



Lesson 4

The Existence of God—Morality

Apologetics Press Christian Evidences Correspondence Course

Bert Thompson, Ph.D. and Kyle Butt, M.A.

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD— MORALITY

It is a well-known fact that actions have consequences. It also is a well-known fact that beliefs have implications. What a person believes is the main force behind how a person acts. Everyone in the world believes that some things are right and other things are wrong. Thus, every person has some system of morality and ethics.

MORALITY AND ETHICS

As we begin this study about the importance and origin of morality and ethics, a brief definition of terms is in order. The English word “morality” comes from the Latin word *mores*, meaning habits or customs. Morality, therefore, is the habit of following the rules of proper conduct. “Ethics” is from a Greek word meaning “character.” The standard dictionary definition of ethics is “the discipline dealing with what is good and bad or right and wrong; a group of moral principles or a set of values.” Ethics, then, is the system that a person uses to determine which things are right and wrong. Morals and ethics deal with proper conduct, duty, and virtue (or, in short, how we ought to behave). The question now before us is: How **should** we behave?

If concepts such as “good and evil, right and wrong” do exist, how do we go about determining whether a particular thing is right or wrong? At times, people do not agree on the exact way to decide whether something is right or wrong. However, everyone agrees that some things are right and other things are wrong. Morals and ethics are universally accepted traits among the human family. Therefore, their origin must be explained. Simply put, there are only two options. Either morality and ethics originate from the mind of God, Who is the source of all goodness, or they originate from within man himself.

One thing is for certain. The choices that we are being required to make today are becoming increasingly complex. Should we approve of abortion? Shall we encourage surrogate motherhood? Should we advocate the death penalty? Shall we recommend euthanasia? We will not be able to answer these and other similar questions in any meaningful way by relying merely on our individual intuitions or emotions. Neither will we be able to answer them by appealing to the past. In many ways, the problems facing us today are unlike those that faced generations long since gone. How will we set our standards?

The person who refuses to recognize the existence of God has only one choice when it comes to explaining morality—it must have originated within man. However, since man is viewed as little more than the last animal produced by the long, meandering, chance process of evolution, this becomes a problem. A lion is not plagued by guilt after killing a gazelle for its noon meal. A dog does not experience remorse after stealing a bone from another dog. Yet man, who also is supposed to have evolved, feels both guilt and remorse when he commits certain acts that violate accepted standards of morality and ethics.

If our society were based on the concept of godless evolution, this Earth would be a miserable place to live indeed. Dr. Richard Dawkins, the famous evolutionist of Great Britain, once admitted that believing in evolution and then acting consistently upon that belief would produce “a very nasty society in which to live.” Indeed it would. Some years ago, another well-known evolutionist, Dr. Desmond Morris, wrote a book—*The Naked Ape*—about the evolution of man. That title brings to mind an interesting question. Since no other animal throughout evolutionary history has been able to locate and live by moral standards, should we somehow trust man—as a “naked ape”—to do any better? Matter—by itself—does not have the power to “evolve” **any** sense of moral consciousness. If there is no purpose in the Universe (which is the position evolutionists are forced to take), then there is no purpose to morality or ethics.

Unbelief therefore must argue (and does argue!) that there is no ultimate standard of moral/ethical truth and that, at best, morality and ethics are different for everyone. If that were true, who could ever suggest that someone else’s behavior was “wrong,” or that a person “ought” or “ought not” to do something? The simple fact of the matter is that unbelievers cannot explain the origin of morality and ethics. Whether the unbeliever is willing to admit it or not, if there is no God then man lives in an environment where “anything goes.” When the famous author Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote his book, *The Brothers Karamazov*, he had one of the characters (Ivan) remark: “If there is no God, everything is permitted.” Oh how true! If evolution is correct and there is no God, people can do anything they want. Thus, it is impossible to formulate any system of ethics by which one can tell the difference between “right” and “wrong.”

With no way to reach a rational conclusion on what is ethical, man finds himself lost on a sea of despair where “might makes right,” where “the strong crushes the weak,” and where each man does what is right in his own eyes. Morals and ethics without God is not a pretty picture, as the following investigation of some different systems of morality documents all too well.

Relativism, for example, says that there are no universal rules for determining morals and ethics. Since all value systems are considered to be the results of culture and environment, one system is just as good as another; no one system has the right to claim it is the “correct” system that men should use to determine their actions. According to relativism, if a society wants to kill all children 8 years old or younger as a means of population control, no one could say (legitimately) that it is the “wrong” thing to do. However, all humans know that some things are right and other things are wrong. It is a difficult (if not impossible) thing indeed to find a society where a man is applauded for betraying those who befriend him, willfully murdering his own children, or committing treason against his nation. For this reason, very few people are willing to defend absolute relativism.

Hedonism is the philosophy which claims that the aim of “moral” conduct is to achieve the greatest possible pleasure with the least amount of pain. In fact, one famous atheist, Aldous Huxley, said that he had his own reasons for insisting on a society where “meaninglessness” reigned supreme. He wanted a world with no meaning, he said, because he felt that morality “interfered with his sexual freedom.” You don’t have to “read between the lines” of such a statement to understand his point, do you? Hedonism basically says if an action provides pleasure to the person who is doing it, and doesn’t really hurt anyone, then it is acceptable.

Yet consider the ultimate consequences of this kind of thinking. Sexually transmitted diseases are occurring in huge proportions all across the globe. Teenage pregnancies are rampant. Babies are born already infected with deadly diseases such as AIDS because their mothers contracted the diseases during their pregnancies and passed them on to their unborn children. In many places, divorces are so common that they equal or outnumber marriages. Cities are filled with rapists, stalkers, and child molesters. What else, pray tell, will have to go wrong before it becomes apparent that attempts to live without God are flawed?

Utilitarianism is the system of belief which suggests that “good” is determined by what produces the greatest amount of pleasure for the greatest number of people. An accurate explanation of this view is found in a book by Katherine Tait, the only daughter of renowned British agnostic, Bertrand Russell. In *My Father, Bertrand Russell*, Mrs. Tait described what it was like to live in the Russell household with her brothers. She commented, for example, that her father firmly believed that parents should teach a child “with its very first breath that it has entered into a moral world.” But as any evolutionist would, her father had great difficulty in defending such a position. Mrs. Tait recounted in her book the fact that, as a child she would say, “I don’t want to; why should I?” when her father told her that she “ought” to

do something. She observed that a normal parent might respond by saying, “because I say so,” or “because your father says so,” or “because God says so.” Admittedly, however, Bertrand Russell was not your “normal” parent. He would say to young Katherine, “Because more people will be happy if you do than if you don’t.” “So what!” she would scream. “I don’t care about other people!” “Oh, but you should,” her father would reply. In her youthful naïveté, Katherine would ask, “But why?” To which her father then would respond: “Because more people will be happy if you do than if you don’t.” In the end, however, Mrs. Tait wrote: “We felt the heavy pressure of his rectitude and obeyed, but the reason was not convincing—neither to us nor to him.” Would it be convincing—for any rational human being?

Situationism is the idea that something is “right” because a person decides it is right in any given instance. According to this philosophy, there is nothing that always is right or always is wrong; each individual situation determines the correctness of an action.

If a sane man, therefore, decided it was “right” in a certain situation to kill his business competitors, how could we (justifiably) ask someone (like the police) to stop him? On the contrary, some things **always** are right and some things **always** are wrong. Situationism is not a worthwhile philosophy because it cannot deal with moral absolutes that are recognized by all humans as both legitimate and necessary. Furthermore, when two people find themselves in a real-life “sticky” situation, and one wants to do one thing while the other wants to do something entirely different, who, then, is “right”? Without any system of absolutes, who gets to choose?

Determinism is the idea that man is not really responsible for his actions. This belief claims that the long evolutionary process has instilled in man certain instincts that determine his actions. According to this concept, then, a person can do anything that he feels like doing and not be held responsible for it. For example, if a person steals something, who is responsible? Determinism would claim that his “evolutionary past” is responsible, or that “his genes made him do it.” Yet common sense tells us that every rational person is responsible for his own actions—else why would we bother having laws, police, courts, judges, or jails!

THE PRACTICAL IMPACT OF MORALS AND ETHICS WITHOUT GOD

What a person believes greatly impacts how a person acts. This fact can be seen quite easily by looking at the effects of incorrect beliefs concerning morality and ethics. What a terrible price we humans have paid because of our incorrect beliefs—and the actions based on those beliefs! In the evolutionary scheme of things, man occupies the same status as an animal. He may be more knowledgeable, more intellectual, and more scheming than

his counterparts in the animal kingdom, but when all is said and done, he is still an animal. And so the question is bound to arise: Why should man be treated any different than an animal when his life no longer is thought to be worth living? Truth be told, there is no logical reason that he should. From cradle to grave, life—from an evolutionary viewpoint—is viewed as “disposable.” Thus, it is not surprising that we see “weak” or “unwanted” humans being destroyed just as if they **were** animals. On January 22, 1973, the United States Supreme Court, in a 7-to-2 vote, decided that the human embryo growing within the human womb no longer is “human.” Rather, it is a “thing” that may be ripped out, slaughtered, and tossed into the nearest garbage dump. And the lengths to which some will go in order to justify this position defy description.

According to Charles Darwin, “weaker” members of society are unfit and, under the laws of nature, normally would not survive. When a prize racehorse stumbles and breaks its leg, and even the most highly skilled veterinarian is unable to repair it, the animal often is put out of its misery with a bullet to the brain. That racehorse, however, is not someone’s father, mother, brother, or sister—which is why we shoot horses. Since nature “selects against” the weaker animal, and since man is viewed as an animal, why should man expect any better treatment? Who is weaker than a tiny baby growing in the womb? The baby cannot defend himself, cannot feed himself, and cannot even speak for himself. He (or she) is completely dependent upon the mother for life. So should it surprise us that some are willing to figuratively “put a bullet in its brain” and murder it through abortion—as if it were as dispensable as a broken-down racehorse?

Once those who are helpless, weak, and **young** become dispensable, who will be next? Will it be the helpless, weak, and **old**? Will it be those whose sickness makes them “unfit” to survive in a society that values the beautiful and the strong? Will it be those who are lame, blind, or maimed? Will it be those whose IQ falls below a certain point, or whose skin is a different color? Some in our society already are calling for such “cleansing” processes to be made legal, using euphemisms such as “euthanasia” or “mercy killing.” After all, we shoot horses, don’t we?

MORALITY, ETHICS, AND THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

The late atheist of Harvard University, George Gaylord Simpson, once wrote that “morals arise only in man.” By saying this, he verified (whether or not he meant to) the fact that morality is something unique to humankind. No two apes ever sat down and said, “Hey, I’ve got a good idea. Today let’s talk about morals and ethics.” But all too often children are taught that they are little more than “naked apes”—and they are intelligent enough to figure out exactly what that means.

Convince children they evolved from animals—and they will **act** like animals! With guns blasting, children (some as young as 10 or 11 years old) bearing a grudge or wanting to settle a score walk into school hallways, classrooms, and libraries, shoot until they have emptied every round from all the gun's chambers, and watch gleefully as shell casings, teachers, and classmates alike fall silently at their feet. Then parents, administrators, and friends congregate in the middle of the bloody aftermath and wonder, "What went wrong." Yet why should we be shocked or enraged by such conduct? According to the laws of nature, only the strong survive. Children have been taught that religion is an outward sign of an inner weakness—a crutch used by people too weak and cowardly to "pull themselves up by their own boot straps." Why, then, should we be at all surprised when they react accordingly (even violently!)? After all, the "law" of nature is "kill or be killed."

The truth of the matter is that only the approach which states that morals originate in the mind of God is consistent logically and internally; only the approach that calculates God into the Universe can provide an objective, absolute set of morals and ethics. But why is this the case?

True morality is based on the fact of the unchanging nature of Almighty God. He is eternal (1 Timothy 1:17), just and righteous (Psalm 89:14), and always consistent (Malachi 3:6). In the ultimate sense, only God is good (Mark 1:18). Furthermore, since He is perfect (Matthew 5:48), the morality that comes from such a God is good, unchanging, just, and consistent—exactly the opposite of the relativistic, deterministic, or situational ethics of the world.

When people suggest that humans feel responsibility for wrong action, they recognize that there is indeed within each man, woman, and child a sense of moral responsibility which comes from the fact that God is our Creator (Psalm 1:3) and that we have been made in His spiritual image (Genesis 1:26-27). As the potter has the right to rule over the clay that he molds (Romans 9:21), so our Maker has the sovereign right over His creation since in His hand "is the soul of every living thing" (Job 12:1). As the biblical character Job learned much too late, God is not a man with whom a person can argue (Job 9:32).

Whatever God does, commands, and approves is good (Psalm 119:39, 68). What He has commanded results from Who He is, and therefore also is good. In the Old Testament, the prophet Micah declared of God: "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). In the New Testament, the apostle Peter wrote: "But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15).

The main idea of ethics based on God concerns the relationship of man to his Creator. God Himself is the unchanging standard of moral law. His perfectly holy nature is the foundation upon which “right” and “wrong,” “good” and “evil” are built. God’s will is the ultimate ground of moral obligation. Why are we to be holy? Because God is holy (1 Peter 1:16). Why are we not to lie (Colossians 3:9)? Because God does not lie (Hebrews 6:18). Since God’s nature is unchanging, it follows that moral law, which reflects His divine nature, is equally unchanging.

While there have been times in human history when each man “did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6), that never was God’s plan. He has not left us to our own devices to determine what is right and wrong, because He knew that through sin man’s heart would become “exceedingly corrupt” (Jeremiah 17:9). Therefore, God “has spoken” (Hebrews 1:1), and by speaking He has made known to man His laws and rules through the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Thus, mankind is expected to act in a morally responsible way (Matthew 19:9; Acts 17:3) by following biblical laws and rules.

Eventually, each of us will meet “the righteous judgment of God, Who will render to every man according to his works” (Romans 2:5-6). It therefore benefits us to “live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age” (Titus 2:12) because one fact is certain: All men will face the chilling waters of death. Will you face death having lived your life with godless morals and wavering ethics, or will you enter into death knowing that you followed the morals that are unchanging and certain because they originated from the nature of the great Creator-God?



Published by Apologetics Press, Inc. Additional copies may be ordered from our offices at: 230 Landmark Drive, Montgomery, Alabama 36117, USA, 334/272-8558. If you wish to have the test portion of the lesson graded, return it to the church or individual who provided you with the lesson. Returning it to Apologetics Press will result in your receiving a delayed response. Copyright © 2001

3. Morals and ethics arise only in which group of living things?
 - (a) All mammals
 - (b) Fish
 - (c) Only humans
 - (d) Humans and some animals
4. Which phrase best describes the things that God does or approves?
 - (a) Sometimes bad
 - (b) Almost always good
 - (c) Always good
 - (d) Neither good nor bad
5. A society based on the idea of godless evolution would be which of the following?
 - (a) Wonderful
 - (b) Neutral
 - (c) Terrible
 - (d) Pleasant

MATCHING

Match the Bible verse with the main idea in the verse (place the correct letter in the provided space by each number).

- | | |
|--|--------------------|
| 1. ___ God is eternal | A. Titus 2:12 |
| 2. ___ God is holy | B. Romans 2:5-6 |
| 3. ___ God is good | C. 1 Timothy 1:17 |
| 4. ___ God is perfect | D. Hebrews 6:18 |
| 5. ___ Man is made in the image of God | E. Matthew 5:48 |
| 6. ___ God cannot lie | F. Genesis 1:26-27 |
| 7. ___ Man should live soberly, righteously, and godly | G. Mark 10:18 |
| 8. ___ God will render to every man according to his works | H. 1 Peter 1:15-16 |

FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. What a person _____ is the main force behind how a person _____.

2. Everyone agrees that some things are _____ and other things are _____.
3. If _____ is correct and there is no _____, then people can do _____ they want.
4. In the evolutionary scheme of things, _____ occupies the same status as an _____.
5. Convince children they came from _____ and they will act like _____.

NOTES/COMMENTS

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____

POSTAL CODE _____ DATE _____