6. Can we be good without God?

Sunday, March 3, 2013, 10 to 10:50 am, in the Parlor

Leader: David Monyak

St. John in the Wilderness
“Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.”

- 1 Peter 3:15-16 (NSRV)
Reference

- **On Guard Study Guide**, by Dennis Fuller & William Lane Craig. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2010
Series Outline

On Guard. Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision

- **Week 1**: Feb 17
  - 1. What is apologetics?
  - 2. What difference does it make if God exists?

- **Week 2**: Feb 24
  - 3. Why does anything at all exist?
  - 4. Why did the universe begin?
  - 5. Why is the universe fine-tuned for life?

- **Week 3**: Mar 3
  - 6. Can we be good without God?
Series Outline
On Guard. Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision

- **Week 4: Mar 10**
  - 7. What about suffering?

- **Week 5: Mar 17**
  - 8. Who was Jesus?

- **Week 6: Mar 24**
  - 9. Did Jesus rise from the dead?

- **Not covered:**
  - 10. Is Jesus the only way to God?
Eternal Light, shine into our hearts, Eternal Goodness, deliver us from evil, Eternal Power, be our support, Eternal Wisdom, scatter the darkness of our ignorance, Eternal Pity, have mercy upon us; that with all our heart and mind and soul and strength we may seek thy face and be brought by thine infinite mercy to thy holy presence; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

- Alcuin of York, 735-804
The Moral Argument for God
“No one is good but God alone.”

- Mark 10:18 NRSV
Moral Argument for God

Statement of the Argument

The Moral Argument for God:

Premises:
1. If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist
2. Objective moral values and duties do exist

Conclusions. Therefore:
3. God exists.
Moral Argument for God

Definitions: Moral Value, Moral Duty

- **Moral Value**
  - The goodness or “badness” of something

- **Moral Duty**
  - The obligation to do what is right, and not do what is wrong.

- Note the “right thing to do” (a *moral duty*) is not identical with that which is “good” (a positive *moral value*):
  - It is good to work as a firefighter (or a priest, a doctor, a homemaker …), but we are not morally obligated to become firefighters (or a priest, a doctor, a homemaker …)
  - We can be confronted with the need to make a choice between several bad options. Our moral duty would be to try to pick the least “bad” / harmful action.
Moral Argument for God

Definitions: Objective, Subjective

- **Objective**
  - *Independent* of people’s opinions.
  - Example: the laws of nature are true and exist whether we have an opinion about them or not. They exist and are true *objectively*.

- **Subjective**
  - *Dependent* on people’s opinions.
  - Example: to say “coffee is good” is expressing a matter of personal taste, a personal opinion. “Coffee is good” is only true *subjectively*.
  - Example: to say “people should drive on the left side of the road” is to express a collective opinion shared by the people of Ireland and a few other places.
Moral Argument for God

Definitions: Objective, Subjective

- If we say there are **objective** moral values and duties, we mean that there are moral values and duties that are true **regardless** of what people think.

- Example: the *Shoah* (= the Catastrophe; commonly called the Holocaust)
  - The Nazis believed the *Shoah* was “good.” We would say the *Shoah* was an **objective** evil, evil **regardless** of what the Nazis or anyone else believed.
  
  - Suppose the Nazis had won World War II, brainwashing everyone to agree with them, exterminating anyone left who disagreed with them, so that every person still alive on Earth believed the *Shoah* was a good thing.
  
  - We would still say the *Shoah* was evil.
Moral Argument for God

Premise 1. If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.

Defense of Premise 1

- Objective moral values and duties require God.

- As Christians, we claim:
  - **Moral values** are based in God, the highest Good.
  - **Moral duties** spring from God’s commandments, such as the two Greatest commandments, or the Ten Commandments.
If God does not exist, what could possibly be the **objective** basis for moral values or moral duties?

If God does not exist, the only bases possible would appear to be **subjective** in nature:

- A matter of personal opinion or preference (I like coffee)
- Social convention and conditioning (drive on the left side of the road if you are in Ireland)
- A by-product of evolution (inbred tendencies helpful for survival in a more primitive time, now perhaps irrelevant, evolutionary shackles we can liberate ourselves from)
Moral Argument for God

Premise 1. If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.

Defense of Premise 1

- The most common form of atheism is naturalism, the belief that the only thing that exists is the physical world, best described by science.
- Atheists who are naturalists say:
  - Science is morally neutral. There are no moral values in a test tube.
  - Those behaviors called by Christians as “moral” are simply by-products of the evolutionary struggle for survival, and social conditioning.
Charles Darwin wrote:

If … men were reared under precisely the same conditions as hive-bees, there can hardly be a doubt that our unmarried females would, like the worker-bees, think it a sacred duty to kill their brothers, and mothers would strive to kill their fertile daughters; and no one would think of interfering.

In other words, what Christians call moral values and moral duties are just accidents of evolution. They have no objective basis.
Moral Argument for God

Premise 1. If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.

Defense of Premise 1

- When a lion kills a zebra, we don’t condemn the lion as a murderer.

“I’m sorry, officer. I just don’t like tofu.”
When a homo sapiens kills another homo sapiens, on what objective basis can an atheist argue it is any different morally from a lion killing a zebra? Homo sapiens, lions and zebras are all animals.

Atheists can argue “murder” violates social convention, a long-standing, time-tested convention that has contributed to social cohesion. It is however merely arbitrary to label this particular violation of a social convention a “moral” violation. And social conventions are ultimately subjective in nature, the collective opinions of a group of people.
Moral Argument for God

Premise 1. If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.

Defense of Premise 1

- **NOTE:** we are *NOT* saying in this premise:
  - Belief in God is required to live what a Christian would view as a good and decent life.
  - Belief in God is required to recognize objective moral values and duties.

- We are **ONLY** saying *if* one wishes to assert moral values and moral duties exist objectively
  - as opposed to existing subjectively
  - as opposed to existing only as personal opinions or social conventions

the existence of God is required.
Moral Argument for God

Premise 1. If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.

Defense of Premise 1

- **Objective** moral values and duties **require** God.

- Take God out of the picture, and all you’re left with is an apelike creature on a speck of solar dust beset with delusions of moral grandeur.
A common objection by unbelievers to Premise 1 is the **Euthyphro Dilemma**, named after a character in one of Plato’s dialogues.

**The dilemma:**
- Is something good because God wills it?
- Or does God will something because it is good?
Premise 1. If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.

Objection: The Euthyphro Dilemma

- If you say: “something is good because God wills it” then good becomes arbitrary.
  - What if God decides we should hate rather than love each other? What if God commanded child abuse?
- If you say: “God wills something because it is good” then good or bad is independent of God, contradicting Premise 1.
The Euthyphro Dilemma is a false dilemma. There is a third option:

- God wills something because God is Good. God and The Good are same.
- God’s own nature is the standard of goodness, and God’s commandments are expressions of God’s nature.
Plato argued that:

- The Good exists on its own as a “self-existent idea.”
- Moral values like mercy, love, justice exist in a “platonic realm” independently of the world.

This view of the objective existence of moral values and duties independently of God can be termed **Atheistic Moral Platonism**.
Moral Argument for God

Premise 1. If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.

Objection: Atheistic Moral Platonism

- Moral values like mercy, love, justice exist in a "platonic realm" independently of the world.
Problems with *Atheistic Moral Platonism*:

- It is unclear what it means to say that *justice* (for example) exists “out there” independently of the world.
- It does not provide a basis for *moral duties*. There is no *moral lawgiver*.
  - Simply because *justice* exists “out there,” what does that have to do with me? (anymore than the fact that the galaxy M33 exists “out there”?)
  - Vices also exist “out there.” Why should I align myself with one of the “out there” virtues versus one of the “out there” vices? Why should I prefer one over the other?
Problems with **Atheistic Moral Platonism**:  
- Why should creatures who evolve in the realm of the physical world, shaped by the forces of natural selection for survival, have any affinity for those things existing in the Platonic realm of moral values? What could possibly connect them?
**Moral Argument for God**

**Premise 1.** If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.

**Objection: Stubborn Humanism**

- **Stubborn Humanism**: the stark, unsubstantiated assertion that:
  - Whatever contributes to human flourishing is objectively good.
  - Whatever detracts from it is objectively bad.
  - Period.
Problem with Stubborn Humanism:

For this to be more than just a “stubborn faith” of an atheist, they must explain why in a Godless world, “human flourishing” is “morally” superior to, say, the flourishing of ants, or mice?

- They seem guilty of what some animal rights advocates call **speciesism** (= a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one’s own species and against those of members of other species)

- Their endpoint (“human flourishing”) chosen to define “good” is *(for an atheist)* **arbitrary and unjustifiable**.

- It is, in other words, subjective, *not* objective.
Most people, including most atheists, do believe that objective moral values and duties exist.

Our moral experience of the world is that some things are objectively good or evil, right or wrong.

Most of us (including many, if not most atheists) feel strongly that:

- Rape, torture, child abuse, are not just unacceptable behavior, but moral abominations—regardless of the mores of the society in which they occur.
- Love, generosity, self-sacrifice are good in any context or culture.
Objection 1: our moral beliefs have been ingrained into us by evolution and social conditioning, and therefore should be distrusted.

Premise 2. Objective moral values and duties exist.

Objection: Sociobiological Objections
**Moral Argument for God**

**Premise 2.** Objective moral values and duties exist.

**Objection: Sociobiological Objections**

- **Answer:** Just because our moral beliefs have been ingrained into us by evolution and social conditioning does not mean they are not true.
  
  - **The Genetic Fallacy:** trying to invalidate a view by showing how a person came to believe that view.
  
  - **Example:** “The only reason you believe in democracy is because you were raised in a democratic country. Therefore your view that democracy is the best form of government is false.”
Objection 2: because our moral beliefs have been ingrained into us by evolution and social conditioning, we are not justified in holding these beliefs.

- Evolutionary forces shaped us with moral beliefs that have **survival value**, not **truth value**.
- They could be true, but we have no **justification** for accepting them as truth.
Answers to Objection 2:

1. To claim “evolutionary forces shaped us with moral beliefs that have survival value, not necessarily truth value” presupposes God does not exist. If God exists, he would likely guide the evolutionary process so we do have correct beliefs instilled in us.

Romans 2:14-15 NRSV: When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them.
Moral Argument for God

Premise 2. Objective moral values and duties exist.

Objection: Sociobiological Objections

- Answers to Objection 2:
  - 2. To claim “evolutionary forces shaped us with moral beliefs that have survival value, not necessarily truth value” and therefore such beliefs cannot be trusted is a self-defeating argument:
    - Evolutionary forces shape all our beliefs (not just moral beliefs) to have survival value rather than truth value, so all knowledge should then be suspect (including our knowledge of evolution).
Moral Argument for God

Statement of the Argument

- **Premises:**
  1. If God *does not* exist, objective moral values and duties *do not* exist
  2. Objective moral values and duties *do* exist

- **Conclusions. Therefore:**
  3. God exists.
Discussion
Discussion Questions

- If God is essential to moral truth, then how is it possible for the millions and millions of people who don't believe in God to behave morally and ethically?
- Is something good because God wills it? Or does God will something because it is good?
- How would you respond to each of the following assertions?
  - “Moral values like justice, mercy, love, just exist without any foundation.”
  - “Whatever contributes to human flourishing is good, and whatever detracts from it is bad.”
  - “Our moral beliefs have been ingrained into us by evolution and social conditioning.”
- Is it necessary to believe in God for one to be bound by objective morality?