

## CHRISTIANITY IS AN UNREASONABLE FAITH

William Lane Craig is possibly the best Christian defender of the faith of all time. His website Reasonable Faith is the go-to for the subject of apologetics. But as good as Craig is, he is less than truthful and you have to read him to see how representative of Christianity he is being. Craig's defence of the plausibility and truth of the Christian faith has been answered in the book, *Unreasonable Faith How William Lane Craig Overstates the Case for Christianity*. James Foder, the author, is an extremely able counteracting force. This page is about his best and essential insights.

### PRIZE QUOTES FROM THE BOOK UNREASONABLE FAITH

CRAIG ARGUES THAT MORAL PRINCIPLES CANNOT STAND BY ON THEIR OWN AND NEED A GOD TO GROUND (MAKE THEM FACTS) COMMAND AND VALIDATE THEM

It is not clear, however, that moral facts do require any further foundation beyond themselves. Moral facts may simply be irreducible brute facts which are true all by themselves, not true in virtue of any other facts that are more fundamental. For example, the fact that “electrons have a charge of -1” is not true in virtue of any other fact about reality, nor is it true by definition (for they might easily have a different charge). Instead, it is simply a brute fact – there is no answer to the question ‘in virtue of what is true’, other than to say, ‘it simply is!’ Some philosophers think that moral facts (or at least the most basic, fundamental moral facts) are also like this. For example, a proposition like ‘causing unnecessary harm is morally wrong’ is not true in virtue of anything else; it is simply a brute fact true by itself. After all, any explanation of a fact must eventually terminate at some stopping point, so what is wrong with terminating moral explanations in terms of basic moral facts?

To say that moral facts are fundamental is not to say that moral values exist as some sort of platonic abstraction such as numbers or sets. Craig sometimes confuses these two issues, as for instance when he says: “Atheistic Moral Platonists affirm that objective moral values do exist but are not grounded in God. Indeed, moral values have no further foundation. They just exist. It is difficult, however, even to comprehend this view. What does it mean to say, for example, that the moral value Justice just exists? It’s hard to know what to make of this. It is clear what is meant when it is said that a person is just but it is bewildering when it is said that in the absence of any people, Justice itself exists.” To assert that moral facts are fundamental is simply, as Wes Morriston says, to affirm that virtues like kindness and justice, or acts that increase the flourishing of conscious creatures, are simply good in themselves. They are not good in virtue of some other property that they hold, nor does the fact that they are good have or require some further explanation. This is not to say that there is some ethereal thing called ‘justice’ which exists apart from any particular act or person. Acts of justice aren’t good because they somehow embody the abstract object of ‘justice’. Rather, they are simply good because they are just, and that is the end of the explanation.

Moral cognitivism is a theory in metaethics according to which moral statements are propositions with truth values. It stands in contrast to non-cognitivist theories which deny that moral statements are propositions, instead holding that they are variously injunctions, emotive expressions, or something else entirely. According to such non-cognitivist views, the phrase ‘rape is wrong’ really means something like ‘don’t rape!’ (an injunction) or ‘boo on rape!’ (an emotive expression), neither of which are propositions that can be true or false. That Craig presumes the truth of moral cognitivism is important because his demand for a foundation of the existence of moral facts becomes irrelevant if moral facts do not actually exist. While Craig thinks that it is just obvious that ‘rape is wrong’ and that this is something we can directly apprehend, directly apprehending that ‘rape is wrong’ is not the same as directly apprehending ‘it is objectively true that rape is wrong’. That is, while we directly perceive morality in relation to our actions and the actions of others, we don’t directly perceive the truth of moral cognitivism itself. To argue otherwise is to confuse our moral perceptions with one particular theoretical account.

IS CRAIG RIGHT THAT TO DENY OBJECTIVE MORALITY IS THE SAME AS SAYING MORALITY IS COMPLETELY RUBBISH OR JUST OPINION (A POLITE WAY OF CALLING IT RUBBISH)?

To do so is not equivalent to embracing moral nihilism, but rather could constitute a reason for embracing a non-cognitivist understanding of morality as discussed above. As Stephen Law has argued: “I agree objective moral values exist up until I am shown reason to believe the first premise (if atheism is true there is no objective morality) is true (which Craig never supplied). At that point, the rational thing for me to do, given overwhelming empirical evidence there’s no god (as Craig defines god), is to give up on moral realism... I might not like that conclusion very much. And it is counterintuitive. But, hey, sometimes we have to give up what seemed intuitively obvious, such as that the earth does not move, in the face of powerful evidence to the contrary.”

Although Craig describes God as ‘loving, generous, just, etc.’, he cannot argue that God’s nature is good because God possesses these traits, for if so then the ultimate foundation of morality would lie in characteristics or values external to God. He would be asserting that attributes such as lovingness, generosity, justice, etc., were more fundamental than God’s nature, and thereby the goodness of God’s nature pertains only because it accords with these independently existing, more basic properties. This would undermine Craig’s argument that God is the ultimate locus and source of moral values. As Wes Morriston explains: “The trouble is that this makes it look as if love and generosity and justice and the rest are doing all the work in the proffered account of moral goodness, leaving God no significant role to play.” Instead, Craig has to argue that the dependence is the other way around, that lovingness, generosity, justice, etc. are good because these are attributes of God. Yet this view faces the problem that it entails that generosity, justice, etc., are only good because they are attributes of God, meaning that if God did not exist or embodied different properties, then these attributes would not be morally valuable. However, this is inconsistent with what we know about morality.

Is something good because it is commanded by God, or does God command it because it is good? Either option seems problematic for the theist. If something is good only because it is commanded by God, then goodness becomes ultimately arbitrary, since if God had commanded us to rape and kill then these would become ‘right’. On the other hand, if God commands something because it is good, then there must be some standard or basis for morality outside of and independently of God, thereby making God’s commandments unnecessary for grounding morality. Craig is able to avoid this dilemma because he advocates a form of what is called modified divine command theory, according to which nothing is good independently of God, but only in virtue of divine commandments. Such commandments, however, are not arbitrary, since they derive from and are grounded in his good and loving nature. While Craig’s theory avoids the classical form of the Euthyphro dilemma, I believe that it is vulnerable to an altered form of the dilemma, what is often called the arbitrariness objection. Under Craig’s account, moral facts are dependent upon particular attributes of God’s character. It follows that if God’s attributes were different, then certain moral facts would be different – e.g. if God lacked a disposition against cruelty, or was not kind, then cruelty would not be morally wrong and kindness would not be morally good. Thus, according to Craig’s account, propositions such as ‘if it wasn’t against God’s nature, then cruelty wouldn’t be morally wrong’ would be true. Yet it is obvious that such statements are clearly false – cruelty would still be wrong even if God’s nature were different, because cruelty is wrong in and of itself. As Wes Morriston explains, this is such an absurd consequence as to render Craig’s account of the grounding of morality extremely implausible: “Could Craig get away with saying that love and generosity and justice and faithfulness and the rest are good-making only because there is a God who is loving and generous and faithful (etc.) to the maximum possible degree? This alternative seems incredible to me. It implies that if there were no God who perfectly exemplified them, these properties would count for nothing. A person could be as fair-minded and loving and generous and faithful as you please and still fail to be morally better than a cruel and malicious person.

## ALTERNATIVES TO ATTEMPTS TO GROUND MORALITY IN GOD

Despite claiming that no non-theistic foundation of morality is possible, Craig completely ignores the large number of metaethical theories concerning the foundation of objective moral values that have already been developed and widely discussed in the philosophical literature. Prominent among such theories are the following:

Railton’s reductive naturalism: moral propositions are true in virtue of objective facts concerning the maximal fulfilment of idealised desires, which are what individuals would want themselves to desire if they had access to all the relevant information.

Jackson’s moral functionalism: a reductive analysis of moral discourse which holds that the truth of moral propositions is based upon non-moral properties which collectively account for the various functions that moral terms play in the complex conceptual scheme that we call ‘morality’.

Cornell realism: a non-reductive account of morality which holds that properties like ‘rightness’ supervene on a range of different non-moral properties depending upon the situation. Thus, there is no single thing that makes moral propositions true, but a wide range of facts and properties corresponding to the diversity of ethical circumstances we can experience.

Discourse ethics: building upon Kant’s deontology – in this theory moral facts are true in virtue of universalisable presuppositions that underpin discourse between persons.

Contractualism: ethics is based upon certain norms or rules of behaviour which, if not always accepted in the real world, nevertheless could not reasonably be objected to if they were to be agreed upon from an informed and unbiased vantage point.

Ethical intuitionism: moral propositions are true in virtue of simple irreducible non-natural properties that cannot be defined in terms of biological or sociological properties.

Buddhist ethics: actions are morally right inasmuch as they contribute to accumulation of good karma and facilitate exit from the cycle of rebirth.

Regarding non-naturalistic, non-theistic accounts of the nature of morality, philosopher Kevin Scharp makes a very similar point: “There are literally dozens of theories of moral values and moral duties that are objective, not naturalist, and make no appeal to gods. For example, G. E. Moore, Sir William David Ross, Christine Korsgaard, Thomas Scanlon, Derek Parfit, Philippa Foot, David Enoch, Russ Shafer-Landau, Rosalind Hursthouse, John McDowell, Jonathan Dancy, H. A. Prichard, Roger Crisp, Joseph Raz, Jean Hampton, and Rey Wedgwood. That’s just a few. Therefore, until he’s refuted every single one of these theories, he needs to stop using the moral argument. The lesson for everybody else: Stop assuming that atheists cannot accept that there aren’t objective moral values. All it demonstrates is that you know nothing about ethics.” Such lists point to the fact that, rather than there being no non-theistic foundation for morality as Craig says, the problem is in fact exactly the opposite – there are too many contending theories and little agreement among philosophers as to which provides the best account of morality.

Despite this plethora of theories, Craig has not written anything specifically responding to any of them. In response to this list Craig has retorted: “But simply providing a list, as Dr. Scharp does, does nothing to show their (the theories’) explanatory adequacy; that these are good theories or plausible theories. In fact we know that most of them can’t be because they are contradictory with each other.”

Further highlighting the underdeveloped and flimsy nature of Craig’s moral argument is the fact that the view that only God can provide any sort of foundation for objective moral values is a fringe view held by only a tiny minority of philosophers. Indeed, over half of philosophers are both atheists and moral realists, with many philosophers adopting other positions which also place them in opposition to Craig’s argument.

#### CRAIG SAYS WE NEED FREE WILL OR WE ARE PUPPETS AND HAVE NO RESPONSIBILITY OF ANY KIND

Regarding Craig’s comparison of human actions to the limbs of a puppet, this analogy is inapt because no one thinks that a puppet can be morally responsible for its actions. By contrast, very many philosophers, both theists and atheists, believe that humans can be morally responsible for our actions even absent libertarian free will. Thus, the fact that Craig can cite one example of an entity that lacks libertarian free will and also cannot be held morally responsible for its actions does not entail that any entity which lacks libertarian freedom must also lack the ability to be held morally responsible. There are many obvious differences between human beings and puppets: unlike puppets, human beings can think abstractly, make plans about the future, feel empathy for others, and understand the consequences of its actions for the pain and pleasure of other people. The fact that these competencies are essential for holding somebody morally responsible is evident from the fact that humans lacking these abilities (e.g. young children and the mentally disabled) are not held accountable for their actions. Humans are thus morally culpable not because they have libertarian free will but because they possess these crucial characteristics, all of which are abilities that exist totally independently of whether or not humans have libertarian free will. As such, there are ample respects in which humans differ from puppets which make no reference to free will, and Craig’s analogy fails. As a result of these considerations, I conclude we have no reason to accept his argument that morality requires libertarian free will.

#### Atheism and Moral Duties

One final argument that Craig makes against the possibility of naturalistic theories of ethics is that even if they can provide a foundation for objective moral values, they cannot offer any foundation for objective moral duties. This argument is rather odd given that typically at least some moral values are thought to entail moral obligations, while Craig seems to believe the two are completely separable.

Finally, Craig argues that even if some moral facts supervene necessarily upon natural facts, this is a “curious” and mysterious state of affairs that needs “some sort of explanation”. Essentially here Craig is saying that if particular natural facts always necessarily give rise to certain moral facts, this is an unusual state of affairs that needs some explanation if we are to think it is so. One problem with this objection is that it is question-begging, as atheism asserts precisely that no such explanation is necessary. More importantly, as Erik Wielenberg has pointed out, if naturalists require an explanation for why moral facts necessarily supervene upon certain natural facts, then so too does Craig require an explanation for why moral facts or duties are necessarily entailed by God’s nature. That is, if necessary moral truths require an explanation, then we must also have an explanation of God’s distinctive set of necessary properties, or why it is necessarily true that God’s nature gives rise to objective moral values. Wielenberg gives the following example: “Because God is loving, He necessarily commands that we love one another. This claim has a certain ring of plausibility to it, but notice that it posits a logically necessary connection between being loving and issuing the command that we love one another. P2 (logically necessary moral connections require explanation) implies that unless Craig provides an explanation for this necessary connection, his meta-ethical approach is unacceptable. To my knowledge, Craig nowhere provides such an explanation.” The only argument Craig provides as to why God is a more plausible stopping point is the following: “The question might be pressed as to why God’s nature should be taken to be definition of goodness. But unless we are nihilists, we have to recognize some ultimate standard of value, and God seems to be the least arbitrary stopping point. Moreover, God’s nature

is singularly appropriate to serve as such a standard. For by definition, God is a being worthy of worship. And only a being that is the locus and source of all value is worthy of worship.” Craig’s bold assertion that ‘God seems to be the least arbitrary stopping point’ is unlikely to convince anyone not already a theist. The only argument he provides in favour of this assertion is that God is by definition worthy of worship, and only a being that is the ‘locus and source of all value’ is worthy of worship. To simply assert, however, that God is ‘by definition’ worthy of worship in no way establishes that the existence of a being so defined is in any way plausible or likely. Furthermore, it fails to explain why God is worthy of worship. If God is only worthy of worship because he embodies properties like goodness, justice, kindness, etc., then it seems that these properties are the real explanatory stopping point for morality. On the other hand, if God is worthy of worship independently of his possession of these properties, then it does indeed seem that God is pretty arbitrary as a stopping point for morality. Even if God possesses all his properties necessarily, it is nevertheless still possible to inquire which properties are most fundamental, and which properties are dependent upon these most fundamental properties. Either way, however, it seems that Craig faces a dilemma which renders God quite implausible as an explanatory ‘stopping point’. In the end, therefore, Craig’s preferred account of objective moral values offers no greater insights than alternatives that make no reference to God. As Wes Morriston aptly summarises the issue: “It may be said that God’s moral attributes just are the ultimate standard of goodness. But how is this any more satisfying than saying that love (for example) just is good-making? As far as I can see, building God and God’s attributes into the account of moral values merely complicates things and replaces one set of puzzles with another.”

## OCCAM’S RAZOR

Contrary to how it is often stated, Occam’s Razor does not say that ‘simpler explanations are more likely to be true’. Rather, it states that explanations which require fewer new (that is previously unestablished) assumptions, are to be preferred over those which require more such assumptions. Thus, it is essentially equivalent to the criterion of plausibility – given our background information, how likely is the proposed explanation?

## MY COMMENT:

Craig’s attitude to God and morality is to be summed as, “God practices morality therefore it is good.” But that is illogical. Doing something does not mean it should be done. God may be moral as a person but saying God is good really means God HAS goodness. Justice and mercy though acted out by a person are not the person. If we have to deny logic to fuse morality and God then we contradict the rule that it is fair to be logical – the two go together. Reason in day to life involves being fair with truth and people. Christianity is actually objectifying God by making out he is justice and love. If God alone matters then that is a very serious abuse indeed! Attempts to ground morality in God degrade him and thus prove not only do they have no chance of succeeding but they actually turn morality into a sham. Whatever chance you have of grounding morality without God, you can only ground immorality with God.