

God is Not a Moral Agent and God by definition cannot be

Do believers in God use human ideas about morality and manmade standards to establish God's moral goodness? In other words, man decides we must not kill so man turns that into a command of God. Many deny that on the basis that the ten commandments cannot apply to God. God does not need to be banned from having other gods. God does not have a wife to commit adultery on. God owns and makes our lives so it is no murder if he takes life back for you do what you want with your own. So God then is not a moral agent in that sense.

People may see God as moral. Or as immoral. Or a mixture. Or as amoral. 'Amoral' is the lack of moral property. It means you are neither moral or immoral. It is not a mere lack of belief in morality. In fact you can be amoral and think you are not!!

It is obvious that even God cannot invent good. Something doesn't become good just because God commanded it. If God's moral rules are suspect if he can invent them without any regard for the harm they do. He would need to be governed by a moral code above him. He would need to be a moral agent.

We affirm that goodness is independent of God. We affirm that anybody who denies this denies the obvious and that is dangerous. It is like taking good and replacing it with a good replica. But a replica of good is by definition not good. We have a right to worry when somebody declares faith in God. Not only is it bad in itself but it denies and threatens to pervert our fundamental wish for right and wrong to be ONLY about OUR human to human relationships.

A moral agent is a personal being that is obligated to do right. An obligation that does not prescribe a penalty when it is broken is not an obligation at all. If God is a moral agent, he will be punished if he breaks the law. But there can be no being bigger than he is to punish him. So he is not a moral agent.

Others say that since God is outside of time and is timeless he cannot engage in a decision making process and a moral agent necessarily needs a process. The doctrine of a timeless God means that God is total master of time and thus the be and the end all.

Many get scared at hearing that God is not a moral agent for they think that means God can hurt babies for fun if he desires. The Church says that it does not mean that at all. Is it telling the truth?

Take justice. If it does not exist or does not matter there can be no morality. Innocent until proven guilty is a human/civil rule but also a religious one. Taking it as a religious rule means it should have come from a God who knows what he is talking about. You need proof that God says it and represents the rule. God is a representative of morality so we are told. Also, as God alone matters as nothing more good than him is possible it follows that even if there were a law of innocent until proven guilty that has nothing to do with God you are to only care that he has a law commanding it too. Two separate laws can command the same thing. Two separate authorities can command the same thing. You follow the law and adore for no other reason than that he authorises it even if there are other reasons. So if it is legitimised without God and legitimised with God it is the legitimised with God that you are to concern yourself about. You need the proof for to say it is given by God's authority means it is only as good as how convincing that authority is. You degrade the rule without proof for the God who endorses it. God represents that rule or law and it represents him. You also are saying that atheists are harmfully failing to recognise God and his endorsement of the rule so you need proof if you want to suggest that! If you need proof to accuse somebody of being bad you need bigger proof to "accuse" somebody of being perfect. If an atheist believes in innocent until proven guilty then it is a sin to say, "He believes in God's rule but he just does not realise it is God's." The atheist is to be condemned for having it without God. It is replacing God's authority. Remember what we said, you saying x and God saying x does not mean that you saying it is any good.

What if I make the mistake of thinking I can have justice without God? Then clearly I am bending the knee to justice. Nobody sane can condemn me for my mistake nor can they condemn the mistake. "I don't care if God is just, I will be" is a far more determined affirmation of justice than, "I believe in a just God for that is necessary to believe in justice." It follows that I do not really need to accept God to be just. It follows that I am being unjust if I try to make out that I or anybody else does.

God is not subject to human morality in the following sense - he cannot need a rule not to commit adultery or to avoid worshipping false Gods. That means that some moral rules do not apply to him just as they might not apply to us either. The adultery ban hardly applies to a man stranded on a desert island. But the principles behind the rules always apply.

The Future of Atheism, Alister McGrath and Daniel Dennett, SPCK, London, 2008 (page 160) tells us that God does not have moral obligations because he is already perfect. So he doesn't need moral laws for he just does good naturally. By

doing good, he is not keeping moral laws or moral obligations. He is not a moral agent. This view says that it is not the moral commands God gives that make him worthy of worship, it is the fact that he is perfect and doesn't need to keep such commandments himself for he does it naturally and doesn't need to be compelled by laws to do it (page 158). So they say that we should not be asking if God commands morality because it is good or because he invents it but asking, "Is God's character good just because it is God's or is it good because it fits some standard of good?" The Christians of course reply that God's character is good just because it is God's. But we must observe that only a good character makes good moral commandments. So telling us we should forget about God commanding and focus on his character is rather pointless.

But if we were all perfect on earth it would not mean we should have no laws or moral obligations! God being perfect does not mean God should have no moral obligations. Law applies to bad and good alike.

We cannot explore God as judge without exploring the suggestion that God is a moral agent. Some refer to God's attributes of say justice and love as moral attributes. It may help in conveying what they are trying to say about God, but it's not strictly accurate. God is a good God but not a moral God.

The Bible teaches that God is love - this is a way of indicating that he is love because he is love and not because some standard says he ought to be. Thus he is not a moral agent. God is justice also.

A Christian wrote "God is by nature perfectly morally good ...moral goodness surely involves fulfilling one's moral obligations" [1].

This implies that God is a bad God if he breaks the rules. It says the laws of morality are higher than God and he is duty bound to keep them. So God is not God for he is not the highest authority.

Christianity teaches that God is not good because he is obligated to be good. He is good simply because he is good. But if it is good to be obligated to be good, then God is imperfect. If it is bad, that means religion should not be encouraging us to be good! And indeed its efforts to encourage would fail!

Some object that if you do any kind of good, and it is never your duty to be good, then clearly it does not matter if you are good or not. It makes no sense to call helping a sick baby good if it does not matter if you do it or not. If they are right then good then is not good - its only a label put on certain kinds of behaviour. The notion of God being good is totally incoherent. God is an incoherent concept.

God's attribute of power tells us something about God as judge. The scriptures teach that all things were created by divine power [2]. God is not an entity in the universe. The Christian philosophers say that there is only one God and he is existence itself - he cannot be in a community with us as if he were simply one of us.

Morality is based on being part of a moral community. God cannot be a member of such a community. God is not to be thought of as a moral agent such as a human judge is.

If more believers were told this they would not be as keen on their God.

People seek religion and God for a sense of belonging and a sense of community. We all want morality to be about community and we want it to be human.

The question of where morality comes from and is it based on a moral God or is based on community is an important one. To base it on either would imply that hurting a baby is not wrong in itself. You have to believe in a moral divine being or moral community to make it wrong. Morality cannot originate from belief in God or the community. That would amount to saying that if you believe something is right that makes it right to do it! But if you say morality comes from God or the community you are saying it comes from belief.

To say objective morality comes from God or a community or both is unhelpful. It is only of value as an idea but serves no practical purpose because it is really saying, "Objective morality comes from belief." That is contradictory. Objective morality by definition means morality is factual and not just based on belief.

And if morality comes from God or a community or both what then?

Does God matter to the extent that community doesn't matter in comparison?

That is religious extremism. It is putting religious belief before people.

Does community matter more than God?

You need more faith to believe in God than in a community. So it would be the case that community comes first. Putting your moral community first leads to sectarianism and division.

What if both equally matter?

That contradicts the view that God by definition as the origin of all existence and the perfect goodness is all that matters. A community is only a good community in so far as it shows what he is like. It has to be all about him.

The scriptures counsel us to have a healthy fear of God. That is impossible unless we understand that he is not a moral agent. If God is under obligation the same as we are, then why is he? Is he not as trustworthy as we think? How can we obey the command to give him all our love if we make any room for doubt?

And as God is not a moral agent, morality cannot be rooted in him.

Even if it were, what difference would it make? If you root morality in God that only tells you THAT morality is not WHAT is moral or immoral. You could argue that it is okay to hold that moral values exist but that is all you know and you could say that rules are useless for nobody knows how to apply them in a way that serves the values.

You would have one believer saying we must put gays to death and another saying we must not. You would have one believer saying that abortion in cases of rape should be allowed and another saying it should not. You would have one Catholic saying we are morally obligated to obey and believe in the utterances of the pope and you will have another who laughs at that. Even if we need to believe in God to be able to accept that morality is real, atheists and humanists act and think as if it is real. Believers say they are confused for they don't see how it conflicts with their denial of God so in a sense they affirm the existence of God. It would be the case that if the believers are right then as long as somebody has a sense that morality is real it does not matter if they think they do not believe in God. It has been noticed that members of the Baha'i Faith have a very vague concept of God. They are great peacemakers and kindly. They prove that you do not really need a clear God theology. They might as well be atheists! A clear God theology is really just about stressing dogma over virtue.

"God doesn't give himself commands". So says William Lane Craig. But the Bible has God commanding us to love him and each other. Love is free and spontaneous and it cannot be commanded. But the Bible says he commanded it and he is perfect. So it follows that commanding love is a perfection. So if God is perfect, God must command himself to love! That God commands us to love actually proves that the popular notion that you cannot really believe in morality unless you believe in God is incoherent.

A God who does good naturally and who is not voluntarily good can hardly attract us as moral agents. He would only attract those who want the benefits of being pally with him. A God who struggles to do the right thing and who manages to do it can be a role model for aspiring moral agents. Our worship of a God who doesn't struggle and who doesn't have moral laws to guide him is simply fake. We would then be more interested in deluding ourselves than really worshipping.

Some say that helping a baby live or survive disease is only good because God says it is. So it does not matter in itself if it helps the baby. This is the divine command doctrine of morality - things become moral because God decrees they are to be considered moral. Divine command in some forms says God cannot give himself moral commands to control himself for his good is spontaneous. (There are loads of people who obey the law spontaneously but that does not mean they are not commanded or don't recognise commands! Spontaneous obedience of the law is the best form of obedience to the law!). So he is not a moral agent. So how can we say anything God does to us is necessarily good? We do not know! When a law does not ensure or try to ensure you are really good nobody can take your word for it that your goodness is just there and that is that. If you were a fraud you would say you are good and your goodness is spontaneous anyway. It would be the same as saying, "I am good because I am good." If you ask to be trusted that you are then that is a proof that you are not in fact good. It will not do to say you just are good.

And if God does not have moral laws for himself that does not mean we cannot evaluate his actions morally. We do that by considering the effects and results of his action.

The believer in God goes as far as to argue that no matter how much evil exists in a universe it does not refute the existence of God for he could have a good reason for tolerating it. So if there is nothing but hell they will still say God could be love. Then if they are right the more evil there is the less chance that there is a mysterious plan. They don't want you to see that. So they usually drop the word could and say that even if there is nothing but hell then God is love no question.

So they cannot say there "might" be a divine need for the suffering in God's plan. That is too weak and amounts to

admitting you don't know one way or the other. It is anti-faith. They have to say they know God well enough personally to say there probably is a reason. They will not say that for it sounds too insane and arrogant.

The reason believers speak so much about a God who is moral values such as justice, love and peace is that they say they want them to be grounded in God. They say that they are grounded in God's nature not in his will. That means he stands for love for he cannot help loving. His will has nothing to do with this. He cannot make a moral value of hate just by his will. God is love and justice but does not invent them or create them. This does not really help humankind. The idea is that values are grounded in God's nature but his commands are grounded in his will. So God commands whatever he thinks is best and it is his choice. So moral commands do NOT have the grounding that moral values have. The commands are what we need. Who cares if God loves nobody and is grossly unfair all the time as long as he commands loving and fair things? The doctrine of God gives us a god that is no real good, no moral good, to us.

The attempts to make God indispensable to morality and to make morality depend on God only make a laughing stock of right and wrong and the fruit of such attempts is arrogance and lies and hypocrisy.

[1] Swinburne, R., *The Coherence of Theism* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1993) p 187

[2] Heb 11:3