

## “Ethics Needs God.”

Paul Copan

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A MORAL ARGUMENT

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Ethics Needs God

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Let me briefly clarify what I do and do not defend in this chapter. My argument will not advance the following points:

- *Objective moral values exist.* Both sides here represented assume this.<sup>1</sup>
- *Belief in God is required for recognizing moral truths.* Properly functioning naturalists, Buddhists, Confucians, and theists know the right thing to do.

- *Atheists/nontheists cannot live decently or be kind to others.* Indeed, some may exhibit greater moral virtue than some professing theists.
- *Atheists/nontheists cannot formulate ethical systems that overlap or mesh with theologically oriented ones.*
- *Certain Old Testament practices, actions, or regulations are historically and contextually confined and should not be taken as normative and universal.*

Frequently critiques of theism include inferior moral practices, laws, and actions in the Old Testament—and fall prey to many misunderstandings and misrepresentations. I thoroughly address this topic elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

What I *am* arguing is this:

- *Theism offers a far more likely context than naturalism/nontheism for affirming objective moral values and duties.* Naturalism does not lead us to expect the emergence of human rights and universal benevolence—a point equally applicable to other nontheistic worldviews.
- *Many naturalists themselves observe that naturalism's context simply cannot lead us to human rights/dignity and moral duties.*
- *Theism offers a more plausible context than atheism/nontheism for affirming a cluster of features related to human dignity and moral duties.*
- *The convergence of contingent human dignity and worth and necessary moral truths makes much more sense in theism than in naturalism.*
- *Euthyphro objections leave theism unscathed and raise their own problems for the naturalistic/nontheistic moral realists.*

In general, I shall argue that moral epistemology must be anchored in the metaphysical resources of theism to provide the most plausible context to account for objective moral values.<sup>3</sup>

## 1. Preliminaries on naturalistic moral realism

My sparring partner in this volume, Louise Antony, repudiates as mercenary all ethical actions and attitudes motivated by fear of judgment or reward from God. God is morally superfluous. Antony's moral atheism is the "perfect piety."<sup>4</sup>

In like manner, naturalist Erik Wielenberg claims that objective morality's ontological and epistemological foundation consists of certain brute ethical facts: they "have no explanation outside of themselves; no further facts make them true" (ontological), and we can know these brute ethical facts immediately without inferring them from other known facts (epistemological).<sup>5</sup> Necessary moral truths didn't evolve with humanity but are "part of the furniture of the universe." They "constitute the ethical background of every possible universe," creating the framework for assessing the actions of any moral agent (whether human or divine). On Wielenberg's *nontheistic nonnatural moral realism*, morality cannot be called "natural" since, like beauty, it supervenes on certain natural properties under certain conditions, though it is not reducible to these natural properties.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Theism: the more natural setting for objective moral values

Finding atheists who think God and objective morality stand or fall together is quite easy, and naturalistic moral realists should take note. Here's a sampling:

- Jean-Paul Sartre: "It [is] very distressing that God does not exist, because all possibility of finding values in a heaven of ideas disappears along with Him."<sup>7</sup>
- Friedrich Nietzsche: "*There are altogether no moral facts*"; indeed, morality "has truth only if God is the truth—it stands or falls with faith in God."<sup>8</sup>

- Bertrand Russell rejected moral realism and retained the depressing view that humanity with all its achievements is nothing “but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms”; so we must safely build our lives on “the firm foundation of unyielding despair.”<sup>9</sup>
- J. L. Mackie: “Moral properties constitute so odd a cluster of properties and relations that they are most unlikely to have arisen in the ordinary course of events without an all-powerful god to create them.”<sup>10</sup>
- Richard Dawkins concludes that a universe of “just electrons and selfish genes” would mean “there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference.”<sup>11</sup>

Moral values such as human dignity and worth make more sense on theism than naturalism. Why think that value would emerge from valuelessness? Wielenberg claims the “no value from valuelessness” maxim is question-begging on the theist’s part. (He favors the maxim, “From valuelessness, value sometimes comes.”)<sup>12</sup> Yet Wielenberg’s maxim is itself terribly question-begging.<sup>13</sup> Just ask: *what should we expect if naturalism is true?* Russell, Nietzsche, Sartre, Mackie, and Dawkins are just a few fish in the larger naturalistic pond who recognize naturalism’s inability to generate objective values such as universal benevolence and human rights. Theism has no such problem.

As we shall see, the same applies to consciousness, rationality, and free will/personal responsibility. Naturalism itself leads us to question similar question-begging maxims such as “from non-conscious matter, consciousness sometimes comes,” “from deterministic processes, free will sometimes comes,” and “from non-rational matter, rationality sometimes comes.” (In the spirit of Wielenberg, we could add yet another question-begging naturalistic maxim: “From

nothing, something may sometimes come.” Due to space limitations, however, I cannot elaborate here.)<sup>14</sup>

The worldview favoring a robust moral world is theism, in which a good, rational, supremely aware Creator makes human beings in his image. God’s existence secures the existence of genuine value and rights in the contingent world, easily accounting for human dignity, rights, moral responsibility (which includes rationality and free will), and duties. On naturalism, however, why think that morally responsible, valuable beings would be the product of mindless, nonrational, physical, valueless, nonconscious processes? Unlike theism, naturalism’s context can’t anticipate the emergence of value.<sup>15</sup>

A *personal* Creator, who makes human *persons* in the Creator’s image, serves as the ontological basis for the existence of objective moral values, moral obligation, human dignity, and rights. Consider: (1) Without the existence of a personal God, no persons would exist *at all*. God is the sufficient reason for the existence of anything (rather than nothing) at all. And (2) if no persons would exist, then no moral properties would be instantiated or realized in our world. Without this personal God and Creator of other persons, why think moral properties would be instantiated? Moral values—the instantiation of moral properties—and personhood are intertwined: moral properties are instantiated through personhood, which is ontologically rooted in God’s personhood. Again, if naturalism is true and the universe is inherently meaningless, we simply should not expect human dignity and rights to emerge. Surely intellectual honesty forces us to admit that human rights and universal benevolence *more naturally or fittingly flow* from a theistic universe than a naturalistic one.<sup>16</sup>

### 3. Theism’s naturalness versus naturalism’s shocking cosmic coincidences

Even if such naturalists reject that humans are nothing more than accidental collocations of atoms or molecules in motion, the context problem still persists. Consider the following reasons.

First, a theistic context for human dignity and rights is far more natural and expected than a nontheistic one of valueless molecules producing value. To say that value “sometimes” may emerge from valuelessness” (Wielenberg) reflects an ungrounded metaphysical optimism.

Second, the naturalistic moral scenario is indeed a shocking coincidence, unlike the natural connection between a personal, good God’s existence and that of morally valuable creatures. Let’s assume that moral facts are necessarily part of the universe’s furniture and that the beings luckily evolved via a torturous, profoundly contingent series of unguided physical events to be morally constituted and thus obligated to those preexisting facts. It is strange in excelsis and staggeringly coincidental that these moral facts should (a) “just exist” and (b) perfectly correspond to intrinsically valuable beings that happen to emerge so late on the cosmic scene. These moral facts were, somehow, anticipating moral creatures that would evolve and be duty-bound to them! Theism, by contrast, does not lean on such a weak metaphysical reed; rather, it brings together unproblematically two otherwise unconnected features—moral facts (rooted in a divine necessary being’s personhood) and moral creatures in whose image they have been made.

Third, objective moral values supervening upon naturalistically evolved, neurologically sophisticated organisms present a problem for the naturalist: why think that our moral awareness/development reflects those preexistent moral facts? After all, we could have developed a contrary morality that would have enhanced survival and reproduction. Michael Ruse offers this counterfactual: instead of evolving from “savannah-dwelling primates,” we, like termites, could have evolved needing “to dwell in darkness, eat each other’s faeces, and

cannibalise the dead.” If the latter were the case, we would “extol such acts as beautiful and moral” and “find it morally disgusting to live in the open air, dispose of body waste and bury the dead.”<sup>17</sup>

Michael Shermer affirms that our remote ancestors have genetically passed on to us our sense of moral obligation within, and this is (epigenetically) reinforced by group pressure. Ultimately, to ask “Why should we be moral?” is like asking “Why should we be hungry or horny?”<sup>18</sup> Yet C. S. Lewis earlier observed that, on naturalism, moral impulses are no more true (or false) “than a vomit or a yawn.”<sup>19</sup> Thinking “I ought” is on the same level of “I itch.” Indeed, “my impulse to serve posterity is just the same sort of thing as my fondness for cheese” or preferring mild or bitter beer.<sup>20</sup> Naturalism’s inability to get beyond descriptions of human behavior and psychology (“is”) does not inspire confidence for grounding moral obligation (“ought”). At best, the atheist/naturalist should remain tentative about it—though Antony and Wielenberg somehow confidently push past such moral tentativity.

Atheistic moral realists naively think they can escape Ruse’s point that our “sense of right and wrong and a feeling of obligation to be thus governed” is of “biological worth,” serves as “an aid to survival,” and “has no being beyond this.”<sup>21</sup> What if our belief in moral duties is a “corporate illusion fobbed off on us by our genes to get us to cooperate”?<sup>22</sup> The philosopher Elliot Sober rejects the purported claim that ethical beliefs can’t be true if they’re the product of naturalistic evolution, which commits both the genetic and naturalistic fallacies.<sup>23</sup> That is, it’s possible that even if one’s beliefs are produced by nonrational mechanisms, this doesn’t entail their falsity. Sober misses the bigger point: if our beliefs are *accidentally true*, being pumped into us by physical and social forces beyond our control, they still do not qualify as “knowledge”

(warranted true belief). And we may hold many *false* beliefs that help us as a species to survive—for example, the belief in intrinsic human rights when we don't in fact possess them.

So naturalism's context doesn't inspire confidence in (a) the emergence of objective moral values; (b) the actual existence of human dignity, duty, and rights (however strongly we are wired to believe in their existence); or (c) in the trustworthiness of our belief-forming structures since naturalistic evolution is interested in survival, not truth (more below).

#### 4. Theism and the requisite features for moral beings

Naturalistic moral realists will acknowledge that humans are “accidental, evolved, mortal, and relatively short-lived,”<sup>24</sup> but they claim that this, by itself, does not present the total (moral) picture. (This, incidentally, is precisely the point I've just made—namely, the emergence of human rights and moral values is non-question-beggingly anticipated by theism, *not* naturalism). Such naturalistic thinkers commonly point to three key features or subvening properties on which human dignity and rights supervene: (1) freedom/free will,<sup>25</sup> (2) the ability to reason and discern between right and wrong, and (3) and the capacity of self-awareness or self-consciousness.<sup>26</sup>

A major criticism of naturalistic moral realists is the insouciant and gratuitous assumption that moral values just emerge via supervenience on natural nonmoral properties (such as a sufficiently developed brain and nervous system). The result? Morally valuable, duty-bound, rights-bearing human beings. Note atheist David Brink's parallel: “Assuming materialism is true, mental states supervene on physical states, yet few think that mental states are metaphysically queer.”<sup>27</sup> So if the mental supervenience on the physical is such a naturalistic “slam dunk,” why not objective moral values? Many nontheists simply fail to take seriously just how gratuitous such assumptions are: Why think matter and energy—which lack inherent meaning and



purpose—could come close to producing rights-bearing, valuable beings? Theism has no such troubles—just the opposite, as we continue to note below.

Below we discuss a remarkable irony: these aforementioned naturalistic moral realists claim that one (or perhaps some combination) is sufficient to ground the three requisite features of human dignity and worth—the capacity for self-awareness/self-consciousness, reason, and free will. Yet other naturalists quite convincingly argue that naturalism cannot account for these very features on which the naturalistic moral realist hangs her hopes.

1. *Self-awareness/-consciousness*: Moral beings have the capacity of self-awareness, rising above genetics and environment to consider intentions, varying motivations, and prospective choices. Yet naturalistic philosophers of mind acknowledge that the emergence of (self-)consciousness from nonconscious matter is a huge problem:

- Colin McGinn: “We know that brains are the *de facto* causal basis of consciousness, but we have, it seems, no understanding of how this can be so. It strikes us as miraculous, eerie, even faintly comic.”<sup>28</sup>
- Geoffrey Madell: “The emergence of consciousness, then is a mystery, and one to which materialism signally fails to provide an answer.”<sup>29</sup>
- David Papineau: As to why consciousness emerges in certain cases, “to this question physicalists ‘theories of consciousness’ seem to provide no answer.”<sup>30</sup>

In contrast to theism (which affirms a supremely self-aware being), naturalism’s resources have no predictable room for (self-)consciousness.<sup>31</sup> Strike one!

2. *Reason*: Moral beings have the capacity to take and reflect on alternative moral paths and make moral judgments. Now while the emergence of creaturely

rationality in the context of a rational God makes sense, naturalistic evolution, in contrast, is interested in survival, not truth. That is, we may form many *false* survival-enhancing beliefs such as “humans are morally responsible” or “humans have dignity and rights”—a phenomenon that naturalists commonly acknowledge:

- Patricia Churchland: “Boiled down to its essentials, a nervous system enables the organism to succeed in the four F’s: feeding, fleeing, fighting, and reproducing . . . Truth, whatever that is, definitely takes the hindmost.”<sup>32</sup>
- Richard Rorty: Truth is “un-Darwinian.”<sup>33</sup>
- Michael Ruse: Morality is a “corporate” illusion that has been “fobbed off on us by our genes to get us to cooperate.”<sup>34</sup> That is, “we think it has an objective status.”<sup>35</sup>
- James Rachels: “Man is a moral (altruistic) being, not because he intuits the rightness of loving his neighbor, or because he responds to some noble ideal, but because his behavior is comprised of tendencies which natural selection has favoured.”<sup>36</sup>

We are left wondering, “Why trust our minds, whose thoughts are the result of mindless molecules affecting other mindless molecules?” How has Ruse escaped this corporate illusionism to which all the rest of us are subject? As we have noted, Ruse’s belief turns out to be accidental true belief (which does not qualify as knowledge)—not warranted true belief (which does). The same problem plagues the naturalistic moral realist as well.

The theist does not have to resort to such mental and moral gymnastics. If a trustworthy God has created our noetic structure (not to mention an ordered, biofriendly universe that our minds can study and understand), then we have all the more reason for generally trusting these

faculties or capacities rather than constantly doubting their reliability—even if, here and there, we may get things wrong. Indeed, we have been designed to trust our faculties (moral, rational, perceptual), and constantly failing to trust them is a sign of cognitive malfunction. It would be wrong-headed to abandon them.<sup>37</sup>

When it comes to naturalism, we should ask: Why should Wielenberg and Antony adopt human dignity and rights over against the views of Ruse and Rorty, whose naturalistic evolutionism entails truth being incidental to survival? Naturalism doesn't inspire confidence here either. Strike two.<sup>38</sup>

3. *The capacity of free will*: Naturalistic moral realists commonly claim that humans possess moral responsibility/free will, having “risen above” the genetic determinism of our evolutionary predecessors. Again, this intuition of free will, however strong, is an illusion according to other naturalists:
  - William Provine: “Free will as traditionally conceived—the freedom to make uncoerced and unpredictable choices among alternative courses of action—simply does not exist. There is no way the evolutionary process as currently conceived can produce a being that is truly free to make choices.”<sup>39</sup>
  - Francis Crick: Our sense of identity and free will is “nothing more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules.”<sup>40</sup>
  - Thomas Nagel: “There is no room for agency in a world of neural impulses, chemical reactions, and bone and muscle movements.” Given naturalism, it's hard not to conclude that we're “helpless” and “not responsible” for our actions.<sup>41</sup>
  - John Searle: We believe “we could have done something else” and that human freedom is “just a fact of experience.” However, “the scientific” approach to

reality undermines the notion of a self that could potentially interfere with “the causal order of nature.”<sup>42</sup>

- John Bishop: Our scientific understanding of human behavior seems to be in tension with a presupposition of the ethical stance we adopt toward it.”<sup>43</sup>

So, the necessary metaphysical requirements for moral beings—(self-)consciousness, rationality, and free will/moral responsibility—are undermined by a naturalistic context of nonconscious matter directed by nonrational and deterministic processes. Value cannot emerge because self-consciousness, rationality, and free will cannot emerge in a naturalistic universe.

What’s more, our natural history from the big bang to the bacterium is one without value and with no predictable hope for giving rise to valuable, rights-bearing beings. A universe of electrons and selfish genes has no metaphysical wherewithal to produce beings possessing intrinsic dignity and worth (and thus certain inviolable rights). Naturalistic moral realists Antony, Wielenberg, and Sinnott-Armstrong—wishful thinkers all—latch on to a theistically grounded human dignity and moral freedom, which is certainly understandable; after all, these atheists too have been made in the image of the God they deny. Yet their context leaves us with no metaphysical shred of confidence that value will or could be produced.

According to Ron Bontekoe, naturalism’s morally bleak metaphysic undermines human dignity: “Human beings cannot be deserving of a special measure of respect by virtue of their having been created ‘in God’s image’ when they have not been *created* at all (and there is no God). Thus the traditional conception of human dignity is also undermined in the wake of Darwin.”<sup>44</sup> In contrast, a good personal Creator proves to be the more robust, metaphysically rich, less surprising, and less ad hoc context for the emergence of intrinsic dignity and rights.

## 5. The Euthyphro question

Plato's *Euthyphro* dialogue raises the question: "Is what is holy holy because the gods approve it, or do they approve it because it is holy?" (10a). In theistic terms, either God's commands are *arbitrary* (something is good *because* God commands it—and he could have commanded the opposite), or there must be some *autonomous moral standard* (which God consults in order to command). Given the abundance of literature rebutting such a notion,<sup>45</sup> it is no mild shock that Antony takes this as an "explicit and vivid" dilemma from which there is no escape.<sup>46</sup>

The theist easily evades this false dilemma; there is a third way: goodness is nonarbitrarily rooted in God's necessarily good personhood (or character), not in divine commands. Antony's mistaken assumption that "good = commanded by God" and therefore God could issue entirely opposite commands is strange in excelsis. Unlike humans, God does not have duties to follow, nor does he need them. Rather, God naturally does what is good because his character is good, loving, and just. Thus it would be strange that God would have duties or be obligated to his own divine commands—particularly when God's personhood is the very source of goodness. Antony incorrectly assumes that William of Ockham's version of the divine command theory is the only game of its kind in town—that God *could* command, say, torturing babies for fun, and this would become obligatory. Yet to say that there is no good or bad except what God commands (as Antony does) is a gross distortion. While God's commands are relevant to ethics, they do not define or constitute goodness. For instance, God may give commands (say, kosher or planting laws for national Israel) that are not permanently binding, nor is there any reason to think these are inherently good.

What's more, we've seen above that the horns of the *Euthyphro* "dilemma" are not exhaustive; moreover, instead of God's commanding something because it is good (or vice versa), we can speak of God's commanding *because he loves us* and *because he is concerned*

*about maximizing our ultimate well-being.*<sup>47</sup> Moreover, for God to command something like torture or rape goes against the very foundation of ethics—namely, God’s necessarily good character. To ask, “What if God were to command rape or baby torture?” that would be like saying, “What if one could make a square circle or be a married bachelor?”

True, our moral intuitions are not infallible, even if we get the basics right; they may stand in need of correction. And a wise, all-good God may on rare occasions or in dire conditions command something jarring (e.g., for Abraham to offer up Isaac), which means he will have morally sufficient reasons for doing so (e.g., to test Abraham’s faith that God will show himself trustworthy to fulfill his promise, even if it means raising Isaac from the dead). That being said, we do have certain unshakable intuitions that it is always wrong to rape or torture babies for fun, so it would be self-contradictory that a necessarily good God would command such things.

Strangely, Antony’s writings do not address what seems a most obvious response to the Euthyphro. All human beings have been endowed with value by God (ontology) and thus have the capacity to know what is good (epistemology). God’s commands—far from being arbitrary—are in accordance with God’s necessarily good personhood. And when God acts, he simply does what is right. And we humans would not *know* goodness (epistemology) without God’s granting us a moral *constitution*, including rights, reason, and free will (ontology).

More can be said about the Euthyphro here:

- If the naturalistic (or nontheistic) moral realist is correct about needing to have some standard external to God, then she herself cannot escape a similar dilemma, *mutatis mutandis*. We ask naturalistic moral realists like Antony: “Are these moral facts good simply because they are good, or is there an independent standard of goodness to which they conform?” Their argument offers them no actual advantage over theism. If two entities are sufficient to

establish a relation (here, between God's personhood and human personhood), inserting yet a third entity—some moral standard independent of God to assess the connection between them—becomes superfluous. The skeptic's demand is unwarranted.

For instance, atheist Michael Martin thinks that an ideal observer theory (IOT) renders a theistic grounding obsolete. ("Good" is what "an ideal observer would approve under ideal conditions.")<sup>48</sup> Not so fast. For one thing, Roderick Firth, the IOT's founding father, was a theist who claimed that "an ideal observer will be a partial description of God, if God is conceived to be an infallible moral judge."<sup>49</sup> Contra Martin, the theist can easily appropriate the IOT!

Second, despite Martin's use of the Euthyphro against theists, he is hoisted with his own petard, exposing just how innocuous the Euthyphro objection really is: if torturing babies for fun is wrong because an ideal observer says so, then is torturing babies for fun wrong because the ideal observer says so, or does the ideal observer say so because torturing babies for fun is wrong? If we use Martin's (and Antony's) logic, we would still have a moral standard independent of the ideal observer—an IIOT!

- The naturalist's query becomes pointless: we must eventually arrive at some self-sufficient, self-explanatory stopping point beyond which the discussion cannot go. Why is this "independent moral standard" any less arbitrary a stopping point than God's own intrinsically good personhood? Why must we bow to the naturalist's insistence on some independent moral standard when God's moral goodness would suffice? Naturalist Wielenberg's invoking a nonnaturalistic realm (which resembles Platonism) is already taking a transcendental step toward theism, conceding that something more than naturalism is required to ground moral realism.

- The necessity of moral truths does not diminish their need for grounding in a necessary personal God, who exists in all possible worlds.<sup>50</sup> God, who necessarily exists in all

possible worlds, is the source of all necessary moral truths that stand in asymmetrical relation to God's necessity. This can be compared to the necessary truth "consciousness necessarily exists"; this is precisely because God—a supremely self-aware being—exists in all possible worlds. God's existence also means that objective moral values are necessary—that is, they exist in all possible worlds precisely because a supremely good God exists all possible worlds. That is, God's existence is explanatorily prior to these moral values. The same can be said about logical or mathematical truths as well.<sup>51</sup>

- God, who is essentially perfect, does not have obligations to some external moral standard; God simply acts, and, naturally, it is good. An intrinsically good God is not duty-bound; rather than having moral obligations, he simply expresses the goodness of his personhood in his acts and commands. As H. O. Mounce suggests, "God cannot hold anything good unless he *already* values it. But then his valuing cannot *depend* on its being good."<sup>52</sup> If the creator were evil, then we would not be obligated to obey or worship such a being since such a being would not be maximally excellent and thus worthy of worship ("worth-ship").

- Though God's personhood grounds his commands, they still play an important role. Divine commands may partially serve as guidance in particular instances where there would otherwise be no moral obligation (e.g., certain food, planting, or clothing laws to distinguish Old Testament Israel from surrounding nations). Furthermore, divine commands may strengthen or reinforce moral motivation. For example, sometimes we know what to do intellectually, but the gentle prodding or even strong rebuke of a caring friend may be just what we need to spur us into action. Beyond this, we know that commands often add greater weight or seriousness to moral obligations of which we are aware. We may be familiar with general ethical principles, but the



command of a genuine moral authority often assists in our taking our duties more seriously than if we merely had a theoretical knowledge of general moral principles.<sup>53</sup>

- The acceptance of objective values assumes a kind of ultimate goal or design plan for human beings. This would make little sense given naturalism (since we are the products of mindless, unguided processes), but it makes much sense given theism, which presumes a design plan or ideal standard for human beings.

- Even if there were some moral standard independent of God, it still would fail to account for how humans, given their valueless, unguided, deterministic, materialistic origins, came to be morally valuable, rights-bearing, morally responsible beings. What's more, this transcendent moral standard assumed by Antony and Wielenberg still can't account for the human moral freedom required to submit to such a standard given a materialistic, deterministic world.

- The Euthyphro dilemma fails to distinguish between moral good (an axiological category) and moral right (a deontic category, denoting obligation/duty). For example, giving all one's possessions to the poor may be good, but this doesn't entail a universal obligation. This good-right distinction enables us to determine what good (supererogatory) actions rise above the obligatory. Again, what is good is not identical to what God commands, but what God commands will ultimately be good. And, as we've seen, God is necessarily good; so if he on rare occasion commands something jarring or morally difficult, he will do so with morally sufficient reason.<sup>54</sup>

Not only does the Euthyphro dilemma pose no threat to a theistically rooted ethic, but a similarly configured argument (as in the first bullet point above) can be launched against the naturalistic moral realist who is convinced of the Euthyphro's efficacy.

One final point: The naturalistically explicable impulse of self-sacrifice for one's own offspring or even species makes no rational sense—a sharp contrast to the theistic worldview. On naturalism, why should a person surrender his momentary existence—all the existence he will *ever* have—so that his offspring may survive? Or why endure lifelong imprisonment in a Communist jail for refusing to reveal the whereabouts of an innocent who is an “enemy of the state”? Accounting for self-sacrificial acts or virtuous acts that bring lifelong hardship and anguish or even death is problematic for naturalistic moral realists.

On the other hand, theism assures us that God does not demand of us more than we can bear and that God will guarantee that a morally virtuous life and even self-sacrifice are not in vain if one's trust is in God. In this case, God's existence guarantees that a moral life and happiness will ultimately come together.<sup>55</sup> Naturalists must concede that, in their view, virtue will frequently go unrewarded and that the unjust and wicked will frequently “get away with murder.” In contrast, the true believer is motivated by dedication to a personal being, not to mere abstract facts and duties. Ultimate happiness is not found in some crass material or hedonistic reward, as critics commonly charge, but in the enjoyment of the company of the God whom the believer has served and in whose personhood is the very standard of goodness. Thus the believer can and should be good for goodness' sake. That is, to pursue virtue for its own sake since God's personhood itself is the fount of goodness and God is also the guarantor that a life rightly lived will not, in the final day, be ignored. Atheism is not perfect piety.

## FOR FURTHER READING

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- <sup>1</sup> For a defense of objective moral values, see Paul Copan, "God, Naturalism, and the Foundations of Morality," in *The Future of Atheism: Alister McGrath and Daniel Dennett in Dialogue*, ed. Robert Stewart (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).
- <sup>2</sup> Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Understanding the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011); also, idem, "Are Old Testament Laws Evil?" in *God Is Great, God Is Good: Facing New Challenges to Belief in God*, ed. Chad Meister and William Lane Craig (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).
- <sup>3</sup> On some troubles with a naturalistic moral epistemology, see chapter 6 in Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (New York: Oxford, 1997).
- <sup>4</sup> See Louise Antony, "Atheism as Perfect Piety," in *Is Goodness Without God Good Enough? A Debate on Faith, Secularism, and Ethics*, ed. Robert K. Garcia and Nathan L. King (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).
- <sup>5</sup> Erik J. Wielenberg, "Objective Morality and the Nature of Reality," *American Theological Inquiry* 13, no. 2 (2010): 79. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong takes a similar view regarding the evolution of moral values, but moral facts are like the laws of physics ( $e = mc^2$ ) and mathematics ( $2 + 2 = 4$ ). Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, *Morality Without God?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 92–93.
- <sup>6</sup> Erik J. Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 52. I grant Wielenberg's "nonnaturalistic" label; ultimately his naturalistic worldview is the target of my critique.
- <sup>7</sup> Jean Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), 22.
- <sup>8</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and the Anti-Christ* (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), 55, 70.

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- <sup>9</sup> Bertrand Russell, “A Free Man’s Worship,” in *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1963), 41. Antony and Wielenberg nobly attempt to salvage Russell as a moral realist, yet Russell abandoned his moral realism early on, thanks to George Santayana. By 1927, Russell wrote, “I no longer regard good and evil as objective entities wholly independent of human desires.” Bertrand Russell, *An Outline of Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1927), 238. See Mark D. Linville’s documentation of Russell’s descent into moral subjectivism in *Philosophy and the Christian Worldview: Analysis, Assessment and Development*, ed. David Werther and Mark D. Linville (New York: Continuum, 2012). On this, see Antony’s debate with William Lane Craig on God and morality, <http://videorow.blogspot.com/2010/03/william-lane-craig-discusses-morality.html> (accessed April 15, 2010); see also Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue*.
- <sup>10</sup> J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 115. Note: the issue of power to create moral values is not quite the way to state the matter, but let that pass.
- <sup>11</sup> Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (New York: Basic Books/Harper Collins, 1995), 132–133.
- <sup>12</sup> Erik J. Wielenberg, “In Defense of Non-Natural, Non-Theistic Moral Realism,” *Faith and Philosophy* 26, no. 1 (January 2009): 40n.
- <sup>13</sup> Oddly, atheist Graham Oppy challenges the weakest (straw man) theistic “arguments from morality,” yet he ignores the solid ones, including those pointing to theism’s metaphysical basis for intrinsic human dignity and rights. Graham Oppy, *Arguing for Gods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 352–376.
- <sup>14</sup> Incidentally, naturalists help themselves to another metaphysical free lunch—namely, the beginning of the universe from nothing. Indeed, the big bang cosmological model’s resembling the biblical doctrine of creation out of nothing has not escaped the notice of naturalistic astrophysicists. For instance, John D. Barrow and Joseph Silk acknowledge: “Our new picture is more akin to the traditional metaphysical picture of creation out of nothing, for it predicts a definite beginning to events in time, indeed a definite beginning to time itself.” They ask: “what preceded the event called the ‘big bang’? . . . the answer to our question is simple: nothing.” John D. Barrow and Joseph Silk, *The Left Hand of Creation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 38, 209.

However, if, as Paul Davies points out, the universe was either caused or uncaused (a metaphysical impossibility), then some nonnaturalistic entity independent of the natural world brought it into being.

Likewise, Paul Davies concludes: “‘What caused the big bang?’ . . . One might consider some supernatural force, some agency beyond space and time as being responsible for the big bang, or one might prefer to regard the big bang as an event without a cause. It seems to me that we don’t have too much choice. Either . . . something outside of the physical world . . . or . . . an event without a cause.” Paul Davies, “The Birth of the Cosmos,” in *God, Cosmos, Nature and Creativity*, ed. Jill Gready (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1995), 8–9.

The universe’s being ontologically haunted undermines naturalism since nature itself sprang into being from something outside itself. Though the universe’s cause may be dismissed as a “brute fact,” we’re dealing with something exceedingly powerful—and

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an entity more fundamental than the universe itself. Not all brute facts are equal; some are explanatorily deeper (“more brute”!) than others.

- <sup>15</sup> On the problems with naturalistic accounts of supervenience, see Alvin Plantinga, “Naturalism, Theism, Obligation, and Supervenience,” *Faith and Philosophy* 27 (2010): 247–272.
- <sup>16</sup> Christian Smith, “Does Naturalism Warrant a Moral Belief in Universal Benevolence and Human Rights?,” in *The Believing Primate: Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Reflections on the Origin of Religion*, ed. Jeffrey Schloss and Michael J. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 294.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 311. This example can be found in Ruse’s “Evolutionary Ethics: A Phoenix Arisen,” 241–242, where he humorously refers to the termites’ “rather strange foodstuffs”!
- <sup>18</sup> Michael Shermer, *The Science of Good and Evil* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), 56–77.
- <sup>19</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 37.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 38, 37.
- <sup>21</sup> Michael Ruse, *The Darwinian Paradigm* (London: Routledge, 1989), 262, 268.
- <sup>22</sup> Michael Ruse and E. O. Wilson, “The Evolution of Ethics,” in *Religion and the Natural Sciences*, ed. J. E. Huchingson (Orlando: Harcourt Brace, 1993), 310–311.
- <sup>23</sup> Elliott Sober, *Philosophy of Biology* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1993), 202–208. The genetic fallacy is the ascription of truth or falsity to a belief based solely on its origin. The naturalistic fallacy makes the sneaky move from “is” to “ought”—from factual description to moral prescription.
- <sup>24</sup> Wielenberg, “In Defense of Non-Natural, Non-Theistic Moral Realism,” 35.
- <sup>25</sup> Walter Sinnott-Armstrong affirms humans have freedom and free will, which gives them dignity; *Morality Without God*, 69–70. Michael Shermer emphasizes that humans have “risen above” our genetically determined evolutionary predecessors into moral freedom; *The Science of Good and Evil*, 19–22.
- <sup>26</sup> Humans “can reason, suffer, fall in love, set goals for themselves” and “experience happiness and tell the difference between right and wrong.” Wielenberg, “In Defense of Non-Natural, Non-Theistic Moral Realism,” 40.
- <sup>27</sup> David O. Brink, “Moral Realism and the Sceptical Arguments from Disagreement and Queerness,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 62 (1984): 120. See also Brink’s *Moral Realism and the Foundation of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and his “The Autonomy of Ethics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, ed. Michael Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- <sup>28</sup> Colin McGinn, *The Problem of Consciousness* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 10–11.
- <sup>29</sup> Geoffrey Madell, *Mind and Materialism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), 141.
- <sup>30</sup> David Papineau, *Philosophical Naturalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 119.
- <sup>31</sup> The issue of nonhuman animal consciousness is beside the point; *any* consciousness cannot be accounted for, given naturalism’s context.
- <sup>32</sup> Patricia Churchland, “Epistemology in the Age of Neuroscience,” *Journal of Philosophy* 84 (October 1987): 548–549.
- <sup>33</sup> Richard Rorty, “Untruth and Consequences,” *New Republic* (31 July 1995): 32–36.
- <sup>34</sup> Michael Ruse and E. O. Wilson, “The Evolution of Ethics,” in *Religion and the Natural Sciences*, ed. J. E. Huchingson (Orlando: Harcourt Brace, 1993), 310–311.

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- <sup>35</sup> Michael Ruse, "Evolutionary Ethics: A Phoenix Arisen," in *Issues in Evolutionary Ethics*, ed. Paul Thompson (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995), 236.
- <sup>36</sup> James Rachels, *Created From Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 77.
- <sup>37</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 185.
- <sup>38</sup> Moreover, does Aristotle have more worth than Joe the Plumber because the former has greater rational power?
- <sup>39</sup> William Provine, "Evolution and the Foundation of Ethics," *Marine Biological Laboratory Science* 3 (1988): 27–28.
- <sup>40</sup> Francis Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994), 3.
- <sup>41</sup> Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 111, 113.
- <sup>42</sup> John Searle, *Minds, Brains, and Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986 reprint) 87, 88, 92.
- <sup>43</sup> John Bishop, *Natural Agency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1.
- <sup>44</sup> Ron Bontekoe, *The Nature of Dignity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 15–16.
- <sup>45</sup> For example, William P. Alston, "Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists," in *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy*, ed. Michael D. Beaty (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990); Thomas V. Morris, "Duty and Divine Goodness" and "The Necessity of God's Goodness," in *Anselmian Explorations* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987); Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991); Paul Copan, "The Moral Argument," in *The Rationality of Theism*, ed. Paul Copan and Paul K. Moser (London: Routledge, 2003); William J. Wainwright, *Religion and Morality* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005).
- <sup>46</sup> Antony, "Atheism as Perfect Piety," 70.
- <sup>47</sup> David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 46.
- <sup>48</sup> See chap. 3 in Michael Martin, *Atheism, Morality and Meaning* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Press, 2002).
- <sup>49</sup> Roderick Firth, "Ethical Absolutism and the Ideal Observer," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 12 (1952): 333.
- <sup>50</sup> Even some theists incorrectly argue that necessary moral truths exist independently of God—that is, "murder is wrong" would hold true even if God does not exist. Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 204; Keith Yandell, "Theism, Atheism, and Cosmology," in *Does God Exist?: The Craig–Flew Debate*, ed. Stan W. Wallace (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003), 96. However, their odd view that God is not necessarily existent in all possible worlds is the culprit here; if that is granted, then the intrinsic connection between necessary moral facts and this necessarily good being becomes clear.
- <sup>51</sup> William Lane Craig, "The Most Gruesome of Guests," in *Is Goodness Without God Good Enough?*, ed. Nathan King and Robert Garcia (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 169–171.
- <sup>52</sup> H. O. Mounce, "Morality and Religion," in *Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Brian Davies (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1998), 278.

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- <sup>53</sup> See Linda Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Richard Swinburne, “What Difference Does God Make to Morality?,” in *Is Goodness Without God Good Enough?: A Debate on Faith, Secularism, and Ethics*, ed. Robert K. Garcia and Nathan L. King (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 151–165.
- <sup>54</sup> Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 47.
- <sup>55</sup> Peter Singer and John E. Hare, “Moral Mammals: Does Atheism or Theism Provide the Best Foundation for Human Worth and Morality?,” in *A Place for Truth*, ed. Dallas Willard (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 190.