

AN EXAMINATION OF MORALITY WHEN IT IS BASED ON AUTHORITY

Authority is a myth. It is not an inherent intrinsic thing. Nothing has intrinsic authority. Authority is what you have to settle for. It is about settling for and not about recognising the authority for being an authority. There is authority a b c and d. Consider how authority d depends on c. C depends on b and b depends on a. At that point we get stuck. So we say "A is the ultimate authority for we cannot think of any more and we have to stop somewhere". An authority that is found that way is not an authority at all but an expedience. It has no direct force. You affirm it because it is all that is there not because it deserves respect. Is it any wonder that society has such negativity and fear and disrespect for authority? Is it any wonder we feel that people who talk about the will of God are in fact talking about their own will? It explains why everybody thinks God agrees with them when it should be the other way around! It is the smoking gun – it is the answer to how a religion can look peaceful and still motivate war.

The notion that there is no duty or sense of duty unless the authority making the duty is superior is nonsense. Sometimes a child can be wiser than the parent and bind him or her to do something. The Church tells you that you need God the supreme moral authority to command you. That is a trick. It is not even logical.

Should people be allowed to make moral choices for themselves or should such choices be turned over to higher authorities? Actually, that's a false dilemma: some choices are always restricted and others allowed. Thus, the real question is where we draw the line. With religion, and God, it is felt that God alone is the source of moral good and thus even if you make your own choice it is not that you are making a moral choice but you are trying to take your moral impulse and how to live it from God alone.

A dodgy or faulty morality that is practical and reaches many to change their way of living for the better is better than a good one that turns people off or is impractical. Religion habitually presents moral systems as good and revealed by God. Once God gives it you cannot debate him for he does not debate and has his own reasons. So bad religious moral systems will have the same destructive effect as a good one that turns people off.

Morality has a sense of law and authority about it. You feel its an obligation to help a dying baby. You believe it.

An ought or an ought not is an authority claim.

For many, this facilitates the sense that moral obligation comes from God and God is the supreme moral authority.

But what is wrong with just helping the baby without a sense of duty? Spontaneous goodness is the best - period.

Does sensing that moral obligation is binding really require us to say that the reason it is binding is God? Why insist on God when many sense and feel it is binding without knowing or caring why? To insist on any particular explanation or "explanation" would defeat morality for it is irrational to be dogmatic on the subject.

If you think there is no morality without God, then you are not choosing God as the explanation. You have no choice and he is the outcome of a process of elimination. You don't want to think people make morality for themselves and it is their decision about what is moral and that makes it moral. So you think if you say morality comes from God you avoid that. A God who is based on compulsion is a God best dropped and abandoned. It would be crazy to take joy in him.

STEPS

When a person is developing into a person who recognises morality and the need for it. The starting point is said to be, "What authority do I need to believe in in order to know or believe in morality?" In fact that is not the starting point at all! The starting point is, "If morality is needed and exists, one thing is for sure that it needs to be an authority in itself. But only I can see why or how it is an authority. Therefore I must take the authority to judge what the authority is. So my authority is the foundation."

If you get the moral theory right or wrong, that does not matter at the start for that is for a later stage.

Steps

1

Decide on your own authority that morality exists

2

Only then can you decide why and how morality has authority. That is another authority.

3
Summary: You decide ENTIRELY on your own authority that you need a moral authority. If you have a choice between your authority and moral authority and cannot have both then it has to be the first that matters. Moral authority does not come from an outside authority at all but is really just your own authority at work. To accept another authority is really just you giving them authority so in that way the authority is all yours.

DOES MORALITY NEED TO BE COMMANDED BY DIVINE AUTHORITY?

Why should I uphold and accept the reality of morality? The starting point for religion is that an authority is supposedly needed in order to believe in or know morality. But if you obey a moral authority that does not make you moral. You could be just obeying because you can and not because you care if it is moral or not. A moral authority then should only tell you what is moral but has no right to command it. There is a difference between doing good and being good. The authority nothing does nothing to help. It hinders for it seeks to control and command in the name of morality but that is in fact an abuse of morality.

Religion has rules telling you to be moral. Religion states that only a person can issue commands to be moral. It says this person is God alone. But this assumes that morality has to be commanded or enforced. Many thinkers argue that it is better to do good because you spontaneously want to and not because you are told to. Doing what you are told because you are told is not good at all. Also, it tends to fool people into caring only about the good results. They should care about real good and the good results.

God wants us to do good because he commanded it for he says as he is the perfectly good person and creator he is to be loved above all things and he is the boss. That means then that the good is not good at all. If you are doing it because you were told and not because you see it as good even if you do see it as good then the good is evil. It is artificial good. It demeans yourself for it is not very adult.

If you do something because it is good you are not doing it just because the rules say it is good but because it is good. Some say that doing something good because it is good means you care more about good than others. But this overlooks the fact that good means caring for others. But it is possible to adore the concept of good and not the reality of good. Even if good is about helping others the fact remains that you can do good for the concept and not for them.

If you return a lost purse to its owner you may care more about the rule not to keep the purse than the person's rights. But if you do that you are doing good not because it is good but because you were commanded by a rule.

CONTROL

Atheists and most believers in God struggle with ethics. Both try to calculate what the best outcome will be and do what seems to bring it about. They weigh benefits and problems against each other.

God being objective morality or not being objective morality makes no difference.

Why would you emphasise God then? It looks like an addiction of some sort. And many try to stop their ideas from being debated by saying they are God's ideas. Whatever is wrong, God is a hindrance and a threat.

We must remember too, that there is no essential difference between a believer who says, "This is the way God wants it done and there is to be no debate" and one who says, "We have found the answer and God has given it to us through the debate." Both agree the final word is God's or rather what we think is God's. They only differ on whether God uses debate or not to teach us. It follows then that if you stifle debate in the name of God and you are wrong to it is not a huge error for the main thing is basing yourself on what God says. But if there is no God it is horrendous and distasteful.

COMMANDING YOU TO HAVE MORAL VALUES IS IMPOSSIBLE

Values and commands are not the same thing. Kindness and fairness are values. Commandments that you should feed the poor and pay the labourer a proper wage are derived from the values. The law of the land values justice but each country has different ways of expressing this. For some countries, it is fair to allow abortion. Others see it as unfair.

God commanding you to have values is ridiculous. You have to discover values and be drawn to them. You cannot command anybody to value anything. It shows a lack of understanding as to what a value is.

The notion of obeying because you are commanded implies that it does not matter if you are good to people because you want to be happy and enjoy healthy relationships with them. You must not care about that. Only the command matters. But

what if the command says you are to do good for that very reason? A command is an implied threat. It says, "I have the authority. Obey!" It tries to force by saying this. It also tries to force by threatening punishment. "If you disobey you are bad and you cannot get away with it for it would not be right for both bad and good people to be treated as if their actions didn't matter". Commanding people to have relationships is impossible. You have to make relationships attractive to them instead.

Suppose we need to be commanded to have any regard for good at all. Suppose we would have less regard for good if we were not commanded. Suppose we would have none or hardly any. Commanding is not going to help if your appreciation and love of good is poor or dead. Commanding is only going to make you less attracted to good. Now if you need to be commanded the reason is that your respect for goodness is weak. So commanding is not going to help. No religion of commands is a good thing in principle.

If we need to be commanded in order to increase our love of good, then that is an argument for forced conversion and religious persecution of atheists and others who do not agree with a religion's morals. If we have to force ourselves we will soon move on to forcing others.

THE PROCESS OF ELIMINATION

Many believers only accept that God is the answer through a process of elimination.

They say that if we have no free will then we are just machines and you cannot expect or ask machines to be moral or to do good. But even if we are programmed the fact remains that we know from experience that asking people to be good works. That is all that matters.

They agree with the "if we are animals then we cannot have a genuine morality" so they think that proves that you must ground morality in God in order to really believe in it and follow it.

If man is nothing but a superior animal how ultimately do we distinguish good from evil? If man is superior then there is a distinction between man and animal even if man is an animal. That gives us an important clue.

The Christian reasoning is that if we are animals, there is no reason why we cannot be non-moral like dogs are non-moral. So Christians say the answer is that God helps us to be moral and he teaches us morality and morality comes from God. This creates a dichotomy - animal nature theory means we are not really moral versus God theory which says we are.

This is a morality of the gaps argument. It sees a hole and fills it with cosmetic filling. Instead of seeing morality as valid in itself, it sees what it wants to see in the hole. But wanting to see something in a hole and telling yourself it is there is no solution.

They feel compelled to see morality in the hole. But morality needs to be recognised freely to be morality. If you hurt a child you need to see it as wrong. A morality of the gaps means, "I do not see it as wrong but have to figure out that it is wrong for lots of harm will ensue if I don't". There is something brutal and oppressive and bigoted and inhuman about such a "morality". It is a good counterfeit for morality but it is not morality.

If there is a problem with how man can have a real morality, it is not worth worrying about for you know you do have this morality. And religion only makes the problem worse.

THE FEAR

Some believers in God want to make God and morality inseparable. One way they do that is by claiming that whatever God commands is good. They are afraid of the notion of a God who makes murder wrong today and who makes it good tomorrow. They want murder to be wrong objectively. They are using God as a safeguard against moral relativism. Moral relativism holds that if polygamy is right in one culture it is not right in one that forbids it. Relativism says polygamy really is immoral when your culture bans it. One fear is that if you do not see morality as "real" then you will violate it as long as you get away with it. It will change how you feel about hurting others.

So God is used to make people more controllable. The believers cannot get their wish. If you fuse God and morality, you will hold that you will only consider something moral if God commands it. Thus you are left doing it either totally because it was commanded or mainly. You are not doing it because it is good at all or mainly because it is good.

To act morally just because God says you must or because a religion or scripture says it, is not acting morally at all. Obedience and being moral are not the same thing. The motivation is blind conformity and that is degrading. If you do something because it is commanded and not because it is moral or ethical then you are not being moral. Obedient yes but

not moral.

"God doesn't give himself commands". So says William Lane Craig. If commands are good as morality suggests then that is a pity. Anyhow, 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.

It may be replied that morality demands obedience. But even if that is the case, if you obey God that is not the same as obeying morality. If you have to obey one or the other then obey morality. Obedience is degrading and you don't want to do it any more than you have to. It is better to do good even if you are told to do it NOT because you are told to. And as our nature is to love good though we often love it wrongly "obeying" morality is not really obeying but just keeping in line with our nature.

This commanding God rather than safeguarding the notion of good diminishes it. Religion no doubt loves it because it wants obedience and does not really care about goodness as it does about getting obeyed. It only leads to hypocrisy and resentment.

It is repugnant to keep moral rules just to get a reward from God or to avoid his punitive justice. That is worrying about the reward and not about what is right or good. But when morality is about forcing you to obey by threatening punishment it is clear that morality is about control and not what is right or good. It wants you to behave for the benefits and falsely claims that it cares about real goodness. It only uses goodness as an excuse to bully.

HARM

Harm can only be understood as follows: if action x makes the person worse off than if some other action had been done, then the person has been harmed.

Philosophers debate something called normative authority. They mean normative moral authority. This authority is independent of anybody's rules even God's. You are to do good because it is good. Religion opposes this though it is plainly correct.

Just see diminishing suffering and increasing happiness as important. Make that your main value. Forget about God. Even if we make mistakes in trying to help people, at least we are still true to our value. The value matters more than any rules about how to implement it. If you have to love values or rules about the values and it has to be one or the other then you know what you must choose.

If a mind could only choose one thing it would not be God or rules it would be a value such as kindness or justice or affinity. The notion of God is nonsense for it implies God alone matters when he simply cannot.

THE CONTRADICTION

Objective morality contradicts itself because it poses as commands. Suppose it is objectively moral to save a toddler who runs out in front of a lorry. What if you don't do this because it is objectively good but because you are commanded by God or think morality in itself commands you? That is not morality but obedience. It is not obedience to objective morality because it is morality. It is just obedience. Surely it is best to just save the child and not think about laws or obligation.

If there is no objective good unless it is commanded, that does not mean you care about it being good. You could care only that it is commanded.

The contradiction is that we want to be able to say that morality as in helping others is objectively good and real. We cannot if we bring commands into it - into the centre and core of it.

Believing then that God commands you to help people in trouble makes the problem far worse for God supposedly comes first or alone matters.

MORALITY AND PUNISHMENT

The God concept destroys morality in many ways. If God exists you will be punished for doing evil. If God does not exist you still have to do good though you will not have him to punish you. You should not do good to avoid punishment but because it is good. So if you need to believe in God it is so that you and others might be punished. The doctrine then is vindictive for it is unnecessary.

MIGHT IS RIGHT

The God belief produces many monsters in how it implies that God should be obeyed just because he is powerful which

sanctions the might is right fanaticism. We don't need to obey him just because he is good for good has its own authority and you cannot obey a person just because they are good.

You obey because it is good to obey not because they are good. Being good doesn't necessarily mean you always get it right. You obey your own perception of what good is and which therefore says good should be done – the perception that the person inspired. God's authoritarianism has been a cancer in the world and has fomented bigotry and resentment in his worshippers for you come to resemble what you adore. God cannot then give meaning to life for the God concept is evil. God is evil if he made us for himself. If he didn't, then we can make our own decisions.

FINALLY

Morality and authority have problems but trying to ground morality in God's commands adds to those problems. The end result is a hypocritical and deceitful "morality". The argument cares about morality and rules and not good as it is. It turns good into a weapon of power - morality is a weapon. Nobody wants to believe that it should be your spontaneous choice to embrace a code of moral rules. Instead they command you to accept it. While you can be forced to keep the rules you have signed up to you cannot be forced to sign up in the first place.