

*Grounding Morality:  
Judæo-Christianity's Explanatory Power for Moral Realism*

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**Abstract:** Since the 9/11 bombing, religion, terrorism and violence have been associated and have been viewed to be “coextensive”. The leading voice of secularism, darwinistic evolutionism and atheism (i.e., Dennett, Harris, Dawkins and the late Hitchens) found their way into popular media and publication and had an old hardline skeptic stance “repacked” as New Atheism. This apparent resurgence of skepticism to the possibility, probability and reality of the Supernatural (God) has been, in some way, gaining success in owning the explanation for the phenomenon of morality eliminating any sense of religion, if possible. But are their claims epistemically and ontologically viable?

This paper will revisit, compare and contrast, and examine the new and the preexisting worldviews and ideologies that actively participate in the contemporary discussion of moral issues. More specifically, this critique will look into the assumptions, presuppositions of Evolutionist, Secular Humanist, Post-marxist, Post-feminist (and other dominant atheist frameworks) that attempt at explaining morality and its nature. The findings will be juxtaposed against the Judæo-Christian paradigm, as it is the traditional and standard argument on the need for God as the ground of moral values and duties.

What this paper wishes to accomplish is a clear and coherent set of explanations which the other contrarian perspectives may consider viable as they consider present their ideas elsewhere. Finally, the paper aims to find its contextual significance in the Philippines as the country is slowly, but steadily receiving the winds of atheistic/materialistic ideologies through contemporary media: print, visual, and social.

**Keywords:** *Morality , Moral Realism, Judæo-Christian Philosophy, Materialism*

### **Introduction**

Very often now a days, people are much fonder of moral pronouncements (or as they seem to be). With the aid of social media, everyone the exposure and access to it can suddenly become a “moral philosopher”, when it comes to government policies, social issues, civil rights and whatnot. However, only a very few of them, as observed, are aware of the ramifications, entailment and assumptions of their “moral views”. To the farther end of the spectrum, one might even deny the objectivity of morality. Some, like other secular humanists, would hold the opposite poles of logic by asserting the morality is both subjective and objective (whatever that means). The other extreme end of the discussion will be occupied by people who are ‘fundamentalists’ that they will impose a bigoted stance of moral laws as informed or by a higher deity (Cf. Divine Command) (e.g., jihadists and the ISIS terrorist group).

But see that most, if not all of these claimants unto morality do not necessarily have the proper grounding/basis/warrant for their carrying out of their ‘moral’ convictions. They only, as it appears, assume the moral framework and do/argue what they see fit. Truly, they demonstrate an “understanding” of morality, without the proper “grounding” of it. This

phenomenon posts a serious problem on the principle and praxis of morality, for when there is no reference point, from which one grasps his/her moral assertions, any discussion on morality can easily slide down to the dispersed discourse of relativism, disallowing anyone, if at all, to claim on what morality is ala-Nietzsche's Parable of the Madman.

With this lurking predicament, this paper seeks to answer the question: How does the Judæo-Christian worldview provide a better grasp of the moral experience in the human realm of existence and possess a more potent explanation for the phenomenon of morality across culture and history? The question emerges from the extant debates and discussions on Morality between and among competing worldviews and theories on Ethics. In the process, the paper will draw out fine distinctions on terms and concepts that will shed light to this topic and wishes to land a coherent conclusion on how and why the Judæo-Christian philosophy's explanation best corresponds or resembles the moral reality and moral knowledge accessible to human beings.

## Theoretical Framework

The paper synthesizes the current trends and discussions in Philosophy of Religion, particularly from Christian Philosophy as propounded by William Lane Craig, 2008, Dinesh D'souza, 2007, J. Budziszewski, 2012, Plantinga, 2000, and Swineburne, 2016.

## Methodology

As a Descriptive-Analytic paper, this study gathered, revisited, and contrasted extant arguments and discussion over the topic. After a careful selection of proper representative ideas and arguments, the discussion went on with premise-implication discussion and grounded it in the historical facts as substantiation for the formal arguments forwarded.

## Body/Findings

Accordingly, this paper argues that God, i.e., the Christian God is the best explanation and grounding for morality. There are two major contentions that this paper defends:

1. *Christian theism provides for a sound grounding for objective moral values and duties.*
2. *Christian theism offers a sound explanation for the nature of Morality.*

### 1. *Christian theism provides for a sound grounding for objective moral values and duties.*

In broad sketch, people can all concede to the fact that morality has this one goal: to Recognize, Respect, and Uphold human life. No one has to be a moral philosopher or a moral theologian to understand this goal. To take the negative of that proposition is absurdity.

The goal to recognize, respect and uphold human life basically presupposes two notions:

○ First, human life has inherent value; that taking away, withholding, or trumping upon that value is necessarily evil.

○ The second presupposition it has is that recognizing, respecting and upholding human life needs to be 'acted upon', than merely discussed in theories. There are things *ought* to be done or *ought not* to be done with reference to the worth and value of the human person.

Here, a clear distinction between Moral Values and Moral Duties that constitute our moral experiences is seen. By Moral Values, one means that there are objectively good and objectively evil (e.g., the

Holocaust or the Plaza Miranda Bombing). Moral Duties, on the other hand, mean that there are objectively right and objectively wrong actions. Moral Duties tell people that there are things that are "unconditionally obligatory or impermissible" and these everyone ought to or ought not to do. Notice, however, that "OUGHT TO" does not imply "WILL". It asserts that, what people HAVE TO DO does not mean that people are going to really CHOOSE it. At times, the things people have to do, they willfully drown by what they WANT to do.

There are situations which tell that it is as if they are imperatives that obeying or disobeying them makes us accountable to an authority, thus the phrase "Moral Law" or as more familiarly noted by Kant, 1788: "'Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing awe and admiration the more frequently and continuously reflection is occupied with them: the starred heaven above me and the moral law within me". This feeling of accountability is what people rather call as "conscience". By "conscience", what one may say is that as long as someone is a conscious, free willing human being, s/he cannot escape the silent, inner grip after NOT helping an old woman pass across the street in front of honking vehicles when s/he had the chance to do so or help a pregnant carry her obviously heavy stuff as she takes the stiff staircase.

While contrarian perspectives may ask the skeptical "Could this be mere conditioning or an effect of dogma?" One could fairly doubt. The human impulse to react to those instances makes one doubt. Or, to extend the skepticism, some may ask "Could this be instinct?" Let alone. Budziszewski, 2012 of University of Texas forwards: "conscience must be more than just instincts, because there are times that our conscience goes against our instincts." The 20<sup>th</sup> century English thinker, Lewis, 1952 provides the following illustrative explanation:

"But feeling a desire to help is quite different that you ought to help whether you want it or not. Supposing you hear a cry for help from a man in danger. You will probably feel two desires— one a desire to give help (due to your herd instinct), the other a desire to keep out of danger (due to the instinct for self-preservation). But you will find inside you, in addition to these two impulses, a third thing which tells you that you ought to follow the impulse to help, and suppress the impulse to run away. The Moral Law tells us the tune we have to play: our instincts are merely the keys".

Now, traditionally, God is the basis of human moral values and duties. As St. Anselm observes, "God

is the greatest conceivable being”. Not only does it mean that God is perfectly good, but also God is the LOCUS and PARADIGM of morality.

Far from being arbitrary, as one can expect from the Euthyphro dilemma, God commands something because HE IS THE ULTIMATE GOOD. God, by nature is Holy, Loving, Kind, Generous (Cf. Descartes’ notion of a benevolent God) among others, and because of that, one can have the basis of objective moral values.

Now, while this is a classic, traditional challenge to the general “Divine Command Theory” (DCT) of morality, this dilemma has been proven demonstrably false in its hermeneutical usage. First, those who use this challenge against Christian Theism virtually disregards that Socrates (as recorded by Plato) used this to expose the fault in the assumed religion of Euthyphro (and the Greeks) as a source of their pride (hubris), i.e., the Greek polytheistic religion. Remember that Socrates was charged of two crimes: corruption of mind of the minor and rebellion against the Greek religion. Hence, in its literary and historical context, the backdrop of Euthyphro dialogue was Greek polytheism, which Socrates questioned. Christianity is monotheistic; hence, it is a category error to use the Euthyphro dilemma to Christianity. This even undermines the fact that Socrates suggestively believed in a monotheistic deity that is not subjected to moral laws, but is originator (Gk. *Archegos*) (see Stone, 1988).

In the Judæo-Christian tradition, it is evidently seen that moral duties and obligations stem out from the Divine Commandments: *love God with all your heart, with all you mind, with all your strength; and love others as you love yourselves*. From this, selfishness, stealing, murder and the like as objectively wrong, hence objectively condemnable. But it did not end there, because when Jesus instituted the New Covenant, one hears: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 14:34, ESV, 2021). And this the Apostle Paul perfectly captures and understands in one of his Epistles: “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8, ESV, 2021). Only in Christianity will one see that the one who gave the command is the first one to obey it.

Thus, in Christian theism, morality is all throughout valid, objective, and binding, not only because moral laws exist wholly apart and independent of the human mind and opinion. But more astoundingly because the so-called “commander” Himself did not hesitate to be subjected to the “commandment” we are to obey. Thence, the attempt to still prove the intrinsic and objective value of obedience, self-sacrifice and selfless

love renders moot in this light. For once, the locus of morality proves to be a competent and worthy *Archegos*.

2. *Christian theism offers a sound explanation for the nature of Morality.*

From the first contention, one can clearly see how and why morality operates. Morality requires, if not demonstrates certain characteristics, which the Christian theistic paradigm could be the best explanation. Among others, one sees how Morality is Personal, Rational and Binding.

Morality is Personal in the strict sense that it is directed at and requires the agency of human personhood. It is human specific:

“Primatologist Franz de Waal, who studies chimpanzees and has done much to emphasize their close kinship with humans, admits that morality is something that chimps don’t have. ‘It is hard to believe that animals weigh their own interests against the rights of others, that they develop a vision of the greater good of society, or that they feel lifelong guilt about something that they should have not done.’” (D’souza, 2007).

In the Judæo-Christian framework, Morality is ingrained, embedded and intrinsic to human beings, because they are “created in God’s image” (Genesis 1:26). It follows that any human being regardless of race, class, gender and phase of development has inalienable and inviolable rights—all under the premise of being human. Any attempt to mitigate or deny such inherent rights are condemned to be immoral, at worst, evil.

The Nazis had to justify and convince themselves that the Jews were less than human beings in order to legitimize the Holocaust (Cf. Turek, 2014). Why? Because they understood that if they were to commit that atrocity it has to be on a non-human or sub-human subject. The gas chambers of Auschwitz are counter-intuitive evidence that PERSONALITY is by nature predicated unto Morality. But why? Where did the Nazis get this sense, which they willfully suppressed amongst themselves? It is from the brute fact that humans are bearers of the *imago dei*—God’s image.

Atheism, moreover, that grounds morality in the natural alone, is highly doubtful in this assertion. One may logically ask the question: how can nature, which is by itself non-moral, be the ground of morality? On the Naturalistic point of view, morality is just a by-product of socio-biological Evolution. The renowned atheist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Russel, 1963 opines: “*Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the*

end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of ACCIDENTAL COLLOCATION OF ATOMS...” (emphasis added). Sustaining that sense, one sees that in the naturalistic perspective, humans are, in the words of the Soviet Biologist Alexander Oparin, just a by-product of “the primordial slime”, as if Matter + Chance + Energy, and here come the humans! A bleep on the radar of time!

Dawkins, 1996 boldly upholds this point. He reports:

“In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, and other people are going to get lucky; and you won’t find rhyme and reason to it, *nor any justice*. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is at the bottom, no design, no purpose, *no evil and no good*. Nothing but blind pitiless indifference. *DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is, and we dance to its music*” (emphasis added).

At its core, atheism is not humanistic, at all.

Secondly, Morality is Rational. Morality allows people to achieve ultimate ends and it is discoverable by reason. The Ten Commandments and its focus on the value of family as a prerequisite for a great civilization anticipated that precept.

By the very logic of causation/causality, for instance, one knows that torturing a baby is wrong and bad, not solely because it does not uphold the welfare of the baby, but torture does not uphold or lead to order at all. And regardless of argumentative circumvention, places like the Auschwitz of the 1940s or the Guantanamo in the contemporary era are condemned as illegal and immoral institutions, because they flout the rule of law, which entails violating the universal notions of Justice and Equality. And with Justice and Equality violated, consequences happen, wars erupt. Order is toppled.

How does the Christian framework account for this? Because only in the Christian framework will one see that “In the beginning was the Word (LOGOS)” (Cf. John 1, ESV, 2021). And that Reason (Logos) is not a mere abstraction, but a PERSON, i.e., the unembodied intelligence/mind becoming flesh. The sense of order as opposed to chaos is first instituted by the Divine Reason, who is the Second person in the Trinity. The Christian framework informs and even commands people to choose and value order, which aligns to that transcendent intention and a product of a divine personal intelligence. In the face of absurdities,

one ought to choose life, because it is the logical option. Life and Reason interweave in the Christian framework of morality, because the very LOGOS or reason why everything at all exists (Cf. Colossians 1:15-20, ESV, 2021), is also the one who said “I am the WAY, the TRUTH and the LIFE.” No other worldviews can better offer us that kind of approach to human worth and value.

Contrastingly, from the atheist framework, human logic and reason is the basis on which we distinguish what is moral or not. But it begs the question: Who’s reason must consider? On what logic? A great part of West Asia is in chaos today because both parties—Israelis and Palestinians—are working under the ‘logic’ of retaliation and unforgiveness. China and the Philippines are in current conflict, because one of the countries appeals to the ‘logic’ of ancient boundaries, while the other on the ‘logic’ of current ruling. North Korea is in conflict with South Korea and Japan due to the ‘logic’ of geo-political and economic autonomy. In times when there are conflicting values, who’s reason is legitimate to arbitrate? Once more, the need for an objective, transcendent standard demands to be recognized.

Furthermore, if Morality is not grounded in God, who or what is the United Nation for it to arbitrate and say that there is an “objective” sense of ownership and self-determination, but guided by overarching principles of “realization of a just and equitable international economic order”? (Cf. Preamble, United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea [UNCLoS]).

History reminds: the Nuremberg Trials, 1946 were not executed solely because of the reason or logic of a specific geopolitical party, but out of UNIVERSALS AND ABSOLUTES, stipulating:

“The following acts, or any of them, are crimes coming within the jurisdiction of the Tribunal for which there shall be individual responsibility:

(a) CRIMES AGAINST PEACE: namely, planning, preparation, initiation or waging of a war of aggression, or a war in violation of international treaties, agreements or assurances, or participation in a common plan or conspiracy for the accomplishment of any of the foregoing ;

(b) WAR CRIMES: namely, violations of the laws or customs of war. Such violations shall include, but not be limited to, murder, ill-treatment

or deportation to slave labor or for any other purpose of civilian population of or in occupied territory, murder or ill-treatment of prisoners of war or persons on the seas, killing of hostages, plunder of public or private property, wanton destruction of cities, towns or villages, or devastation not justified by military necessity;

(c) **CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY:** namely, murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, and other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population, before or during the war; or persecutions on political, racial or religious grounds in execution of or in connection with any crime within the jurisdiction of the Tribunal, whether or not in violation of the domestic law of the country where perpetrated.”

In any atheistic framework, morality is derived on how People agree on what is normative or non-normative on the basis of Contract (i.e., Social Contract). But then again, it begs the questions: Where does the CONTRACT base its terms? Where do the agreeing parties get their terms?

By reason and logic, humans only discovered, NOT FOUNDED, these UNIVERSALS AND ABSOLUTES. In the final analysis, human reason as ground for morality that strives to achieve peace and prosperity in an arbitrary way dies a death of a thousand qualifications since, if human reason is the moral anchor, then all humans who are capable of reasoning could claim to be an anchor, practically leaving and having no anchor at all.

To this effect, Atheism needs to smuggle in the Christian notions of law and order to sustain its framework (Morality shouts... UNFAIR!).

Finally, Morality is binding and necessary with reference to moral accountability. This statement logically flows out from the undeniable notion of MORAL OBLIGATION, both in the immediate and ultimate levels. Christian theism tells informs that “while we (the believers) are in the world, we are not of the world (John 15:19, ESV, 2021)”. Simply, life is not only in the here-and-now, but there is the ultimate, transcendent state—the realm of the afterlife where cosmic justice awaits. Christians rather call this as the Blessed Hope, when the Christ returns and judges the living and the dead and gives the ultimate verdict on all crimes and injustices that seemed to have escaped human laws. The Russian novelist, Leo Tolstoy,

captures this notion in his story “God sees the truth, but waits”. Needless to say, but God stands as the moral law giver.

Far from being just a wishful thinking, the hope for moral accountability unto cosmic justice is not just a mere invention of the Church Fathers who allegedly made an illusion of the blissful afterlife to maintain control over the believers. Theist and Atheist Anthropologists and Mythicists alike agree that heaven, if it were “an illusory, wishful desire to escape injustice and suffering” is not the only common theme in the base cultural narratives of peoples and tribes, but also “hell”. Vulliamy, 1926 and Ellwood, 2008 separately account that if heaven was only a collective wish of bliss, what does “hell”—ultimate punishment—in all of these myths and cultures explain? It only proves that the sense of cosmic justice, that is the ultimate reward and punishment—is ingrained in the human psyche and is far from being merely invented and arbitrated. The Christian framework explains that “Eternity is put into man’s heart (Ecclesiastes 3:11, ESV, 2021)”, as Lewis, 1952 upholds: “Christianity asserts that every individual human being is going to live forever, and this must be either true or false”.

Atheism could not have an account for this notion of “eschatology”. While it upholds Moral accountability in the here-and-now, it does not and cannot claim any sense to a transcendent, ultimate justice because there is no afterlife to expect (Cf. Lamont, 1997). In the absence of the transcendent realm, atheism concedes to the injustices it so-called “immoral”, as ultimate and final. In atheism, people who commit atrocities—great or petty—perish with their crime, without punishment, without accountability. In atheistic framework still, the cosmos grants the likes of Hitler, Stalin, Mao and Polpot and the mundane drug pushers that the present Duterte administration runs after a, “cosmic acquittal without any trial”. If this was true, then atheism does not take away the pain. It only takes away the hope.

## Conclusions

Now that the aforementioned terrains of morality (both on ontology and epistemology) were explored on the standard of plausibility, it is not far from reason to believe that one has proven that Christian theism offers the best explanation of the existence of objective moral values and duties. It has a full account of why, at all, humans have this complex moral experience that bespeaks of the here-and-now and anticipates the beyond.

If God is not the ground of morality, if Christian theism is false, and the contrary (i.e., atheism) was true, this one question remains: why must

people think that human beings have an objective moral worth, when in a relatively short period of time, they will just all perish together with this infinitesimal speck of dust, called the planet earth? Fortunately, rather providentially, "Somebody" from the outside says (to this extent): *I don't want you to perish, but have eternal life, because you are important to Me even before the creation of all space, time, matter, and energy.*

### Recommendations

In light of the foregoing discussion, following are the recommendations:

1. Localised version and context of the discussion can be done, e.g., cultural and educational implications of the Judæo-Christian moral-ontological framework.

2. True and formal experimental, i.e., Quantitative, studies can be executed for tertiary subjects in Ethics and Moral Philosophy, applying the Judæo-Christian moral-ontological framework.

3. More Filipino Christian philosophizing could be explored as the Philippine society faces the tides of secularism and postmodern cultural influences.

4. Segmented philosophical analysis can be explored, within each area of Philosophy (e.g., Metaphysics, Epistemology, etc.), from a consciously and alternatively Judæo-Christian stance.

5. Pluralistic discourse can be employed in the discussion of certain issues, especially those that particularly marginalizes the Judæo-Christian perspective as a viable academic stance.

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