

Theistic Arguments: The Craig Program, 4

Edwin Chong
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Moral Argument

- ✦ God makes sense of the *objective moral values in the world.*

The Argument

- # If God does not exist, objective moral values do not exist.
- # Objective moral values do exist.
- # Therefore, God exists.
- # (A *deductive* argument.)

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Objective Moral Values

- # Morals that are binding whether or not anybody believes them.
- # Example: the Holocaust was objectively wrong even though the Nazis who carried it out thought that it was right.
- # Many theists and atheists concur on premise 1 (e.g., [Bertrand Russell, Michael Ruse, Friedrich Nietzsche]).
- # If there's no God, what's so special about human beings and their morality?
- # On the atheistic view, there's nothing really wrong with rape. But somehow we all recognize that rape *is objectively wrong*, not just socially unacceptable (perhaps for preservation of our species).

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What We're Not Saying

We're not saying:

- # "We must believe in God to live moral lives."
- # "We must believe in God to recognize objective moral values."
- # "We must believe in God to formulate an adequate system of ethics."

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Counter-Argument: Premise 1

- # *If God does not exist, objective moral values do not exist?*
- # Objective moral values can exist in the absence of God.
- # "Atheistic Moral Realism."

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Answer (Premise 1)

- # *Objective moral values can exist in the absence of God.*
- # Incomprehensible.
Example: what does it mean for justice to exist?
- # Moral values exist as properties of persons, not as abstractions.
- # Moral duty or obligation is incompatible with Atheistic Moral Realism [Richard Taylor].
- # It is highly improbable that just that sort of creatures would emerge from blind evolution who correspond to the abstractly existing realm of moral values.

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Counter-Arguments: Premise 2

- # *Objective moral values do exist?*
- # But objective moral values don't exist (because there is no God).
- # The only reason you believe objective moral values exist is that you believe in God!
- # If objective moral values exist, why is it that we change our view of morals over time?
- # If objective moral values exist, why can't we all agree universally about what is moral?

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Answers (Premise 2)

- # *But objective moral values don't exist (because there is no God).*
- # Agreed. This follows from premise 1 if we assume there is no God.
- # But what other reason is there to think that this is true?

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Answers (Premise 2) [cont'd]

- # *The only reason you believe objective moral values exist is that you believe in God!*
- # *Genetic fallacy*: invalidating an argument by showing how it originated (e.g., the only reason you believe in democracy is that you were raised in a democratic society).
- # The truth of a statement is independent of how the statement originated, or the motives of the person asserting it.

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Answers (Premise 2) [cont'd]

- # *If objective moral values exist, why is it that we change our view of morals over time?*
- # Our gradual and fallible apprehension of the moral realm no more undermines the objective reality of that realm than our gradual and fallible apprehension of the physical world undermines the objective reality of the physical realm.

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Answers (Premise 2) [cont'd]

- # *If objective moral values exist, why can't we all agree universally about what is moral?*
- # Some moral questions have clear answers, others do not.
- # If we fail to see the objective moral truth about a matter, then we are simply morally handicapped, like a color-blind person that cannot tell red from green. This impairment should not make us question what we do see clearly.

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Other Counter-Arguments

- # *If we say "God is good," we must have some independent meaning of the word "good."*
- # Plato's Euthyphro Argument.
- # Basic dilemma: either something is good because God commands it or else God commands it because it is good.
- # Former: right and wrong are arbitrary; latter: goodness is independent of God.
- # Plato's solution: God himself is the Good. God's commandments are not arbitrary, but necessarily flow from his own nature.

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Other Counter-Arguments [cont'd]

- # *Some things are evil, but God is good and he created everything.*
- # *Problem of evil:* classical atheistic defense.
- # But how do we know that something is evil? It must be that we have a moral yardstick by which to judge evil.
- # Gives rise to an argument for God's existence:
 - If God does not exist, objective moral values do not exist.
 - Evil exists.
 - Therefore, objective moral values exist (some things are truly evil).
 - Therefore, God exists.
- # But we still haven't answered *why* God permits evil. That's a wholly separate question.

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Further Reading

- ‡ Wes Morriston, "Must There Be a Standard of Moral Goodness Apart from God?" *Philosophia Christi*, Series 2, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 127–138, 2001.
spot.colorado.edu/~morristo/goodness.html