

# Moral Argument of God's Existence

By T.T. Kumakura

This paper introduces the Moral Argument for the existence of God, which appeals to the existence of a universal moral law. The argument says the existence of such a moral law suggests a Moral Law Giver, and that Law Giver is God.

Here is the argument:

1. There is a universal moral law in our minds.
2. Such a law requires a universal Moral Law Giver.
3. That Moral Law Giver is God.

## **1. There is a universal moral law in our minds.**

This is an argument from the normative nature of morality. People in all cultures and civilizations presuppose the existence of a certain standard of behavior even if they don't always conform to it.

C.S. Lewis, perhaps the most popular proponent of the moral argument, cites as an example two people quarrelling. When someone criticizes another person, he is appealing to some kind of standard of behavior which he expects the other person to know about. Quarrelling means trying to show that the other person is in the wrong. And there would be no sense in trying to do that unless the two share some sort of agreement as to what right and wrong are, Lewis says in *Mere Christianity*.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, when someone is being accused of stealing, he often says he did not steal, instead of saying there is nothing wrong with stealing.

Lewis says people in every culture and civilization share this moral law. The moral teaching of the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Hindus, Chinese, Greeks and Romans are very similar to the modern Western moral teaching, he says.<sup>2</sup> The moral law, then, must be objective. It must exist independently of human minds.

## **2. Such a standard requires a Moral Law Giver.**

Such an objective law exists only if there is a mind that exists independently. Thus, it is necessary to postulate an absolutely perfect mind that transcends our desires and material needs in order to account for the existence of this law, according to philosopher Hastings Rashdall (1858-1952).

An absolute Moral Law or moral ideal cannot exist in material things. And it does not (we have seen) exist in the mind of this or that individual. Only if we believe in the existence of a Mind for which the true moral ideal is already in some sense real, a Mind which is the source of whatever is true in our own moral judgments,

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 6.

can we rationally think of the moral ideal as no less real than the world itself. Only so can we believe in an absolute standard of right and wrong, which is as independent of this or that man's actual ideas and actual desires as the facts of material nature.<sup>3</sup>

This law is prescriptive of human behavior, not merely descriptive of how we behave. The idea that we "ought to" do something implies a mind that stands independent of our own minds. That means the Moral Law is a command. If it is a command, then there must be a commander.

### 3. That Moral Law Giver is God.

Lewis says the Moral Law is "inside information" that God has put into our minds. We find out more about God from the Moral Law than from the universe in general. The Moral Law tells us what human beings ought to do.<sup>4</sup> Using the language of Kant (1724-1804), we can't realize *summum bonum*, or the greatest good, without God:

Therefore, *summum bonum* is possible in the world only on the supposition of a Supreme Being, having a causality corresponding to a moral character. Now a being that is capable of acting on the conception of laws is an intelligence (a rational being), and the causality of such a being according to the conception of laws is his *will*; therefore the supreme cause of nature, which must be presupposed as a condition of the *summum bonum* is a being which is the cause of nature by *intelligence* and *will*, consequently its author, that is God. It follows that the postulate of the possibility of the *highest derived good* (the best world) is likewise the postulate of the reality of a *highest original good*, that is to say, of the existence of God. Now it was seen to be a duty for us to promote the *summum bonum*; consequently it is not merely allowable, but it is a necessity connected with duty as a requisite, that we should presuppose the possibility of this *summum bonum*; and as this is possible only on the condition of the existence of God, it inseparably connects the supposition of this with duty; that is, it is morally necessary to assume the existence of God.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, the existence of God gives a deeper meaning to morality. Consider a naturalistic world in which there is no God. George L. Mavrodes points out that in such a world, there is less incentives to be moral. Mavrodes refers to atheist Bertrand Russel's description of a Godless world where people exist only until they die physically.

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<sup>3</sup> Hastings Rashdall, *the Theory of Good and Evil; A Treatise on Moral Philosophy*, Vol. 2, 212. (Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon Press, 1907), 212.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis, 29.

<sup>5</sup>Immanuel Kant, *The Moral Argument*, in *Philosophy of Religion Selected Readings* (New York: Oxford Press, 1998), 185.

In such a ``Russellian world,`` there are ``Russellian benefits,`` such as a long, contented life, sexual pleasure, a good reputation, etc. That world does not have spiritual benefits, such as life after death or heaven. Since there is no God and afterlife in this world, there is no much incentive for people to be moral. Thus, goodness, obligation, and morality have no lasting effects in the Russellian world, Mavrodes says.<sup>6</sup>

Christianity, then, I think is related to the queerness of morality in one way and perhaps in two. In the first instance, it provides a view of the world in which morality is not an absurdity. It gives morality a deeper place in the world than does a Ruseelian view and thus permits it to ``make sense.`` But in the second instance, it perhaps suggests that morality is not the deepest thing, that it is provisional and transitory, that it is due to serve its use and then to pass away in favor of something richer and deeper.<sup>7</sup>

However, according to a world that presupposes the existence of God, he holds all persons morally accountable for their actions. Evil and wrong will be punished; righteousness will be vindicated. Good ultimately triumphs over evil, and we will finally see that we do live in a moral universe, Craig says.<sup>8</sup>

If God does not exist, Craig says, it is plausible to think that there are no objective moral values, that we have no moral duties, and that there is no moral accountability for how we act. However, if objective moral values and duties do exist, we have good grounds for believing in God's existence.<sup>9</sup>

## Criticisms

Now, let's discuss various criticisms directed at each of the three propositions of the Moral Argument. We will also examine the problem of evil, since that is a common objection that skeptics and atheists raise when presented with the Moral Argument.

### **1. There is a universal moral law in our minds.**

Not everyone agrees with this first premise. Some critics say our moral standards come from our parents, human need, and experience, while an increasing number of people are abandoning their belief in moral absolutes.

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<sup>6</sup> George L. Mavrodes, *Religion and the Queerness of Morality*, in *Philosophy of Religion Selected Readings*) 207.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Craig, Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Take Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). The Austrian psychiatrist suggested that our sense of right and wrong comes simply from what we have been taught.<sup>10</sup> Freud believed that during a child's development he internalizes the part of his parents that tells him what to do and what not to do. This internalized part of the parents becomes his conscience, according to Freud.<sup>11</sup> Our moral code also comes from what humans find to be useful and expedient, Freud said, adding that ethics are not based on a moral world order but on the inescapable exigencies of human cohabitation. Since ethics are a kind of traffic code, they change with time and culture, he said.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, the idea that there are no absolutes has entered into the popular culture. Existentialism, which provides the rationale for contemporary relativism, has become the philosophy of television talk shows and sitcoms, says Veith, Jr.<sup>13</sup>

## **2. Such a standard requires a Moral Law Giver.**

While atheists reject any theory of morality that involves God, many of them in fact support objective moral laws. What they do reject is a claim that it is God's commands that make certain acts moral or immoral. Mackie, an atheist, says God's commands cannot be the source of moral obligation:

The commands of a legitimate human ruler do not *create* obligations: if such a ruler tells you to do X, this makes it obligatory for you to do X only if it is already *obligatory* for you to do whatever the ruler tells you (within the sphere in which X lies). The same applies to God. He can make it obligatory for us to do Y by so commanding only because there is first a general obligation for us to obey Him. His commands, therefore, cannot be the source of moral obligation in general: for any obligation that they introduce, there must be a more fundamental obligation that they presuppose. This criticism decisively excludes one way in which it might be thought that God create morality.<sup>14</sup>

Theists cite God's command when asked why we should do certain things or refrain from doing certain other things. Theists say, for instance, that murdering is immoral because God commands us not to murder. Sinnott-Armstrong rejects this view:

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<sup>10</sup> Armand M. Nicholi, Jr. *The Question of God* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 60.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>13</sup> Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 1994), 38-43.

<sup>14</sup> J.L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and against the Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982) 114.

Why should we obey God's commands? The answer cannot be that God will punish us if we disobey, since might does not make right. Even if a government commands you to turn in runaway slaves and will punish you if you don't, that does not make it morally wrong to hide runaway slaves. Some theists answer that we should obey God's commands because God gave us life. But our parents also gave us life, and yet, at least in modern societies, we do not have to marry whomever our parents tell us to. Theists might answer that it is simply immoral to disobey God, but that claim is no more illuminating than when atheists say that it is simply immoral to cause unjustified harm. A better answer is that God has good reasons for his commands. God commands us not to rape because rape harms the victim. But then that harm (not the command) is what makes rape immoral.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, theists' idea that it is God's commandment that creates moral laws means that if God did not exist, there would be no reason for us to keep moral laws. "Let us all earnestly hope that all those theists who believe that without God all is permitted will never change their minds!" says atheist Arnold T. Guminski.<sup>16</sup>

### **3. That Moral Law Giver is God.**

Critics say morality does not need a God as a supreme source of commands. Mackie says moral thinking does not require that the sort of justice incorporated in Kant's highest good be realized.<sup>17</sup> Mackie argues that even if moral convictions presuppose the existence of a god, such convictions cannot be used to show that there is a god. That would have to be shown independently in order to validate those convictions.<sup>18</sup>

#### Argument Defended

##### **1. There is a universal moral law in our minds.**

The fact that something is learned is hardly evidence against its objective truth and validity. We learn that two plus two equals four, and that war is bad, and we learn all kinds of things which we believe to be nonetheless true, Miller says.<sup>19</sup> At the same time,

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<sup>15</sup> William Lane Craig and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, *God? A Debate between a Christian and an Atheist*, (New York NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 35.

<sup>16</sup> Arnold T. Guminski, *The Moral Argument for God's Existence, the Natural moral Law, and Conservative Metaphysical Naturalism* (accessed Feb. 11, 2010); available from <http://www.colorado.edu/philosophy/TheoForum/gum.pdf> Internet.

<sup>17</sup> Mackie, 118.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ed L. Miller, "God and Reason" (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 87, quoted in Ronald Nash, *Faith and Reason* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 159.

even if postmodernists are right in saying that people do not believe in absolute truth any longer, that does not mean that absolute truth does not exist.

## **2. Such a standard requires a Moral Law Giver.**

Mackie appears to be referring to God's special revelation when he discusses his moral commands. However, moral commands in the Bible are not unique. Mackie is right in saying that there is first a general obligation for us to obey God. This obligation was put into our heart in the form of moral law.

## **3. That Moral Law Giver is God.**

This paper maintains that the Moral Law Giver is God. This proposition is not based on an irrational presupposition. A law has no meaning unless it comes from a mind, as evangelical philosopher Elton Trueblood says. The moral law makes sense only if there is a Mind or Person behind it.<sup>20</sup>

The Moral Argument may not provide a conclusive proof of God's existence. Yet, this argument, along with other classical theistic arguments for the existence of God, such as the ontological argument, the cosmological argument, and the teleological argument, may provide a cumulative case that the existence of God is probably true.

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<sup>20</sup> Geisler, 499.

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