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## *Isn't Morality Relative?*

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**It** is widely accepted in the Western world today that morality is relative. People who say this usually mean that morality is a matter of personal or cultural sentiment that has no objective basis in reality. Many modern people tend to think of the physical world as consisting of matters of fact (it's not relative whether water is H<sub>2</sub>O) but of morality as being a matter of subjective opinion.

If we accept the modern, secular story of the world, this is a natural belief. If there is no higher authority on moral issues than individual or group opinion, then moral judgments are indeed subjective. Further, if the naturalistic story is true, and all that exists are matter and energy governed by natural laws, then good and evil are illusory concepts with no basis in reality. After all, no material thing has the property of being good or evil; there are no good or evil atoms or molecules, thus, neither good nor evil exists. Yes, one could have ideas about good and evil on this view, but they wouldn't be any different from ideas about unicorns or leprechauns—none of these, in reality, would exist.

Many nonbelievers, when presented with this observation, will typically say something like, "I don't have to be religious to know right from wrong," or, "Lots of atheists are good people," or, "Christians do so many evil things." We can agree with all of these statements, but they miss the point that naturalism undermines any basis for objective moral values and duties. The key word here is objective, meaning something that exists or is true regardless of what any person or group of people believe about it. Even if every person in an ancient culture believed that human sacrifice was a good and necessary practice, they would still be objectively wrong—that is, if an objective standard of morality exists. And the only plausible candidate for such an objective standard is God, whose very nature determines what is good.

Many who hold to a naturalistic worldview have never thought through its logical implications, especially in relation to morality. A number of leading naturalistic thinkers, though, have recognized and acknowledged that morality and naturalism are incompatible. This doesn't mean that they became outlaws in their personal lives,

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but they certainly had to confront the cognitive dissonance of having deep moral intuitions (as all humans do), while also believing those intuitions have no relation to reality (though most don't admit to this inevitable struggle).

Well-known biologist and atheist Richard Dawkins declared in his book *River Out of Eden* that “The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference.” Dawkins recognizes that good and evil have no place in a naturalistic universe.

Existentialist philosopher and atheist Jean-Paul Sartre acknowledged that it was “very distressing that God does not exist, because all possibility of finding values in a heaven of ideas disappears along with Him... As a result man is forlorn, because neither within him nor without does he find anything to cling to.”

Atheist philosopher Joel Marks recalls that he once believed in objective morality but was eventually driven to abandon that position. He experienced a “shocking epiphany” that “the religious fundamentalists are correct: without God, there is no morality.” He was forced to conclude that “atheism implies amorality; and since I am an atheist, I must therefore embrace amorality.”

Atheist philosopher Julian Baggini confesses, “In an atheist universe, morality can be rejected without external sanction at any point, and without a clear, compelling reason to believe in its reality, that's exactly what will sometimes happen.”

In a debate with a Christian at Stanford University, the late Cornell biology professor William Provine stated, “There are no gods, no purposes, and no goal-directed forces of any kind... There is no ultimate foundation for ethics, no ultimate meaning in life, and no free will for humans, either.”

I belabor this point somewhat because it is so difficult for most secular moderns to come to grips with. One can hardly blame them, because the implications of naturalism are truly horrifying. It represents the complete dissolution of all objective meaning, value, purpose, and morality.

Thankfully, however, naturalism is not true, and there is an objective basis for right and wrong, which is God's own supremely good nature. Because all human beings are made in God's image, we have deep moral intuitions that help us discern right from wrong. This remains true even for those who reject belief in God, which is why many nonbelievers live basically moral lives, even while discounting the very foundation of right and wrong (Gen. 1:26–27; Rom. 1:32; 2:14–15).

Due to the Edenic fall, our moral intuitions have been corrupted by sin, and we need the moral guidance God has provided in His Word. God's commands in Scripture represent our moral duties and obligations and provide a firm foundation for living a life that reflects God's own wholly good nature.

