



THE MORAL ARGUMENT FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE

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THE MORAL ARGUMENT
THE GOD-MORALITY CONNECTION
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The God-Morality Connection

- ▶ Psalm 11:3: “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?”
- ▶ Western culture is increasingly losing touch with the foundations of ethics—namely, a good personal God.
- ▶ Philosopher John Rist: there is “widely admitted to be a crisis in contemporary Western debate about ethical foundations.”

- John Rist, *Real Ethics*

TWO PRELIMINARIES

- ▶ #1. *VALUES (GOOD) AND DUTIES (RIGHT)*.
- ▶ #2. *OBJECTIVE (“INDEPENDENT OF BELIEF”)/SUBJECTIVE (“DEPENDENT ON BELIEF”)*.

#1: VALUE (THE GOOD) VS DUTY (THE RIGHT)

- ▶ There is a distinction between the good and the right.
 - ▶ The **good** (involving beauty, value, rationality) is a broader category than the right (moral obligations/duties, permission).
 - ▶ God is good, but he doesn't have moral duties (the **right**); he simply acts, and what he does is good.
 - ▶ Heroic acts (e.g., donating a kidney to a stranger) is good, but not a duty.
- ❖ Good ≠ Right

#2: OBJECTIVE VS. SUBJECTIVE

OBJECTIVE: “INDEPENDENT OF BELIEF OR FEELINGS” (we have duties and humans have dignity, even if certain persons don’t believe it).

SUBJECTIVE: “DEPENDENT ON BELIEF OR FEELINGS” (e.g., If morality is nothing more than feeling one has a duty, then morality is subjective).

Let's unpack the moral argument, which looks like this:

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

LET'S UNPACK THE MORAL ARGUMENT:

- ▶ 1. IF GOD DOESN'T EXIST, OBJECTIVE MORAL VALUES AND DUTIES LIKELY DO NOT EXIST.
- ▶ NOTE: THE GOAL HERE IS TO SHOW THAT A STRONG GOD-MORALITY CONNECTION EXISTS IN MANY RESPECTS.

a. BEING IS MORE BASIC THAN KNOWING.

- ▶ Atheist: “I can know objective moral truths even if I don’t believe in God.”
- ▶ Or: “*Atheists can be just as moral as believers.*”
- ▶ All humans have been made in God’s image and can get a lot right morally if they don’t suppress their conscience.

b. INCOMPLETENESS OF SECULARIST ETHICS:

- ▶ Secular (objective) ethical systems (Aristotle, Kant, social contract theories) may affirm many truths theists affirm (moral obligations, virtue/character). They are still incomplete because they cannot offer any basis for human dignity or duties without God (KNOWING VS. BEING).


c. FROM VALUELESSNESS VALUELESSNESS COMES:

Intrinsically-valuable, thinking persons don't come from impersonal, non-conscious, unguided, valueless processes over time. A personal, self-aware, purposeful, good God provides the needed context.

d. THE IS-ought PROBLEM (we can't jump from the way things are in nature to the way things ought to be)

If nature is all there is, moral impulses or feelings are no more true than a vomit or a yawn. Feeling that I have a duty is no different than feeling hungry or thirsty. These are all functions of biological evolution and have no being beyond this.

- ▶ C.S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 37.




e. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN PERSONHOOD AND VALUE: Without God (a personal Being), no persons—and thus no moral values—would exist at all: no persons, no moral values.

The Image of God

- ▶ **Spirituality** (our capacity to relate to God);
- ▶ **Emotion** (our ability to feel deeply);
- ▶ **Rationality** (our capacity to think deeply);
- ▶ **Creativity** (our ability to engage in art, literature, and other expressions of imagination);
- ▶ **Volition** (our capacity to make responsible choices that are up to us and that make a difference);
- ▶ **Morality** (our ability to carry out our moral duties and to make moral judgments).

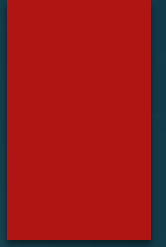
f. GOD'S EXISTENCE GUARANTEES COSMIC JUSTICE.

Naturalism can't guarantee this.
People will just get away with
murder and other evils. Something
is not right with that picture.

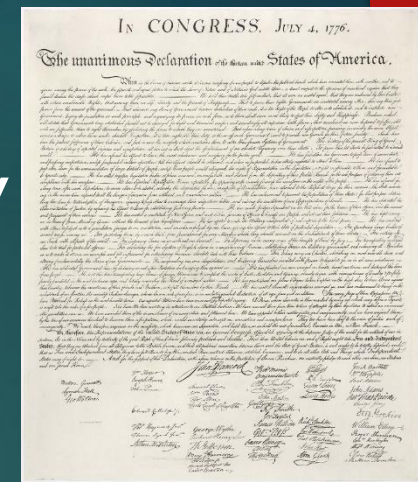


g. ATHEISTS MAKE THIS GOD-MORALITY CONNECTION: Leading atheists (Sartre, Nietzsche, etc.) recognize the God-objective morality connection. A God-less world means no human dignity, moral duties, etc.

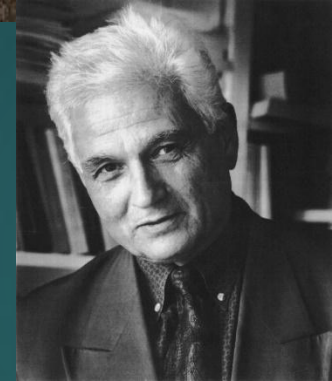
**h. THERE IS A HISTORICAL
CONNECTION BETWEEN GOD AND
HUMAN RIGHTS:**



- ▶ Declaration of Independence (1776): “...all men are created equal [and] are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.” This document presents God as the basis or foundation for human dignity and worth.
- ▶ France’s Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789) affirms these rights “in the presence and under the auspices” of “the Supreme Being.”
- ▶ The United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948): Drafted by Christians and Jews: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”



Non-theists and theists alike recognized the connection between God and rights.



- ▶ Atheist intellectuals such as philosopher Jürgen Habermas and postmodern intellectual Jacques Derrida have acknowledged this God-rights connection.
- ▶ Human rights scholar Max Stackhouse: “intellectual honesty demands recognition of the fact that what passes as ‘secular,’ ‘Western’ principles of basic human rights developed nowhere else than out of key strands of the biblically-rooted religion.”

- Max Stackhouse, “A Christian Perspective on Human Rights,” *Society*



- ▶ The **bioethics** movement in the early 1960s was inspired by Christians concerned for the sanctity of human life.
- ▶ Daniel Callahan (closely associated with the emergence of the modern bioethics movement):
“When I first became interested in bioethics in the mid-1960s, the only resources were theological or those drawn from within the traditions of medicine, themselves heavily shaped by religion.”

- Daniel Callahan, “Religion and the Secularization of Bioethics,” *Hastings Center Report*




Callahan

EXCURSUS: PLATO'S EUTHYPHRO

"DILEMMA"

- ▶ “Is what is holy holy because the gods approve it [God’s commands are arbitrary], or do they approve it because it is holy [there’s an autonomous moral standard external to God]?” (10a).
- ▶ *No, God’s good character/nature (his attribute of goodness) is the basis for objective morality. Humans are moral creatures made in God’s image, which enables us to recognize right and wrong.*
- ▶ Unlike humans, God has no moral duties. He simply acts and it is good.

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- ▶ 1. Plato's understanding of "the gods" is not a matter of the greatest conceivable being.
 - ▶ 2. This "dilemma" isn't a dilemma. It collapses the good and the right. Duties/commands = goodness.
 - ▶ 3. Euthyphro gives no basis for affirming intrinsic human dignity.
 - ▶ 4. God's intrinsic goodness is sufficient to ground moral values (just like the meter bar in Paris sets the standard for all other meters).

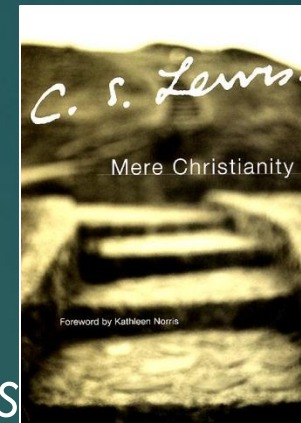
2. OBJECTIVE MORAL VALUES (AND DUTIES) EXIST.

- ▶ Here, the point is to show that moral values are inescapable.

INESCAPABILITY OF ETHICS

- ▶ Objective moral values do exist and are inescapable and properly basic (cp. Amos 1-2).
- ▶ C.S. Lewis: “human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid of it.”

- C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*



a. WE HAVE BASIC, UNDENIABLE MORAL INTUITIONS.

- ▶ We have no good reason to deny them. They are properly basic, and to deny them is to deny what makes us human.
- ▶ Don't believe people who say murder or torturing babies for fun isn't really wrong. They are bluffing, are self-deceived, or need help.

b. BELIEF IN GENUINE RIGHTS UNDERMINES RELATIVISM.

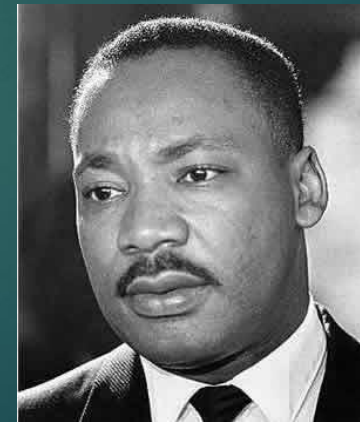
- ▶ **Rights and relativism contradict each other. We can ask the relativist: What's wrong with oppression, intolerance, racism?**
- ▶ **Why do relativists get upset with people who think there are moral truths for all people?**

c. FOLLOW THE PRINCIPLE OF CREDULITY REGARDING OUR BASIC MORAL INTUITIONS.

- ▶ We should treat general moral intuitions regarding, say, torturing for fun or raping as innocent until proven guilty (just like we do our sense experience).

d. OBJECTIVE MORALITY IS REINFORCED BY THE REFORMER'S DILEMMA:

- ▶ Moral principles are discovered, not invented; this makes sense of moral reforms like abolishing slavery or affirming civil rights.
- ▶ Morality isn't just what a culture or its laws state. Otherwise, Jews resisting the Nazis would have been "wrong."
- ▶ Also, we know that blacks had value before the Civil Rights Act of 1964. New laws didn't give them value!



3. Therefore, God (most likely) exists.

- ▶ *(1) If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties (likely) do not exist.*
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APPENDIX 1: Biological evolution does not undermine objective morality.

The problem is not evolution but unguided evolution. If evolution is true, why couldn't God guide the evolutionary process to produce beings morally capable of understanding moral obligations and pursuing goodness, which are rooted in the character of God.

Evolutionary development dovetails with the reality of the moral realm.

Appendix 2: Atheistic Ethical Non-naturalism?

Erik Wielenberg, Russ Schafer-Landau, G.E. Moore: Morality cannot be reduced to the natural. Moral facts are non-natural and transcendent, but they are not rooted in God. They simply exist as brute facts.

Moral FACTS are eternal, necessary, transcendent Platonic realm.


Moral VALUE emerges through the evolutionary process. This emergence of human value with moral awareness and duties somehow corresponds to the preexisting moral facts.

RESPONSE TO ATHEISTIC ETHICAL NONNATURALISM:

#1: To say that moral values emerged from the physical is just an assertion. How does the moral or the mental emerge from physical/chemical processes?

#2: We have a cosmic coincidence of eternal moral facts that seem to anticipate the emergence of moral value (i.e., morally valuable human beings). There is no such coincidence if there is a supremely valuable God who makes valuable humans in his image.

#3: Why think that human beings should have free will/moral responsibility if they have been produced by deterministic physical forces? Such personal responsibility is crucial to living a moral life.



#4: Necessity vs. Contingency: God is the kind of being whose necessary existence is bound up with his nature. Nothing about the universe requires its existence, let alone finite human beings.

#5: Personal vs. Impersonal Universe: Moral facts, which are connected to personhood, are more at home in a personal theistic world than an impersonal non-theistic one.