has come into your life as he promised. You have begun a personal relationship with God.

What follows is a lifelong journey of change and growth as you get to know God better through Bible reading, prayer and interaction with other Christians...

Only you know if you sincerely asked Jesus to come into your life, to forgive you and take up residence as God in your life. However, assuming that you did make that decision and invited Him into your life, then did God hear you? Yes. I John 5:14 says, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us." Jesus promised that He would enter our lives, if we ask Him.

In Revelation 3:20 Jesus makes this offer, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." Did you open the door of your heart to God? If so, what did He say He would do? Would God mislead you?

In John 6:37, Jesus said, "All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out." And in John 10:27-29 Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."

Jesus died on the cross for our sins, so that we could be in relationship with Him. He's not indifferent to the issue. He went to great lengths to bring us into relationship with Him. Jesus took our sins on Himself and covered us with His righteousness, making us fully forgiven and fully accepted by Him. We don't have to first live good lives, or perform religious rituals, or spend years begging Him. He is the one who made it possible for us to have a relationship with Him. And we come to Him based on what He did for us, rather than what we can do. He paid for our sins, so He now offers to forgive us and come into our lives. I Peter 3:18 says, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."