

"Evidence for God from Morality"

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1. The Moral Argument

GOD IS THE BEST EXPLANATION FOR OBJECTIVE MORAL VALUES & DUTIES

Objective moral values & duties exist.

By “objective” I mean valid and binding whether anyone believes in them or not; that is, true independent of peoples’ opinions, just like $2 + 2 = 4$ is objectively true even if everyone in the world disagreed.

Deep down we all know objective moral values & obligations do exist. Even people who claim to be moral relativists, live as if morality is objective. It’s very easy to *say* there are no objective moral values & obligations, but it’s much more difficult to *live* as if there are none.

The judgments we make when ourselves and others are unjustly treated, reveal what we really believe about morality, regardless of what we say we believe. We believe that the holocaust or raping little girls or torturing toddlers for fun are moral abominations, not just a flouting of social conventions or personal dislikes [or even just actions that don’t maximize my self-interest]. And we think everyone else should agree.

If someone walked into this room and said, “Well you guys might think that torturing toddlers for sport is morally wrong but me and my buddies think it’s great sport,” we would not draw the conclusion that torturing toddlers for sport is not really wrong after all. Rather we would deduce that there is something wrong with those guys. They are not functioning properly! If they were functioning properly they would recognize how morally reprehensible those actions were.

If God does not exist then objective moral values and obligations do not exist.

But if there is no God 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 only different arrangements of space, time, matter and energy?

A purely materialistic universe would be morally indifferent. Humans, like everything else in the universe, would be just accidental arrangements of atoms, and therefore, we could not justifiably declare that humans are objectively valuable. And why think the morality of the human species, above all other species, is objectively binding rather than just our opinion?

Moral judgments would be just relative and subjective - merely expressions of personal tastes. Or, they might be just social conventions, pragmatic suggestions for survival that society has agreed upon so that people can live together without chaos. But in neither case would they be objectively binding moral obligations. Maybe rape is not socially advantageous and over time has become forbidden, but this does nothing to prove that rape is really objectively wrong!

Do not misunderstand me. This is not to say that atheists can't be moral - just that if there is no God there would be no basis for the objective morals we all believe in – atheist & theists alike. The problem here is not the absence of **belief** in God but the absence of **God**.

Atheist philosopher of science, Michael Ruse drives this point home:

“The position of the modern evolutionist is that humans have an awareness of morality because such an awareness is of biological worth.... Considered as a rationally justifiable set of claims about an objective something, ethics is illusory.... Morality is just an aid to survival and reproduction, and any deeper meaning is illusory.” (“Evolutionary Theory and Christian Ethics”, in *The Darwinian Paradigm*, Routledge, 1989, pp. 262-269)

"we must conclude that Darwinian ethics [positively] excludes the objectivist approach"?

(M. Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously: A Naturalistic Approach to Philosophy* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986) and reprinted (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1998); 254.)

This is a serious problem for naturalism/atheism.

Formally the argument looks like this:

1. If God does not exist, objective moral values & obligations do not exist
2. Objective moral values & obligations do exist
3. Therefore, God exists

This is the choice before us - if you are confident that atheism is true, it seems you must give up the reality of objective moral values & obligations, that the holocaust, or raping little girls or torturing toddlers for sport are not really wrong! But if you are confident that the holocaust, or raping little girls or torturing toddlers for sport are objectively wrong, then logically you must give up atheism.

Since, we know that objective moral values & obligations do exist, and since they cannot exist without God, it follows that God exists. God's holy and good nature provides a foundation for the moral values which the atheist just has to accept by faith.

2. Misunderstandings & Objections with Responses

- I. **Are you saying atheists can't be moral?!!!** (this is the main concern it seems for almost every atheist that I've ever debated and they take it so personally! – e.g. – Paul Kurtz in debate with Craig)
 - a. The God & morality question is about the nature of moral values – are they social conventions, expressions of personal taste, beliefs that have evolved because of survival value, or are they objectively true – i.e. valid and binding independent of our opinion? And if moral values are objective in this way then what is their foundation?
 - b. The question is not must we believe in God in order to recognize objective moral values.

- c. The question is not can we formulate a system of ethics without referring to God. If the atheist recognizes the intrinsic value of human beings there is no reason to think that he cannot work out a system of conduct that the believer will largely agree with.
- d. It is not about the necessity of belief in God but the necessity of the existence of God.
- e. *Belief in God* is not necessary for objective moral values *God* is!

II. “How do you know objective moral values and obligations exist? You haven’t proved it. You are just manipulating people’s emotions with these examples, and this conclusion is based on nothing more than feelings, not evidence!”

- a. Let me explain how I am helping people see the truth of premise 2 of the argument.

Most surveys report that between 60% to 85% of people think morality is relative to individual or cultural opinion. However, I think these numbers are soft, and many people are not as ‘morally relativistic’ as they think they are. I find it a very interesting exercise to try and help people see the reality of objective moral values and obligations.

I’ve found that if I bring up examples of obvious moral atrocities, most people recognize the objective moral wrongness of these actions, despite their avowed relativism. People do recognize that the Nazis Holocaust, genocide in Darfur, raping little girls, and torturing toddlers for sport are not just objectively wrong, but are morally reprehensible and that everyone should agree.

For the minority who still resist admitting objective moral truth exists, I just personalize the examples to their lives. “What if the little girl being raped and murdered was your little sister or daughter – has the perpetrator done anything morally wrong?” Very few people can avoid drawing the conclusion that something objectively and horribly wrong as taken place, and not just that it was something they didn’t like, or that our culture frowns upon. The examples do not always have to be so graphic either. Let me tell you a story that makes the point just as well.

A philosophy student wrote a research paper arguing that morality is subjective – that there are no objective moral values. 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 color 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 values 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 values like fairness and justice, and he was expecting them to be applied to his situation right then and there. [1]

This story resonates with students who immediately identify the injustice of the professor’s actions.

Even though most people respond to examples of horrible violations of moral values by recognizing the objective reality of those values, there are still a few who don't buy it. They sense that something is up – some sleight of hand has taken place.

Well, they have a point. What they have correctly perceived is that I have not provided any arguments or evidence for the claim that objective moral values and obligations exist. At the heart of the matter is the fact that they cannot accept the idea that someone could know something to be true without there being some empirical evidence in support of the belief.

And this is why I think some people find it difficult to accept that objective moral values and obligations exist in the absence of proof or evidence. When I ask them if torturing toddlers for sport is morally wrong, I'm not providing empirical evidence. I'm merely trying to help people **directly experience** the moral truth at hand.

Rather than providing arguments or evidence, which I can and do on other occasions, I find it more persuasive for most people to directly experience the moral truth that, for example, torturing toddlers for sport is wrong.

The moral order of values is on similar footing as the natural order of physical objects. Just as we assume the reality of the world of physical objects on the basis of our sense experience, so too we assume the reality of the moral order on the basis of our moral experience.

[Philosopher W.L. Craig comments](#), “Philosophers who reflect on our moral experience see no more reason to distrust that experience than the experience of our five senses. I believe what my five senses tell me, that there is a world of physical objects out there. Similarly, in the absence of some reason to distrust my moral experience, I should accept what it tells me, that some things are objectively good or evil, right or wrong.”

I can and do gain knowledge of some moral truths apart from the use of my five physical senses. This is an example of what philosophers call knowledge by acquaintance.

There is even another faculty as well that we are all quite familiar with – our rational faculty. When you come across an argument in the form of *modus ponens*,

1. $P \rightarrow Q$ [which reads If P then Q]
2. P
3. Therefore, Q

you know Q logically follows from the first two premises.

How do you know this? Not empirically. You experience the truth of the logical inference we call *modus ponens* directly! One requires no proof for *modus ponens*. You either get it or you don't. If you don't get it, typically an example or two will provide the needed clarity for you to have that “ah-ha” experience.

This is an example of your rational sense directly experiencing reality. This time it is a logical reality. Your rational sense is also able to directly experience the reality of basic mathematical truths like $2 + 2 = 4$.

“But isn’t this just a ‘feeling’?” some students retort. And isn’t our alleged direct awareness through our moral sense, that torturing toddlers for sport is morally wrong, also just a ‘feeling’? I don’t think so.

The idea that our experience of our rational and moral faculties is just a ‘feeling’ and therefore easily dismissed is confused. Think about your sense of sight – you have a sensation of a tree in front of you. It would be easy to call this experience of a sensation a ‘feeling’ but that would confuse it with an emotion which it is not. It is an experience of direct awareness.

When you experience the truth of the logical inference *modus ponens*, it would be easy to call this experience a ‘feeling’ but that would confuse it with an emotion which it is not. It is a direct awareness of a logical truth through our rational sense.

Likewise when you are prompted to think about various examples of behavior and are asked if they are morally good or bad, you directly experience the truth of many such examples: like torturing toddlers for sport [morally bad]. It would be easy to call this experience a ‘feeling’ but that would confuse it with an emotion which it is not. It is a direct awareness of a moral truth through our moral sense.

Even many atheist philosophers like Louise Antony do not have strong doubts about our ability to know objective moral truth. In a debate with W.L. Craig on the foundations of morality [she said](#), “Any argument for moral scepticism will be based upon premises which are less obvious than the existence of objective moral values themselves.” She recognizes the strength of our knowledge of moral values through direct awareness. Through direct awareness we are warranted in claiming to know some moral truths.

This does not mean that we can never be wrong about our moral beliefs, but this is also the case with our direct awareness of the physical world. We are mistaken at times about what we think we are seeing. We think we see a bent stick in the water, when in fact the stick is straight - the bent stick is an illusion. But in both categories our beliefs obtained through direct awareness are *prima facie* justified, that is, justified in the absence of any defeaters of those beliefs.

When we claim to know that torturing toddlers for sport is morally wrong because of our direct awareness of the injustice of the behavior, we are justified or warranted in our claim to knowledge, unless or until a defeater of our belief arises.

I want to introduce a philosophical term to describe this experience of direct awareness of reality. The term is intuition. I have avoided the word until now because some people tend to have a pejorative view of the term.

By intuition though, philosophers do not mean an irrational hunch or some popular notion like when one refers to a ‘woman’s intuition’. Rather as J.P. Moreland & W.L Craig put it in their excellent text, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, (p. 422)

“The philosophical use of intuition does not mean a mere hunch or a prereflective expression of, say, a moral attitude. ... a common usage defines an intuition as an immediate, direct awareness or acquaintance with something.

An intuition is a mode of awareness—sensory, intellectual or otherwise—in which something seems or appears to be directly present to one's consciousness. For example, one can have a sensory intuition of a table or an intellectual intuition of a conceptual truth, for instance, that $2 + 2 = 4$.

Intuitions are not infallible, but they are prima facie justified. That is, if one carefully reflects on something, and a certain viewpoint intuitively seems to be true, then one is justified in believing that viewpoint in the absence of overriding counterarguments (which will ultimately rely on alternative intuitions). Furthermore, an appeal to intuitions does not rule out the use of additional arguments that add further support to that appeal. ... Similarly, an appeal to intuitions in ethics is not a claim to infallibility or a substitute for further arguments.

All moral reasoning begins with intuitions – reflective, considered intuitions.

I am not trying to ‘show’ or persuade people through evidence and argument. Rather I am employing a strategy to help people experience a direct awareness of the truth so that they will ‘know’ that torturing toddlers for sport is morally wrong and that everyone should agree.

But what about those who still disagree? I know you are out there. I can hear you! Not too long ago, I had a few particularly persistent questioners following a couple of lectures I gave on university campuses on arguments for the existence of God. Even though I gave three arguments, and two of them included some very interesting features about the early universe, almost all the questions were about the moral argument. In particular they questioned how I know that objective moral values and obligations exist.

After prompting them to think about atrocities like the Holocaust, and Apartheid, and horrible actions like raping little girls or torturing toddlers for sport, these students still were not persuaded that objective moral values and obligations existed.

I decided to use an illustration. I said, “What if a bunch of guys walked into our lecture hall and said, ‘You people might think torturing toddlers for sport is morally wrong but me and my buddies think it is great fun!’ How should we respond to that? Should we throw our hands up and conclude, ‘Oh, no, I guess morality is relative to subjective opinions after all?’

No, of course not. We should think that there is something wrong with those guys! They are not functioning properly. In fact what do we call people who do not think torturing toddlers for sport is morally wrong?” After a moment of silence the answer came back from a few students – “A psychopath!” “Right”, I said. “Anyone who claims torturing children for sport is not objectively wrong is not functioning properly morally. We rightly call someone like that a psychopath.”

That seemed to make a difference. The remaining few doubters seemed to realize that their choice was to accept that torturing toddlers for sport was an example of an objective moral value and obligation that was being violated, or to put themselves in the same moral category as psychopaths.

I don't know for sure if they were fully persuaded, but I do know that their questions stopped. By the looks on their faces, I suspect that maybe their moral intuitions had finally broken through to the surface and they were beginning to recognize that they did believe in some objective moral values and obligations after all - especially that torturing toddlers for sport was morally wrong.

III. Humanism – Whatever promotes human flourishing & survival is good and whatever weakens it is bad. If we want to promote human flourishing, then we ought to live co-operatively OR we ought to follow the Golden Rule. Some people have often said the Golden Rule is the objective foundation for morality.

- a. The naturalistic humanist has no access to the critical assumption - which is that human beings are objectively valuable.
- b. Not only is this confusing knowing objective moral values with finding the foundation for those moral values, there is no more obligation to these rules than “if you want this slime mold to flourish, then you should keep the temperature and humidity moderate.” [Craig]

Humans are merely more complex slime that have evolved certain complex features by a completely accidental, impersonal process (unless God was behind it). Therefore, they/we are no more valuable than slime.

Objection: There are different philosophical understandings of what "objective" means.

Answer: Most people are thinking of being able to reason objectively to the right thing to do, given certain basic beliefs like it is wrong to harm human beings, but again they do not seem to understand that they do not have access to that assumption if there is no God and human beings are just accidental arrangements of atoms and that the notion of objective that we are looking for contain the idea of 'foundation.'

IV. Naturalistic Evolution can explain our moral values, obligations and moral sense.

- a. But naturalism holds that only things that can be described by science really exist. Since you can't find moral values in a test tube, they do not really exist - they are merely human illusions.
- b. If the naturalist is willing to go beyond the boundaries of science, the best that moral values can be, if there is no God, are just the by-product of biological evolution and social conditioning that provide survival value for the species.

Moreover, if there is no God, and 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. Once we have figured out that our moral sense is just a byproduct of evolution and social conditioning, why think it imposes obligations on us?

- c. On the naturalist's view humans are just animals and animals have no moral obligations. As W.L. Craig has pointed out, Lions don't *murder* zebras. Male great white sharks don't *rape* the female when they forcibly copulate with them. There is no moral dimension to these actions... So if God does not exist why think that we have moral obligations to do anything? Who or what imposes these moral duties on us? Where do they come from? Certain actions like rape may not be biologically and socially advantageous and so over time have become taboo, but that does nothing to show that rape is really *wrong*.
- d. Only if God does not exist is a sociobiological account true and thus our moral beliefs illusory. But that is no reason to think the sociobiological account *is* true, and thus no reason to deny what our moral experience tells us.¹

Craig: If God does not exist, then moral values are mere byproducts of biological and social evolution. But if God exists, then they're not. For the truth of a belief is independent of how you came to hold that belief. You may have acquired your moral beliefs through a fortune cookie or by reading tea leaves, and they could still be true. In particular, if God exists, then objective moral values and duties exist, regardless of how we come to learn about them. The socio-biological account at best proves that our perception of moral values and duties has evolved. But if moral values are gradually discovered, not invented, then our gradual and fallible perception of those values no more undermines their objective reality than our gradual, fallible perception of the physical world undermines its objective reality.

- e. Moreover, naturalistic evolution is self-defeating, since, if it is true, then we should be skeptical of all our beliefs [i.e. we shouldn't believe anything] including naturalistic evolution. After all, all our beliefs would be the result of evolution and social conditioning.²

V. **Atheistic Moral Platonism can provide a foundation for objective moral values without God.**

- a. Moral values make more sense as properties of persons. It is difficult to make any sense of what it means for say that abstract objects like justice just exist.³ The Good would not be good - abstract objects can't be good or act good or lovingly or kindly – because they are not personal.

¹ W.L. Craig, *On Guard* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010); 143,4

² *Ibid*; 144

³ *Ibid*; 137

It is more plausible to think that moral values are embodied in persons, and God is the ultimate person. And persons are valuable because God is a person.

- b. No basis for moral duties – even if moral values like, justice, loyalty, & mercy could just “exist” in some sense, why would you have a duty to be, say, merciful? Who or what puts that obligation on you? Philosophers agree - if abstract objects do exist, they cannot cause anything! They do not stand in causal relations. Furthermore, since moral vices, on the Platonic view also just exist, why wouldn't we also be obligated to hate? No grounds for moral obligation.⁴
- c. Utterly incredible coincidence that the blind evolutionary process should spit forth precisely the sort of creatures who correspond to the abstractly existing realm of moral values. Much more plausible that the laws of nature and the moral law are both under the authority of God, than to think that these two independent realms just happened to mesh.⁵

VI. The Euthyphro Dilemma shows that God cannot be the foundation for morality.⁶

- Moral values are either independent of God (if he wills them because they are good) or they are arbitrary (if they are good just because God wills them).
 - a. There is a third option: God wills them because *he* is good. God's own nature is the standard of goodness, and his commandments to us are expressions of his essentially good nature. The morally good/bad is determined by God's nature, and the morally right/wrong is determined by his will. God wills something because he is good, and something is right because God wills it.

When the atheist demands, “If God were to command child abuse, would we be obligated to abuse our children?” he's asking a question like “If there were a square circle, would its area be the square of one of its sides?” There is no answer because what it supposes is logically impossible.

- Why think that God's nature is the ultimate stopping point rather than some other thing?
 - a. Because God is the greatest conceivable being by definition. Moreover, it is greater to be the paradigm of goodness than to conform to it. Thus God is a being worthy of worship and adoration. There is nothing higher than God. Any finite stopping point that an atheist could offer seems arbitrary and implausible compared to God. God, as the greatest conceivable being is the only plausible ultimate stopping point.

Ask the atheist what his ultimate stopping point is for the Good. If you ask him “is it good because it creates the good or because it recognizes the good?”, he would say, “it just is the good, the standard, the ultimate and legitimate stopping point. Well, that is

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid; 137, 138

⁶ Much of the response to this question is compiled from various articles by W.L. Craig available on ReasonableFaith.org.
<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/site/PageServer>

what the theist is saying about God's nature and that is more plausible than any naturalist stopping point.

- But if God is Good, then to claim God is good is to say nothing more than God is God!
 - a. It makes no sense to ask of one's ultimate stopping point, "Is it good because it creates or recognizes the good?" Neither one – it just is the good, the standard, the definition of good and evil.
God is good because his nature is good – the paradigm of goodness, the measuring stick by which all else is compared. His nature defines the good.
- But isn't the whole process circular – in order to know God is good, one must know what good is, but in order to know what good is, God must exist?
 - a. The objection confuses the order of knowing (Epistemology) with the order of being (Ontology). In the order of knowing, the concept of goodness chronologically precedes the concept of God. In the order of being, the existence of God logically precedes the existence of goodness. Only if one confuses the two categories can one get circularity. We recognize that God's being and actions are consistent with our concept of good, which is ultimately rooted in our moral intuitions [built into us by God.] Just like our understanding of basic logical axioms and inferences though, our conscious awareness of these basic moral truths only come about as we develop intellectually and socially.

We then can call God good without arguing in a circle.

VII. Doesn't appealing to God undercut appealing to the reasons why something is morally good/right or bad/wrong? And it seems that real objective morals require doing things for good reasons, not just because someone commands it – even God, i.e. obeying God because he has good reasons for what he commands.

- a. Certainly there can still be reasons for what God commands. For example, He forbids raping little children because it would be unjust and injurious to them. But then the deeper question is, "Why is it wrong to cause injury to innocent persons? What determines what is just or unjust?" Eventually such questions must find a stopping point in the character of God. Kindness is good because that's the way God is; cruelty is evil because it is inconsistent with God's nature. Therefore He issues commands that forbid behavior which is cruel and prescribe behavior which is kind.⁷

VIII. Is The Fact Of Our Moral Judgments Itself A Grounding Of Them?

- a. No – Just because we know objective moral obligations exist, it does not logically follow that we have a rational justification or foundation for them.

The fact of our moral judgments does not itself ground them.

⁷ Craig, W.L. "The Euthyphro Dilemma Once More." Reasonable Faith, Nov 7, 2011.

<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=6087>

That everyone shares the belief only means no one is going to ask us to justify it, not that it is justified.

If we genuinely know that some actions, such as infanticide, are wrong, then that knowledge must have an ultimate source or cause

IX. The Christian view teaches “Doing the right thing only for the reward.”

- a. Not the case. The morally valuable is to be desired for its own sake! And God’s nature is the paradigm of moral virtue. The Christian view may actually correctly combine the motivations of reward and desiring the Good for its own sake – after all the reward on the Christian view is a personal relationship with God forever and since God’s nature is the paradigm of Good, then the reward (God Himself), is desired for his own sake. Isn’t the book of Job all about that?! That is God’s answer to Satan.

Conclusion

- My son’s experience at a secular university – in an upper level class on metaethics, the conclusion after a semester of looking for a naturalist foundation for objective ethics was that there is no consensus at all that any naturalist hypothesis can successfully provide a ground or foundation for objective morality.
- God is the best explanation for the objective moral values and duties that, when we are honest, we all know exist. His holy and good nature can provide a foundation for objective morality. Theism succeeds precisely where atheism/naturalism fails in this regard.
- This is a great argument! It touches people where they are at – where they feel, act, think, believe! Learn it! Treasure it! But most of all use it! – when God provides opportunities.