

Sermon 10: The Moral Argument for God

OUTLINE

Nature
Nurture

INTRODUCTION

One of the most popular arguments against God is the problem of evil. We will be dealing with that later in the series. Today however we want to talk about an argument for God called the problem of good. The existence of morals and moral obligations points to a moral God who created us with this sense of obligation. Romans 2:14-16 gives us a record of this sense, '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 on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.'¹ Paul is in a discussion with the Jews about their sinfulness. He argues that if those who do not have the Ten Commandments have the law written on their hearts by which they will be judged, how much more the Jews who have the Law. These verses clearly tell us that we have a law written on our hearts, that is the Law of God that is written there, that we reveal we know this law by the good we do and approve, and our consciences judge us by the law we know to be true. This reality has become very important in the secular evolutionary atmosphere that we live in in the 21st century. In our day and age there are two basic answers to the question where does our moral sense come from? There is the answer that evolution gives us, and there is the answer that we gain it from culture. In other words, when answering the question of morals it is often a classic nature or nurture discussion to try and answer it without God. It is our contention that these worldviews are unable to give a satisfying account of our sense of moral obligation, and that God is the best explanation of it.

For you philosophers out there the argument looks something like this:

1. Objective moral obligation exists
2. The best explanation of objective morals objective is God and not any modern accounts.
3. Therefore God exists.

Now we have already argued that all arguments are rationally avoidable, and I need to qualify that this argument along with all the others is not an invincible proof. Technically all truths can be formally doubted if you make wrong assumptions. We are not placing our confidence in this argument as a type of silver bullet but we do recommend it as a reasonably demonstrating the existence of God as the best accounting of the problem of good. The strength of this argument can be appreciated when we see that this was one of the key things that brought C. S. Lewis to faith. He writes, 'My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of *just* and *unjust*? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust? If the whole show was bad and senseless from A to Z, so to speak, why did I, who was supposed to be part of the show, find myself in such violent reaction against it?...Thus in the very act of trying to prove that

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ro 2:14–16). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

God did not exist—in other words, that the whole of reality was senseless—I was forced to assume that one part of reality—namely my idea of justice—was full of sense. Consequently atheism turns out to be too simple. If the whole universe has no meaning, we should never have found out that it had no meaning.² How can you know what good is if there is no God to distinguish good from evil? This is the problem of good as an argument for God.

Nature

The modern narrative of our present existence is that we are here by chance and have evolved to our present state. Morals like love, hate, goodness, beauty, etc. must have a natural explanation. If our sense of morals exists and you assume evolution to be how we got here, how does evolution account for our sense of moral obligation? The theory will go something like this: in the past somewhere in our evolutionary history, altruistic people survived better. They survived better because they were willing to cooperate with a larger group which guaranteed their survival. These had a better chance of surviving than those who were selfish and cruel and so these altruistic genes have survived to be handed down and make up the sense of moral obligation we all feel. This is why the general consensus is that selflessness and sacrificing for others is viewed to be the best way. In other words, our sense of right and wrong is nothing more than a relic of our former survival strategy. There is in fact no real and objective category of right and wrong, merely pragmatic reasons for naming selflessness good. If we had evolved differently, where the selfish ones had happened to have survived to propagate then our 'feelings' of right and wrong would call selfishness good. Our moral compass is not actually reliable and we do not actually know what good and evil are.

There is a natural reaction of rejection to this analysis, yet it is the inevitable consequence of a natural explanation of morals. Some have even been bold enough to admit it, Thomas Huxley said, 'the thief and the murderer follow nature just as much as the philanthropist. Cosmic evolution may teach us how the good and evil tendencies may have come about; but, in itself, it is incompetent to furnish any better reason why what we call good is preferable to what we call evil than what we had before.'³

'Scientist Rodney Holder elaborates: 'If we are nothing but atoms and molecules organized in a particular way through the chance processes of evolution, then love, beauty, good and evil, free will, reason itself—indeed all that makes us human and raises us above the rest of the created order—lose their objectivity. Why should I love my neighbor or go out of my way to help him? Rather, why should I not get everything I can for myself, trampling on whoever gets in my way? After all, I am nothing but a 'gene survival machine', and my sole purpose is to propagate my own genes. The best we can do can be to come to some kind of agreement in our mutual interest along utilitarian lines to live in peace, but it suits us we shall be free to break any such agreement. Our behavior could degenerate to that which we see in the animal world—after all, we are just animals anyway.'⁴

This does raise the problem of punishing crimes. What is a crime? Is it really a wrong? Or is it merely something that does not suit the general consensus? Will a criminal sit in his/her cell agreeing that they have done wrong or that they are a victim of those who

2 Blanchard, p169.

3 Ibid., p382.

4 Ibid., p382.

moral opinions are at the moment in holding the reins of power? This also raises the problem of true choice. If we are programmed to feel what right and wrong are, that our emotions and values are not real but pre-programmed responses to stimuli, is a criminal really guilty for his actions. One Evolutionist argued in a New York Times article, 'that women who murdered their new born babies may not be mad or evil, but unconsciously obeying primeval instincts to sacrifice their children for the good of the tribe.'

Many who have put God out of the picture have tried to consistently remove God from ethics and relativize the whole thing, but on a functional level they betray that their hearts are hard-wired to recognize good and evil.

Nurture

The world is presently spiraling in a moral morass. Here is an example, it shows the irreconcilable conflict between two values that are seen to be non-negotiable in the modern human rights movement, individual freedoms versus the common good. In the UK a girl was murdered by a man who was given to watching violent forms of pornography. The mother of the girl went on a rampage to try and get this form of pornography made illegal. The trouble is the police could not agree or make a move to act against those who made or acted or used the material. It was made by consenting adults and watched by consenting adults. An obvious evil that was resulting in others harm could not be addressed. Individual rights versus the common good the common solution is some sort of compromise between the two. How very different to what God says about the evils of pornography, murder and rape.

We have explored the evolutionary model for explaining our sense of good and evil, let us now consider the cultural model. In other words we get our views of right and wrong from the culture that we are in. The trouble is we live in an age of moral relativism. It goes something like this: 'No one is allowed to impose their morality on others because each one has the right to derive the truth from within themselves.' The assumption in this view is that all moral values are culturally created and should be given equal space. This is the assertion however this is not the way we eventually live our lives. Those who hold to relativistic morality have very strong judgements about all sorts of things that are evil in the world. They immediately betray that they do in fact believe in a universal ethic by which others are condemned or commended.

Another explanation for morality is the vote of the majority. In a democratic era there is a sense of safety in the majority consensus on a matter. The good is defined by that which the majority identifies to be the good. We don't need God to identify the good we are able to navigate this issue on our own. Or can we? Isn't crowd morality just a group of individuals? If individuals can err why cant 1000 individuals? What about the heroes we love? Haven't our heroes been those who have rejected the majority opinion like Wilberforce standing against slavery, or Luther King against racism. Wasn't it the argument by the Nazis that the eradication of the Jews and Gypsies and the disabled was for the common good and the majority thought it so. The trouble with majority ethics is the inevitable drift. 'The story is told of a man who stopped outside a clockmaker's shop every morning on his way to work and synchronized his watch with a large clock standing in the shop window. One day, the owner of the shop got talking to him and asked him what kind of work he did. Rather sheepishly, the man told him he was the timekeeper at a nearby factory, and that one of his responsibilities was to ring the closing bell at five o'clock every evening. As his watch kept very poor time, he synchronized it every morning with the clock in the shop window. The shop-owner, even more embarrassed, replied, 'I hate to tell you

this, but the clock doesn't work very well either, and I adjust it every time I hear the factory's closing bell.⁵

In the West we are naïve about majority ethics and are ignorant of what others actually think. 'In 1995 the Daily Telegraph carried this news item: 'Minibuses in Teheran are to be segregated to stop male and female passengers from brushing against each other, which is a sin in Islam. A transport official said that with 370,000 women passengers a day being brushed ten times a day each, 3.7 million sins were being committed.' A few months later, the Observer reported a husband's brutal murder of his wife in Pakistan according to a tribal tradition called karo kari, under which any man who sees a female relative with a man to whom she is not married is obligated to kill both individuals to preserve his family's honour. A human rights lawyer explained that under the Pakistani Penal code Karo kari murder was a justifiable offence which the court would consider 'an honour killing.' Writing as an agnostic Jew with no religious axe to grind', the Daily Telegraph's Janet Daley made an important point: 'it is a fundamental logical error to think that you can choose between cultures when a given culture, with its explicit moral program, is the only equipment we have for making social choices. Carried to its logical conclusion, cultural relativism produces not tolerance, but nihilism. If everyone is right, then no one is.'⁶

As one writer puts it, 'If a premise (There is no God) leads to a conclusion you know can't be true (Napping babies is culturally relative) then why not change the premise?'⁷

One apologist points out the problem of human rights without God. Where do human rights come from? If you reject God what are you left with? Some have said nature. But the objection is raised that nature is red in tooth and claw and has no normative rules that suggest individual freedoms and protections. This leaves us without ourselves, and the group rather than the individual as a more reliable guide. It is argued that human rights with its guarding of individuals makes for a better society so that everyone in the long run will be better off. This road is fraught with problems. What if someone wants to use the right to speak his mind freely and is at odds with the general good? What about minority groups? Even Richard Dworkin concludes, 'if we want to defend individual rights, we must try to discover something beyond utility that argues for these rights.'⁸ In other words we need an objective standard of norms that does not ground its authority in ourselves.

There are only four possible sources of morality. Some argue we get it from nature, but nature is red in tooth and claw, plus, the God who made nature is the ultimate source of any 'natural laws' we could discover. Some argue it comes from the individual, but this results in anarchy and nihilism. Some have argued that we find it in society, but this is still to reach no higher than ourselves. The Bible tells us that we have a conscience that recognizes right and wrong when we see it. God has given us this ability. If there is no God there can be no meaning, no morality, no beauty and no truth. But God is real and this is why we are able to know right and wrong. We agree with Dostoevsky, 'Without God everything is permitted.' Francis Collins says this: 'This moral law, which defies scientific explanation, is exactly what one might expect to find if one were searching for the existence of a personal God who sought relationship with human kind.'

5 Ibid., p379-380.

6 Ibid., p378.

7 Keller, the Reason for God, p156.

8 Ibid., p151.

The Bible tells us that we all have consciences and we all know when we have sinned, the question I have to ask you is, does your conscience tell you whether you are a good person or a bad person? Are you guilty of pride, deceit, greed, lust, envy, hate, unforgiveness, selfishness, slander, a rejection of the God to whom you owe your existence, and many more sins. Your conscience even though abused by the constant excuses and indulgences is able to accuse you. Francis Schaeffer has a great picture about the conscience and how it shows you that you are a sinner and in trouble with a holy God. Imagine you have a tape recorder around your neck. It only records all the times that you have ever judged another person as doing something wrong. When you accuse someone of lying, of selfishness, of being a jerk in the traffic, etc. These are things that you know to be true and morals you acknowledge as right. Now have you ever been guilty of the things that you have accused others of doing?

Each one of us knows the good, this proves God but it also proves our own guilt and the need for a Saviour. Jesus Christ has died to save us from the guilt of the sins we know we have done. He had to die to pay the penalty for the crimes we had committed. If you recognize that God has made you to know good and evil, and you feel the guilt of your own heart, then you need Christ as the one who can pay for your crimes and wash you clean. Only He can do it. Humble yourself before Him today and ask for forgiveness. God gives grace to the humble and forgiveness to those who truly repent and confess their sins before Him.