

# 119

## MINISTRIES

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### **Answering Atheists: Does God Exist? – The Moral Argument**

Is there a right and wrong—a good and evil? Do these concepts really exist?

For instance, are actions such as rape and murder really morally wrong? It seems like a ridiculous question, doesn't it? But if God doesn't exist, you might be surprised to learn that right and wrong or good and evil *can't* actually exist—not in any meaningful way, at least.

Without God, there is no “objective” morality, which is to say, there are no moral facts and obligations that are true independent of human opinion. Everything becomes socio-culturally relative. All we have is one individual's or group's beliefs and preferences, which are no more valid or binding than any other individual's or group's beliefs and preferences.

For instance, you personally might affirm a certain action to be morally wrong, but if God doesn't exist, your subjective belief doesn't apply to anyone else. In fact, what's “wrong” to you might be “good” to someone else. Your moral beliefs ultimately boil down to a matter of personal taste, like preferring burgers to pizza.

This applies also to society. While our modern society does rightly affirm certain moral values, like human equality, if God doesn't exist, then we can't meaningfully condemn other societies—and even our own society in the past—for things like slavery, segregation, and racism. After all, what makes our current society right and others wrong? Since atheism gives us no basis for affirming objective moral values and duties, there is nothing that grounds our moral judgments.

Think about it this way. If atheism is true, on what basis do human beings have any objective moral value at all? We're merely the accidental byproduct of chance. We're no different than any other living organism on this speck of dirt we call earth. We've all evolved from primordial goo, just the same as mosquitoes and rats.

If atheism is true, why should we treat *human beings* as special? Where do we get these delusions that we have these moral obligations toward one another—that people have intrinsic dignity and are worthy

of respect? On the atheistic view, humans are just animals. As biologist and atheist, Richard Dawkins, says:

[W]e, and all other animals, are machines created by our genes.

-Richard Dawkins, "The Selfish Gene," p. 2

Now, along with theists, atheists generally *do* treat human life as meaningful, which we will talk about a little later. But the point here is that atheism as a worldview offers us no reason to affirm humans as being worthy of dignity and respect. If there is no God, Richard Dawkins is right that humans are simply animals. And animals don't have any moral duties to fulfill.

For instance, we don't sentence a hyena to prison for "murder" when it kills a wildebeest. We don't condemn a group of male dolphins as abusive "gang rapists" when they isolate a female dolphin, slap her with their tails, and forcibly copulate with her for weeks.

Why not? Because we understand that animals have not been given any moral duties or prohibitions. Therefore, they are not morally responsible toward each other. Why should we think it's different for human behavior—especially since we're just highly evolved animals? If God does not exist, there is no objective morality, only the subjective illusion of morality, which is relative.

"That's pretty depressing." You might say. And you would be right. But it gets worse. If atheism is true, our collective fate as humans—along with all other life in our universe—is extinction anyway. So who cares about doing right or wrong when it *literally* doesn't matter in the grand scheme of things?

Dr. William Lane Craig sums it up quite well:

Scientists tell us that the universe is expanding, and everything in it is growing farther and farther apart. As it does so, it grows colder and colder, and its energy is used up. Eventually all the stars will burn out and all matter will collapse into dead stars and black holes. There will be no light at all; there will be no heat; there will be no life; only the corpses of dead stars and galaxies, ever expanding into the endless darkness and the cold recesses of space—a universe in ruins. So not only is the life of each individual person doomed; the entire human race is doomed. There is no escape. There is no hope.

-Dr. William Lane Craig, *The Absurdity of Life without God*, [www.reasonablefaith.org](http://www.reasonablefaith.org)

Think about that for a moment. Eventually all life in our universe will be extinct. There will be nobody to remember the good you've done in your life. All of your achievements will amount to nothing, and nothing you did to show love or compassion to anyone else ultimately matters.

The care you took in raising your children, the causes you championed for social justice—*everything* you cared about and worked for will have exactly zero lasting impact in the grand scheme of things. If atheism is true, life is utterly without meaning and purpose.

On this point, atheists, such as Richard Dawkins, generally agree. Here is what Dawkins writes in his book, *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life*:

In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt,

other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.

*-Richard Dawkins, "River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life" (New York: Basic Books, 1996), p. 133*

The logical conclusion of existence without God is that we can't condemn as objectively evil things like rape, murder, oppression, and so forth. We can personally disagree with such behavior. At most, it might not be acceptable to be a rapist or a murderer within our society of apelike animals. But we can't really call such behavior wrong, not in any meaningful way.

Moreover, we can't praise as objectively good love, compassion, equality, and self-sacrifice. Why? Because humans have no objective moral worth. If God does not exist, Richard Dawkins is exactly right: there is no good and evil. There is no ultimate purpose. There is only our insignificant existence that lasts for a relatively short time before we're all dead and forgotten.

Of course, nobody actually lives this way. All of us—believers and unbelievers alike—live as though our lives *do* have meaning. We live as though there really is a moral standard. We live as though at least *some* things are really morally wrong. For instance, there is not a case where torturing a child for fun could be moral for one person but immoral for another. It's always wrong, objectively.

In fact, atheists—the ones critical of religion, at least—are often the most vocal proponents of morality and justice, particularly when they condemn the perceived evils of religion!

The difference between Christians and atheists is that Christians actually have a logical basis for affirming moral values and duties. Atheists do not. We'll talk more about that in a minute.

But first, to be clear, we are not saying that atheists cannot be good people and treat others with kindness and dignity. There are many loving, kind, and compassionate atheists in the world. We also aren't saying that believers cannot be evil. There have been many professing Christians throughout history—and even today—who have done great evil.

All we're saying is that when atheists appeal to good and evil, they are appealing to God whether or not they know or care to admit it. Why? Because God is the only basis upon which we can even have objective morality. That is to say, objective moral values and duties exist only because God exists.

So here is how we can frame this argument for God's existence on the basis of objective morality.

1. If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.
2. Objective moral values and duties *do* exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.

The first premise of this argument is pretty uncontroversial and affirmed by many theist and atheist philosophers alike. We've already discussed some of the reasons that objective morality cannot be possible if there is no God.

Again, on the atheistic view, humans have no objective moral worth to speak of. We're just animals. What we call "morality," therefore, is merely an evolutionary adaptation that developed within us as an

aid to survival. Moreover, all life in our universe as we know it will ultimately end in nothingness anyway, so really nothing matters in the grand scheme of things—least of all the subjective notions of “right” and “wrong” that have emerged among us highly evolved apes.

But what about the second premise. Do objective moral values and duties actually exist?

One way we might establish the objective truth of morality is by our moral experience. As we’ve already mentioned, humans live as though our lives really do have meaning and as though right and wrong, good and evil, actually do exist. Doubting our moral experience makes as much sense as doubting our experience of the natural world around us. As Dr. Craig explains:

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, namely, that there is a world of physical objects out there. My senses are not infallible, but that doesn’t lead me to think that there is no external world around me. Similarly, in the absence of some reason to distrust my moral experience, I should accept what it tells me, namely, that some things are objectively good or evil, right or wrong.

*-William Lane Craig, On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision*

We know that the external world around us exists objectively, because our sensory experience convinces us that it does. If someone denies this reality, pick up a baseball bat and say to them, “If I hit you in the face with this bat, will you still deny its existence?”

Similarly, to the moral skeptic you can ask, “Don’t you see that randomly assaulting people with baseball bats is morally wrong? If someone hit your mother in the face with a bat, would you still deny the immorality of physical assault?”

This sense we have of right and wrong is a properly basic belief that has been naturally formed in the experiential context of seeing, hearing, and feeling things—just like the physical world we observe. These beliefs are appropriately grounded in experience. To dismiss our belief in moral values and duties as merely an appeal to emotions would be similar to saying that my beliefs that the Statue of Liberty exists, or that I have a nose, or that yesterday happened, are simply based on emotions.

We all share a moral experience, and at least some of our moral beliefs are clearly warranted. Now, someone might say, “But clearly there are people in the world who see things like murder and rape to be perfectly fine! What makes our moral experience right and theirs wrong?”

People who believe that murder and rape are perfectly fine are called psychopaths. That is to say, due to our moral experience, we are rational in seeing that such people have a deficiency in their perception of morality. In the same way that a blind person being unable to see physical objects does nothing to disprove the objective reality of those objects, a murderous psychopath’s moral impairment does nothing to prove that our moral experience isn’t trustworthy.

Now, 95% of people are easily convinced that moral values and duties are objectively real after thinking about it. However, some hardline atheists sometimes stubbornly insist that things like rape, racism, and torturing children are just morally neutral. But as long as they aren’t psychopaths, they are simply being insincere. They don’t *really* believe that. This stubborn insistence usually comes from a desire to avoid the argument’s conclusion that God exists, which logically follows from the truth of objective morality

that we all innately affirm.

Now, some might say that we can't really trust our moral experience due to it simply being ingrained into us by evolution. There is a certain sense of primitive morality innate in some intelligent mammals, such as a sense of kinship protection, for example.

But even if we grant the sociobiological account of the origins of morality, that does nothing to undermine the truth of our moral beliefs. As Dr. Craig explains:

This response [to the Moral Argument] is almost a textbook example of the genetic fallacy. The genetic fallacy is trying to invalidate a point of view by showing how that point of view came to be held. Even if evolution and social conditioning has programmed into us a certain set of moral beliefs, that does nothing to show that those beliefs are false. Indeed, if moral values are gradually discovered rather than gradually invented, then our gradual and fallible apprehension of the moral realm no more undermines the objectivity of that realm than our gradual, fallible comprehension of the physical world undermines the objectivity of the physical realm. In the absence of some defeater, it seems to me that we're perfectly within our rights in believing that there is an objective realm of moral values and duties, just as we're within our rights in believing there is a world of physical objects around us.

-William Lane Craig, "The Ben Shapiro Sunday Special," Ep. 50

In other words, even if morality were pre-programmed into us biologically, it wouldn't invalidate the truth of objective morality.

Some might argue that we are unjustified in holding our moral beliefs because they were shaped by evolution, which would produce our moral beliefs in the aim of survival, not truth. However, there are two problems with this argument.

First, it's self-defeating. If naturalism is true, *all* our beliefs are the result of evolution. Not just our moral beliefs. But this would entail that we are unjustified in believing *that we are unjustified in believing in morality* since that belief would also be the result of evolution!

Second, the argument assumes atheism. If God does not exist, then our moral values are illusory, as the first premise of the moral argument affirms. But there is no reason to assume atheism is true. If God exists, it's perfectly reasonable to think that He would instill such moral beliefs in us. In fact, that's what Scripture teaches:

### **Romans 2:14-15**

For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, **by nature** do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while **their conscience** also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.

As Dr. Craig says:

Apart from the assumption of atheism, we have no reason to deny what our moral experience tells us.

*-William Lane Craig, On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision*

Given our moral experience, we are justified in affirming the second premise of the moral argument: objective moral values and duties do exist. But objective morality, by definition, transcends the individual. Moreover, like logic or mathematics, morality doesn't exist in the physical realm; therefore it transcends our physical world. Thus, the fact that morality exists entails the existence of a transcendent moral law—otherwise how would good and evil be identified? Further, a moral law entails a moral lawgiver.

Now you might ask why a moral law would entail a moral lawgiver. Keep in mind that the mere existence of a transcendent moral law already pushes us beyond the boundaries of materialism. As John Njoroge explains:

In addition to material particles and energy, we now have an entirely different realm of reality—a reality that consists of abstract entities that exist necessarily and to which human beings are subject. That is no small shift. We now have one foot in the unseen world, where God lives. Exit materialism, to which much of the modern atheistic movement is intricately wedded.

*-John Njoroge, "Must the Moral Law Have a Moral Lawgiver?" [www.rzim.org](http://www.rzim.org)*

So when we affirm the existence of morality, as we all innately do as humans, we need to explain *why* it exists. Njoroge continues:

If there is a moral law, there must be a moral lawgiver. But we can strengthen the argument even further by showing that morality, and specifically moral obligation, is both agent-relative (it can only arise in the case of persons) and objective (it transcends human will). If moral obligation is grounded in a person (or persons) and it is not dependent on human beings, then it must be grounded in a supernatural Person, i.e., God.

*-John Njoroge, "Must the Moral Law Have a Moral Lawgiver?" [www.rzim.org](http://www.rzim.org)*

In other words, since morality by its nature contains an obligatory character—moral duties—it presupposes the existence of a moral lawgiver—a transcendent Personal Being with the authority to issue commands.

Thus, the existence of objective moral values and duties leads to the existence of a morally perfect God whose commandments order right human behavior.

*We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.*

*Remember, continue to test everything.*

*Shalom!*

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