

Christian Worldview and Apologetics

A Moral Argument, Chapter 7

Introduction: This morning we're going to study a moral argument for the existence of God. We're going to use chapter seven in our book as the basis for our outline, but I'm also going to add some of John Frame's insights to those of Paul Copan's.

In my opinion, moral arguments for God's existence are **the most persuasive and intuitive arguments** that we can offer to an unbeliever. Sometimes other arguments for God's existence, such as epistemological and cosmological arguments, can get a little technical for many unbelievers. But every human being is doing ethics every day—even if he “claims” that there are no moral absolutes to which humans are obligated.

What is a moral value? Let's take a little time to think about the nature of a moral value. A moral value is not a physical object that one can see with his eyes or weigh and measure with instruments. It's not something that grows on trees or that we find under a rock. It's not a process of nature that we observe and quantify such as gravitational force or other so-called “laws of nature”. Yet we perceive moral values all the time.

[**Illustrate** by describing a robbery in which a young man grabs the purse of an elderly lady and runs into the crowd.]

All of us here would say that **we saw a sin**, an act of evil. But did we see evil with our eyes? Is evil a physical thing that reflects light back to our eyes? We merely saw a man grab a purse and run, but we “perceived” an evil act. The young man violated an unseen law of moral value. He committed more than a crime—he committed a sin.

We are accustomed **to think of the universe as operating according to the laws of physics**, such as gravitational force and the law of entropy. It may surprise you to hear me say that by their nature moral laws are more certain and regular than are the laws of physics. Let me explain.

We have many examples in the Scriptures of God performing **miracles** which are often **exceptions to the normal ways** in which He governs nature. God caused an ax-head to float on water; He made water gush out of a rock; He caused the sun to stand still in the sky. But let me ask you, **has God ever done anything that's morally evil?** Has God ever lied? Has he ever carried out exceptions to moral laws?

There's a sense in which **we shouldn't regard the “laws of physics”** as “laws”. They are not necessarily universal and unchangeable. Indeed, in the New Heavens and the New Earth, we may live under a few different laws and even some laws that are reversed from the “laws of physics”. For example, will the law of entropy be a part of the world to come?

Moral law is more like the laws of logic in that both moral law and logical law are necessary, universal, and unchangeable. The laws of physics are not necessarily so. The laws of logic will always be the same because they exist on account of the way in which God Himself reasons or thinks. God can no more make a square circle than can He make “A” both “A” and “not A” at the same time and in the same way. Neither can God do evil or command evil. The Bible says, for example, that it's *impossible* for God to lie (Heb. 6:18).

Yes, **moral law has the property of necessity**. This is because, as we will discuss later, moral law is

rooted in the unchangeable moral character of God Himself.

The overall argument of this lesson will support the following syllogism:

“If objective moral values exist, then God exists.

Objective moral values do exist.

Therefore, God exists” (pg 109).

I. Objective Moral Values as Properly Basic (pgs 109-111)

- “Here’s a good rule of thumb about morality: *Don’t believe people who say murder or rape may not really be wrong.* Such people haven’t look deeply enough into the basis for moral belief; they just aren’t functioning properly” (pg 110).
 - “As part of **God’s general self-revelation**, all people—unless they ignore or suppress their consciences—can and should have basic moral insight, knowing truths generally available to any morally sensitive person (Rom 2:14-15). We just know the rightness of virtues (kindness, trustworthiness, unselfishness), and the burden of proof falls on those who deny this” (pg 111).

[**Romans 2:14** 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. ¹⁵ 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 ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.]

- **Some unbelievers might object** to this by bringing to our attention that many people disagree about what exactly is morally good or evil. “The existence of gray areas doesn’t mean that we can’t readily recognize general moral principles. In making moral judgments, we must begin with the clear and move to the unclear, not vice versa.... The fact that there is such a thing as twilight does not mean that we cannot distinguish between day and night” (pg 111).
- Paul Copan uses the **language of foundationalism** when he talks about our perception of moral value being “properly basic”. (You may remember our talking about foundationalism as one system of epistemology). We may not be comfortable with foundationalism, but we may confidently assert that moral law, as rooted in the character of God, exists as surely as God exists, and that we may believe in moral properties even without offering an argument for them (although we are at liberty to offer arguments for them to “remind” the unbeliever of what he already knows but suppresses in his unrighteousness).

II. The Connection Between God and Objective Moral Values/Human Dignity (pgs 112-115)

- Some people like atheist philosopher **Michael Martin want to be moral realists** but not affirm the existence of God. (A person who affirms “moral realism” believes that moral properties and laws have genuine and objective existence). Christians are moral realists. But when a naturalist claims to be a moral realist something strange has happened, and we’ll discuss this under our next point, “God and Evolutionary Ethics”.
- **We may affirm in common** a non-theist many moral principles. This is because the non-theist can know moral law even though he denies the foundation of it. This is to say that the atheist may have an **epistemological awareness** of moral law but suppresses the **ontological**

foundation of it. [Explain.]

- **Theism makes more sense** of the world, including moral laws, than naturalism does, because “personhood and morality are necessarily connected” (pg 113).
- [Review table 7.1, Naturalism verses Theism.]

III. Nontheist’s Recognition of the God-and-Morality Connection (pgs 115-117)

- [Read several of the **quotes** of various atheist naturalists.]

IV. God and Evolutionary Ethics (pgs 117-119)

- “**Naturalists generally claim** that moral values are just the result of human evolutionary development.” Some claim, as we discussed earlier, that moral values really exist, “that **moral properties emerge** once the human brain and nervous system reach a certain level of complexity” (pg 117). Others claim that moral values are merely subjective. One philosopher of science “asserts that we have developed an ‘awareness of morality—a sense of right and wrong and a feeling of obligation to be thus governed—because such an awareness is of biological worth.”
- **If our perception of moral value is merely a survival mechanism** given to us by evolution, then moral values are not necessarily real or true. Instead, moral values are merely **mirages** that we’re hard-wired by evolution to perceive and govern our behavior in order to survive in this cold and merciless world in which we live.

But if this is the case, it doesn’t only destroy our confidence in the objectivity of moral values, it also destroys our confidence in our cognitive faculties produce true beliefs. “**The evolutionary process is interested in fitness** and survival, not in true belief. The problem with naturalistic evolution is that not only is objective morality undermined, but so is rational thought. Our beliefs—moral or epistemic—may help us survive, but there is not reason to think that they are true” (pg 118).

[Remind the class about Plantinga’s “evolutionary argument against naturalism”: **P(R/N&E)**, P=Probability; R=the proposition that our cognitive faculties are reliable; N=Naturalism; E=Evolution. “**Paul and the Tiger**” illustration.]

Also, if moral obligations don’t have real existence, then we have **no obligation** binding us to affirm the truth of a **logical syllogism**. [Illustrate by “all men or mortal Socrates is a man therefore Socrates is mortal”.]

- Moral obligations **arise** in the context of **interpersonal relationships**.

We feel guilt when we violate moral law, but we **never feel guilt over violating impersonal objects** like rocks, helium gas, and chairs. (We feel guilty over these matters only when we personalize them.)

- **We learn morality from our parents;** but as we learn that our parents are fallible, we look higher and higher up for infallible moral law—the law that obligates even our parents and our grandparents and takes precedence over all other moral obligations.

What is the ground of ultimate moral law? **It must be either personal or impersonal**, but impersonal objects never morally obligate us in real life. Therefore ultimate moral obligations must be grounded in an ultimate person. **We eventually come to God** and stop with Him since He is the **absolute Person**. Therefore, He alone is the ground of universal and necessary moral obligations.

V. The Euthyphro Problem (pgs 119-122)

- In **Plato's dialogue, *Euthyphro***, Socrates and Euthyphro discuss with one another how to define "holiness". Euthyphro says that holiness is whatever the gods say it is; that is, holiness is whatever the gods decide for it to be. Socrates, on the other hand, argues that holiness is what the god's love; that is, holiness exists apart from the gods since it is admired as such by the gods.

This is the dilemma: If holiness is whatever the gods declare it to be, then it is **arbitrary**. On the other hand, if holiness is whatever the gods love or admire, then holiness does not depend on or require the gods for its existence. This same **dilemma** is often used to critique Christians who assert that morality requires the existence of God.

- **How shall we resolve this dilemma?** "The ultimate solution to the Euthyphro dilemma shifts the grounding of morality from the commands of God to something more basic—that is, the nature or **character of God**.

Goodness is a property of God's nature. God is good. He doesn't merely love the good as if it were some free floating universal substance external to Him. He loves Himself because He Himself is good. His character is "the good". Absolute moral obligation or law is grounded in an Ultimate Person who is also "the good".

- **God's commands** are the criterion or **standard** for ethical behavior. But God's commands are **not arbitrary** like those of the Greek gods. God commands out of the goodness of His nature; therefore, His commands are normative and good.

For us, a **virtuous life** is a life lived in **imitation** of God:

1 Peter 1:14 "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; 16 because it is written, "**YOU SHALL BE**

HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."