

Saturday, May 12, 2012

Answering Dustin Segers' Presuppositionalism, Part IVa: Objective Morality

I am back! I had originally intended to post my response to [Segers' question about morality](#) back in April, but I had several conferences to attend and I also moved into a new house on the outskirts of Bangkok. There's still much to do and I'm extremely busy, but I have managed to devote some snippets of time here and there to my writing. Not ideal, but I'll take what I can get!

So many issues came up as I was writing about the contrasts between (genuinely) objective morality and what passes for morality in Christianity, that I have decided to split this portion of my reaction to Segers into two different blog entries. In the present entry I answer Segers' question about morality, provide definitions for important terms relevant to his question (e.g., what is morality? What is objectivity? Etc.), emphasize the importance of focusing on the individual when discussing morality, examine the 10 commandments, explore the topic of how one determines his own values, and make some points about the abortion debate.

In the follow-up entry (IVb), I will highlight the collectivistic implications of Christian morality and explore Christianity's permissive view of slavery.

Throughout all of my discussion I draw attention to the stark contrasts between objective morality and Christian morality, leaving no question that Christian morality is entirely unfit for human life and certainly not to be confused with a moral code which is in fact objective in nature. To serve this end I make use of some dazzling quotations from defenders of Christianity themselves.

The previous four entries in my response to Segers can be found here:

[Answering Dustin Segers' Presuppositionalism, Part I: Intro and the Nature of Truth](#)

[Answering Dustin Segers' Presuppositionalism, Part II: The Nature of Logic](#)

[Answering Dustin Segers' Presuppositionalism, Part IIIa: The Uniformity of Nature](#)

[Answering Dustin Segers' Presuppositionalism, Part IIIb: The Problem of Induction](#)

In [his blog](#), Segers poses the following question about morality to atheists:

4. Morality - "How do you account for objective morality without God?"

I have to say, when looking at questions like this, that seeing the concept "objective morality" in the same sentence with the notion "God," I can only suppose that the person posing it really has no rational understanding of what morality and objectivity are. Since the question clearly implies that its author thinks there must be some difficulty in the project of offering an "account for objective morality without God," some significant remedial investigation is necessary. **Basic Definitions** To understand Segers' question, we need to clarify what the terms of his question mean. Only then can we intelligently address it. So let's ask the relevant questions:

What is morality? What is objectivity? What is objective morality?

In [his blog entry](#), Segers follows up his question with the following anecdotal report of his adventure at the Reason Rally where he posed his questions to the event's attendees:

Regarding **morality**, we defined what objective morality was, showed that it requires God to make sense out of it, and as expected, most atheists defended moral relativism.

He says "we defined what objective morality was" ("was"?), but unfortunately he does not include that definition in his blog entry. Perhaps folks like Segers are in the habit of assuming that the definitions of such terms are already well known, perhaps even self-evident somehow, even though what these terms mean

may be the greatest point of contention when questions like Segers' are debated. It's even worse if neither party to such debate is concerned about their meaning.

Of course, I don't think we'll find the meanings of these terms in the Christian bible. Those who contend that we can, are welcome to explain how.

Unfortunately, however, none of my bibles even contain either of the words 'objective' or 'morality' to begin with, let alone provide definitions for them. If, as presuppositionalists might want to argue, these concepts are nevertheless present or implicit in what the bible says, it remains that we still need to look for their meanings elsewhere, and import them into our reading of the biblical text, an operation which itself will only undermine such a contention and confirm the sneaking suspicion that we'll be better off looking elsewhere for serious information about morality.

At any rate, since Segers directs his questions to non-Christians, then it is only suitable that non-Christians address his questions by informing their terms with their own worldview's meanings and "presuppositions." After all, isn't that what presuppositionalists are interested in? Aren't presuppositionalists concerned to expose some kind of internal inconsistency or self-contradiction lurking within the worldviews of their opponents? Such apologists should therefore welcome non-Christians making plain the meanings of their terms and the content of the premises which inform their conclusions.

By 'morality', then, my worldview means: "a code of values to guide man's choices and actions" (Ayn Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics," *The Virtue of Selfishness*, p. 13).

A 'value' is something that a living organism requires to live and which it acts to gain and/or preserve. Clearly man is a living organism, and because of his root nature as such he requires values in order to live. The standard of man's values, then, is his life as a biological organism. For man, his values include such obvious things as food, water, shelter, clothing, medicine, and some things which other worldviews might tend to overlook, such as freedom (since he needs to be free to act and pursue reason where it takes him), pleasure (since pleasure gives him an incentive to live), reason (yes, man can and should value reason itself, for it makes his pursuit of other values possible), relationships (for they also give him an incentive to live), etc. Let those who think freedom, pleasure, reason and relationships are not properly classed as values, abandon those things in his own life.

Objectivity is a principle which guides man's conceptual activity, namely one which teaches him how to discriminate between fantasy and fact, between imagination and reality, between what is actual and what is merely wishful thinking, between emotion and truth. Objectivity is the application of the primacy of existence to all areas of one's reasoning.

To be "objective" in one's conceptual activities is volitionally to adhere to reality by following certain rules of method, a method based on facts *and* appropriate to man's form of cognition. (Leonard Peikoff, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand*, p. 117)

Rand offers some helpful points which expand on this:

Objectivity is both a metaphysical and an epistemological concept. It pertains to the relationship of consciousness to existence. Metaphysically, it is the recognition of the fact that reality exists independent of any perceiver's consciousness. Epistemologically, it is the recognition of the fact that a perceiver's (man's) consciousness must acquire knowledge of reality by certain means (reason) in accordance with certain rules (logic). This means that although reality is immutable and, in any given context, only one answer is true, the truth is not automatically available to a human consciousness and can be obtained only by a certain mental process which is required of every man who seeks knowledge—that there is no substitute for this process, no escape from the responsibility for it, no shortcuts, no special revelations to privileged observers—and that there can be no such thing as a final "authority" in matters pertaining to human knowledge. Metaphysically, the only authority is reality; epistemologically—one's own mind. The first is the ultimate arbiter of the second.

The concept of objectivity contains the reason why the question "Who decides what is right or

wrong?" is wrong. Nobody "*decides.*" Nature does not *decide*—it merely *is*; man does not *decide*, in issues of knowledge, he merely *observes* that which is. When it comes to applying his knowledge, man decides what he chooses to do, according to what he has learned, remembering that the basic principle of rational action in *all* aspects of human existence, is: "Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed." This means that man does not *create* reality and can achieve his values only by making his decisions consonant with the facts of reality. ("Who is the Final Authority in Ethics?" *The Objectivist Newsletter*, Feb. 1965, 7)

Morality is *objective*, then, when it is based on relevant *facts* which underwrite man's need for values and which determine the actions which he needs to take in order to live *and* on a method which is "appropriate to man's form of cognition," namely *reason*. Objective morality is essentially the application of reason to man's task of living his life. Objective morality, then, is informed by reference to *facts* which man discovers *by reason*, not by "commandments" which are "revealed" to a chosen few and delivered to all with the expectation that they will be accepted as truth and obeyed on someone's mere say so.

Since the standard of man's values is his life as a biological organism, we must keep in mind those facts which ensure the objectivity of his moral code. Several key *facts* which inform this standard include the facts that:

- man exists
- he is a biological organism
- he faces a fundamental alternative (he can live, he can also die)
- he must act in order to live
- his life requires values
- he does not automatically know what he requires in order to live
- he does not automatically know what actions he needs to take in order to achieve or preserve those values that his life requires
- he has the ability to conceptualize what he perceives
- it is by conceptualizing what he perceives that man can *know* anything

As should be clear by now, we should notice at this point that there has been no reference or need to make reference to a god or any supernatural agent here. We did not need to consult the bible for our understanding of what morality is (indeed, we couldn't - the bible does not explain what the concept 'morality' means), and we did not come to this knowledge by revelation, faith, prayer, laying on of hands, fasting, or any other mystical "means of knowing." Theism is utterly irrelevant to objective morality, and necessarily so (particularly since [theism violates the primacy of existence](#)).

It should be noted that objective morality does not consist of a set of "obligations" which one is compelled to do regardless of its importance to his own life or in spite of his needs. Objective morality is informed by *rational principles* which guide an individual's choices and actions with respect to his own life, his needs, and the circumstances in which he finds himself. Christian morality undermines this project by telling the individual that he has a divinely decreed obligation to submit to something "higher" than him, to sacrifice himself, to be willing to sacrifice his values, to embrace suffering as an end in itself, to view death as a passage of liberation from the sorrows of living. By contrast, objective morality teaches an individual how to celebrate and enjoy his life:

The purpose of morality is to teach you, not to suffer and die, but to enjoy yourself and live. ("Galt's Speech," *For the New Intellectual*, p. 123)

Christians will say that one should "enjoy God," not himself, but then immerse themselves into the confines of an apologetic labyrinth in which the apologist continually confuses himself with the god he claims to worship and serve as the source of all that is right and true. This is all part of the bait-and-switch tactics of

the Christian devotional program. Its net effect is to divorce man from the values he needs in life, and biblical anecdotes model exactly this.

Christians will react to a morality based on facts by insisting that such a moral code must commit the “is-ought fallacy.” Following Hume (who argued in Book III of his *Treatise on Human Nature* that morality is not derived from reason), Christian apologists can be expected to recite the worn-out objection that one cannot derive an “ought” from an “is,” and in this way seek to discount objective morality - i.e., a moral code based on facts. But this would miss the fact that *values* as objective morality informs them are not the same thing as “oughts” as deontological ethics informs them. It is true that one cannot derive *duties* from facts - objective morality agrees with this entirely, and it is because there is no factual basis to the *duties* which moral codes like Christianity’s foist onto man, that such monstrosities should be rejected and abandoned.

Objective morality holds that *values* are the tie between man’s nature (i.e., relevant reality) and the proper choices and actions he needs to make in order to live. Since the standard of value is man’s life itself, both his needs as a biological organism and the nature of his consciousness serve as the relevant factors in defining a moral code proper to the task of living.

Objectivism holds that value is objective (not intrinsic or subjective); value is based on and derives from the facts of reality (it does not derive from mystic authority or from whim, personal or social). Reality, we hold – along with the decision to remain in it, i.e., to stay alive – dictates and demands an entire code of values. Unlike the lower species, man does not pursue the proper values automatically; he must discover and choose them; but this does not imply subjectivism. Every proper value-judgment is the identification of a fact: a given object or action advances man’s life (it is good): or it threatens man’s life (it is bad or an evil). The good, therefore, is a species of the true; it is a form of recognizing reality. The evil is a species of the false; it is a form of contradicting reality. Or: values are a type of facts; they are facts considered in relation to the choice to live. (Leonard Peikoff, “Fact and Value,” *The Intellectual Activist*, Volume V, Number 1, New York, 1989.)

The alternative to fact is imagination. Objective morality is premised on fact, while religious morality (including Christianity’s) is ultimately premised on imagination. This is why defenders of Christianity resonate so positively with Hume’s view that there is an unbridgeable divide between “is” and “ought”: their “oughts” have nothing to tie them to *facts*.

So in response to Segers’ question “How do you account for objective morality without God?” I can say:

I account for objective morality by pointing to the objective theory of values. The objective theory of values is based on *facts* which we discover about our nature by means of *reason*. The objective theory of values avoids the so-called “is-ought problem” since ‘value’ is a *type of fact*, and because moral action is both *chosen* as well as inherently *goal-oriented*. The “is-ought problem” will always be a problem for thinkers who conceive of morality as a code of *duties* - as a list of dos and don’ts which one is *obligated* to observe and perform. Rather than a deontology prescribing *categorical imperatives* (“thou shalt...”), the objective theory teaches man to organize his choices and actions in the form of *hypothetical imperatives* - e.g., *if X is your goal, then Y is the action that must be performed to achieve it*. A broad context of relevant facts, beginning with man’s biological nature, is what determines whether or not X is his suitable goal.

Moreover, I have no need to appeal to a god precisely because this moral code is *objective* in nature. Appealing to a god ensures *subjectivism* (as opposed to Objectivism) since according to god-belief, what is “moral” is adherence to what a god *commands* (as opposed to facts relevant to man’s life needs which one discovers by means of reason). On an *objective* moral code, facts are facts *independent of conscious activity*, which means: facts are facts *regardless of what anyone commands*. Given [the primacy of existence](#) (which Dustin Segers [sought to refute](#)), actions of consciousness - be they [imagining](#), [wishing](#) or [commanding](#) - have no power over facts. The facts of reality do not conform to conscious intentions. Recognition this fact and applying it consistently to our knowledge are the essence of objectivity. Christian theism constitutes a full-frontal assault on this recognition, and debilitates one’s ability to apply it consistently to what he accepts as knowledge. Christianity and objectivity are irreconcilable opposites. If Segers does not grasp this

now, after he's been [corrected on such a miserably embarrassing, face-losing gaff](#), he really does confirm [my analysis of the mystical mind](#).

Morality and the Individual

It should also be noted that, according to the conception of morality which I have laid out here, morality is not *primarily* social in nature. In other words, it's *primary* application, manifestation and context of meaning is not in terms of social relationships, but in terms of one's own needs and his relationship to reality. Objective morality is primarily suited to the *individual*, for not only is it the individual who has needs and faces a fundamental alternative (i.e., life vs. death), but it is the individual who reasons and makes choices. An individual does not lose his individuality by joining a group; he still has to make choices and take responsibility for his actions.

This fact, that morality is focused on the individual, seems to be lost on many theistic commentators. The reason why it seems to be lost on theistic commentators is because when the topic of morality surfaces in conversation with theists, focus is immediately thrown to interpersonal relations. Once morality becomes a debating topic, attention is immediately cast onto things like killing, stealing, lying, adultery, etc., issues which clearly involve the individual interacting with others. It is as though theists are simply unwilling to consider the individuality of man and the nature of *his* moral needs, for this would probably compel them to start thinking about *why* man needs morality, which would require them to ask *if* man needs values, and, if so, *why* he needs values. Better for theists to ignore all of this and blur the individual into some collective so that his individuality is lost in a series of floating abstractions.

Christian theism's habit of overlooking the individuality of morality finds its model in what they take to be the authorized standard of morality, namely their god's *word* (again, not *facts* which we discover in reality, but a set of "revelations" which have been dispensed to a chosen few and passed down through the generations as "holy text"). Take a look at what Christians typically point to as their quintessential standard of morality, the "10 Commandments." Here they are (from Exodus 20 - vss. 3-17):

1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
2. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.
3. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. 4. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.
5. Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.
6. Thou shalt not kill.
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
8. Thou shalt not steal.
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.
10. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

Notice how most of these "commandments" assume the context of interpersonal relationships. True, interpersonal relationships are the norm for most persons, but this fact alone does not justify ignoring an individual's need for a code of values which guides *his* choices and actions. He needs this first in order to live and even value social interaction in the first place.

In contrast to the bulk of the bible's "commandments," objective morality is *individual-focused*. Objective morality provides an *individual* thinker those tools which he needs in order to govern his choices *objectively*

and *rationally* - i.e., in accordance with fact and reason. It does not ignore or deny his ability to think and reason by prescribing for him a list of duties he's commanded to follow without thinking or reasoning in the social contexts in which he finds himself.

Rand made a very important observation about *objective morality* when she stated in her novel *Atlas Shrugged*:

You who prattle that morality is social and that man would need no morality on a desert island—it is on a desert island that he would need it most. Let him try to claim, when there are no victims to pay for it, that a rock is a house, that sand is clothing, that food will drop into his mouth without cause or effort, that he will collect a harvest tomorrow by devouring his stock seed today—and reality will wipe him out, as he deserves; reality will show him that life is a value to be bought and that thinking is the only coin noble enough to buy it. (“Galt’s Speech,” *For the New Intellectual*, p. 127)

In other words, a man who finds himself stranded all alone on an island - with no one to help with survival, no one to trade with, with no one to loot, no one to mooch off of, no one to provide for him - would have to have a very clear understanding of his own priorities as well as a sharp mind for determining how to meet those priorities. In other words, he'd have to have a solid code of values which could guide his choices and actions. He'd need something rational that he could bank on, for his life would depend exclusively on this; it would depend exclusively on his own effort, his own ability, his own determination to make the right choices - i.e., the choices which his life requires given the circumstances he faces. He couldn't leave it to someone else to meet his life needs; his life rests entirely on his own shoulders. Rand's point is that such a person would have far more need for morality than those of us who live in a fully developed, modern society, where others might very well provide the effort we need in order to survive and with whom we can trade.

The 10 Commandments

With this in mind, let's take a closer look at the “morality” of the 10 commandments. Notice that the first four commandments (namely: 1. Have no other gods; 2. Do not make any graven image; 3. Do not use the Christian god's name in vain; 4. Keep the “sabbath”) do not in any way address man's biological needs. It is true that these four commandments do not require a context of relationships with other human beings in order for them to be practiced. But following these commands would not in any way help a man stranded alone on a desert island in his effort to live. So to the extent that the 10 commandments address the needs of man qua individual, they are useless.

The remaining six commandments all presuppose some kind of social relationship. The commandment to honor one's parents, for example, presupposes that one has some proximity to his parents, such that he can act in such a way that he can indeed honor them. Unless the fifth commandment is not tantamount to ancestor worship, it is not commanding a person to “honor” his parents in some form of mystical manner. If a person is separated from his parents by hundreds or thousands of miles of open sea, such a commandment has no intrinsic value whatsoever.

Even more, the commandment “thou shalt not kill” presupposes the presence of persons which one could theoretically kill if he had made the choice to do so. A man cannot kill another man if there is no other man available to kill. The commandment against killing others does a person no good as a moral principle if there are no others that he could kill if he so chose.

How about the commandment proscribing adultery? This too would be morally useless to an individual who found himself stranded alone on a desert island. Even if the individual is married, he would have no one to commit adultery with. So in this respect already it's of no use.

And if there's no one else on the island with him, there's no one to steal from, so the eighth commandment will simply not apply. It can't.

How about the ninth commandment's injunction against “bear[ing] false witness against [one's] neighbor”? Again, we must ask: to whom would a man stranded alone on a desert island bear false witness against his

neighbor, especially when he has neither neighbor nor anyone to whom he could bear such false witness in the first place? Again, we have a morally useless “commandment” here for our poor fellow who finds himself all alone on an island.

Now certainly the tenth commandment, prohibiting the act of “coveting thy neighbour’s house... wife, ... his manservant, ... his maidservant, ...his ox, ... his ass, ... any thing that is [his] neighbor’s,” must have some value for an individual who finds himself stranded all alone on a desert island, wouldn’t it? Unfortunately, no, it would not. Such an individual would have no neighbors whose values he could covet. And even if he could covet the values of those neighbors he had back at home, hundreds if not thousands of miles away, such an injunction would have no moral value - it would not provide him with any guide for his own choices and actions.

The point is not so much that the 10 Commandments do not apply to an individual who is stranded alone on a desert island, but rather that “biblical morality” offers an individual no guidance for his own personal choices and actions qua individual human being, even when he is surrounded in the midst of numerous interpersonal relationships. Telling a person not to kill others or to steal from them or to bear false witness or covet his neighbor’s ox, does not teach him how to guide his own choices and actions in regard to his own life. It leaves an individual’s life concerns completely unattended. To the extent that the “morality” provided in the bible is a system, it systematically ignores the individual’s needs and reduces him to herd animal which needs to be prodded into “right behavior” by telling him what *not* to do rather than teaching him how he can determine for himself what he *should* do, given the constraints of his existence qua biological organism possessing a conceptual consciousness.

Even worse, the “morality” which one finds in the bible is entirely geared toward either how an individual can sacrifice himself, or how he can deprive himself in the context of interpersonal relationships. Rather than teaching man how to live and enjoy his life, “biblical morality” discourages him from living, and instead commands him to surrender his life, to give it up, to present himself as “a living sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1), either to those who would have to violate its teachings in order to benefit from his surrender, or to a being which would have no use for it to begin with (since the Christian god is said to be incorporeal and bodiless, and therefore non-biological, and also immortal, eternal and indestructible, and therefore not beholden to the fundamental alternative of life vs. death).

Determining One’s Values

Let us ask: How does one determine what the content of man’s values is? One’s answer to this question will of course depend on what he takes as his standard and the means by which he acquires and validates knowledge. If morality is to be objective, then its ultimate standard *must* be the primacy of existence and the means by which moral knowledge is acquired and validated is reason. The primacy of existence is the recognition of the fact that existence exists independent of consciousness, that the facts are what they are regardless of any individual’s wishes, fantasies, imaginings, feelings, temper tantrums, commandments, etc. Reason is the faculty which identifies and integrates the material provided by man’s senses. It works by means of [concept-formation](#).

The essence of the primacy of existence can be found in the truism that *wishing* doesn’t make a claim true. Why doesn’t wishing make a claim true? Because existence holds metaphysical primacy over the actions of consciousness, and wishing is an action of consciousness. So if the theist acknowledges that wishing doesn’t make it so, then he’s conceding to the primacy of existence. How else does he account for the fact, which he affirms, that wishing doesn’t make it so, if not by recognizing the broader fact that existence exists independent of consciousness? There’s no room for compromise here, no allowance for vagueness, evasion, elusiveness, slipperiness, or theistic expedience. Either existence exists independent of consciousness, or it doesn’t. The issue of metaphysical primacy compels the theist to state his position in explicit terms. What will it be?

If morality is objective, then it’s based on the primacy of existence, which means: its principles obtain regardless of what any individual thinks, feels, wants, commands, denies, suppresses, etc. The content of man’s values is therefore determined by *facts* which one *discovers* in reality (no one “creates” them by some

act of will), such as the fact that man requires food, water, shelter, even happiness, in order to live qua man (i.e., qua the rational animal). And since his knowledge is neither automatic nor infallible, man needs an objective means of knowledge by which he can determine what is a value to him and which actions he will need to take in order to achieve and/or preserve the values which he needs. Man's means of knowledge is called *reason*. So objective morality is a code of values which guides an individual's choices and actions in conformance with the primacy of existence and according to relevant facts about man's nature as a biological organism and suited to the epistemological needs determined by the nature of his consciousness. At each point, it is *facts* which consistently determine the nature of his moral code. It's hard to see why anyone would object to this, but many do, and do so strenuously.

Those who say or imply that morality is *not* based on facts, are simply telling us about themselves and the worthlessness of their brand of morality. They're telling us that what they take to be moral principles have no facts to back them up.

The alternative to objective morality is a code which grants metaphysical primacy to some form of consciousness and which dispenses with reason as its epistemological standard. The primacy of consciousness is the view that reality conforms to the dictates of a *will*, that consciousness holds metaphysical primacy over existence. Expressions of this metaphysic are found throughout Christianity: from the doctrine of creation ex nihilo (i.e., creation by an act of *will*), to the creation of man, to the overarching "plan" informed by "God's counsel" to which all of human history conforms, to the doctrines of miracles, faith in the supernatural, prayer, demon possession, prophecy, salvation, etc. All of these vital tenets of the Christian worldview rest on the primacy of consciousness. In each case, we have some activity of consciousness causing, motivating, manipulating, revising, influencing what exists and what happens. Sort of like *Bewitched*. Or a [cartoon](#).

A morality which rests on the primacy of consciousness, then, is going to be a morality which is informed by *commands* delivered from a ruling consciousness which is alleged to possess power to bring reality into being, reshape its contents according to its will, and make happen whatever it pleases (cf. Ps. 115:3). It also requires obedience to its commandments, for these commandments are supposed to be more absolute than fact. Such a morality is not objective, since it is not in keeping with the primacy of existence. Rather, it is *subjective* since it rests on the assumption that some *subject* holds metaphysical primacy over existence. What Christian would deny his god the power to create the universe and dictate its contents by an act of will? The subjectivism of Christian morality is impossible to miss once it's pointed out: man's guide to action according to Christianity consists of the "duty" to obey a list of commandments on the threat of eternal punishment. This is "morality" backed up by a cosmic stick-waver - "Obey my commands, or I'll make sure you suffer." Ultimately such a morality boils down to obedience to someone's whims which are taken as inviolate commandments. It all comes down to a *person* saying something is the case, very much in the manner of wishing makes it so.

On Christianity's premises, *chosen* action can be "justified" - not because there are objective reasons (i.e., reasons which back out to a reality which exists independent of any observer's consciousness), but because the ruling consciousness says so. Many examples of this can be found in many defenses of "Christian morality," but a very clear and concise example of this was provided recently by Sye Ten Bruggencate when he joined Seth Andrews and DPR Jones on [The Thinking Atheist Podcast](#), [episode #53](#), from which the following dialogue was excerpted (17:48 - 18:23):

DPR Jones: I want to hear Sye's answer to this. An all-loving god commits people to an eternity of torment and torture. How is that compatible with an all-loving god?

Sye Ten Bruggencate: Well, like I said, he's not all-loving, first of all. He's all-good. But you have to keep in mind too that although we're plunged into sin by one person, there's also the chance for salvation through one person.

Jones: You're shifting the ground again.

Sye: Oh sorry, okay, go on...

Jones: Answer the question. How is it justified that...

Sye: Because God says it's justified.

Jones: Because God says so. Okay.

Sye: That's right.

According to Christianity, something is "justified" simply because the Christian god is believed to have "said" it's justified. No other reason is offered, and Christianity requires in the believer a mindset which finds such blatant subjectivism satisfactory.

This is the root reason why Christianity abhors selfishness. "Don't be selfish," we're constantly being told. Why? Because an individual is not to live for his own sake, according to Christianity. He is expected to be ever-willing to sacrifice himself - his values, his judgment, his reason, his life - for the sake of a supernatural being which could never have any need for it (for the Christian god is said to have *no* needs in the first place). And the first thing he is to give up is his mind. Just as Abraham was expected to be willing to kill his own son in Genesis 22, the Christian believer is expected to be willing to give up his judgment and his reason for the sake of embracing a worldview which is incompatible with both.

A selfish person is not going to be willing at the drop of a hat, basically merely by being commanded to do so, to give up his own mind or kill his own son. A selfish person acts to *preserve* his highest values. Refusing to give up your own mind and insisting on acting to preserve your own values is condemned by presuppositionalists such as Dustin Segers and Sye Ten Bruggencate as nominating oneself as the authority of one's own mind. Christianity does not allow a person to own his own mind and take responsibility for governing it. Government of one's own mind must be surrendered in toto to a god whose goals, purposes and reasons may forever remain utterly mysterious to him.

Bruggencate puts it in terms of who is "lord" of one's reasoning - either himself or some being which we can only apprehend by imagining it ([Thinking Atheist podcast](#), 33:45 - 34:05):

I would say that there are some fundamental tenets [to being a true Christian]. One of them is God being the Lord of our reasoning. And you cannot reason out of a position that God is Lord of our reasoning, because then you are always Lord of your own reasoning. And I'm saying that it's impossible to reason from a position that God is Lord of your reasoning. And that is one fundamental tenet. If you're the lord of your reasoning then you're not a Christian.

By the same token, on the view which Bruggencate affirms here, one could not reason his way *to* Christianity as a set of truths, since to do so one would be presuming himself as "lord" of his reasoning. This presents insurmountable logical problems for Christianity holds that all human beings start out in need of salvation, in need of rescue from sin, in need of Jesus. So sinners need to *convert* to Christianity. In order to become a Christian, then, one must completely surrender his mind in blind sacrifice *without any reason*, for if one has a reason to do so, then he's setting himself up as "lord" of his reasoning, and that is anathema to genuine Christianity. This can only mean that Christian faith and reason are philosophically incompatible.

While teaching an individual why and how to secure and protect his own values is the essential concern in objective morality, protecting one's own highest values is not what is modeled in the moral code presented by the bible. For instance, in the story of Jesus' crucifixion, the Christian god models the type of behavior which one could expect only from someone who's adopted an *anti-value* moral code. Here we have a father ("God") who stands idly by while his own son is being tortured, maimed, and nailed to a cross to die. The Christian bible's "father" does nothing to prevent harm from coming to his son, even though he's completely aware of what's happening and has the ability to bring all the power in the universe (and more!) against it in order to protect his child. But this "loving father" turns his back on his values, and allows them to be destroyed.

This is rather ironic, given what Christian apologists might claim, for in the very same [Thinking Atheist podcast](#), Sye Ten Bruggencate, reacting to Dan Barker's morality of "minimizing harm," exclaims (30:53 - 31:16):

I actually talked with Dan Barker on a radio show a couple days ago. But this whole idea of

minimizing harm, that's arbitrary. Why is that wrong? Why is it wrong to harm other people? By what standard is, y'know, why should we minimize harm? Is that the proper goal? That's the problem with pragmatism is that, pragmatism can give you a lot of things, but it can't give you the proper goal. See, I could tell you why we should minimize harm, but the atheist can't.

If there is a "should" behind minimizing harm, the Christian god seems to be unaware of it. The Christian god allows harm to come to its own son, and pretty much to everyone else. And while we can cite natural disasters which result in thousands of casualties, there are other things which act to harm human beings - what are said to be "creatures" made in the Christian god's "image" - such as disease, wars, and crime. And these things happen, which can only mean: the Christian god is not acting to minimize harm. So although Bruggencate says he can tell us why we should minimize harm, it's noteworthy that he doesn't provide that explanation in the podcast.

Abortion

Defenders of the Christian worldview very often raise the issue of abortion as a debating point. Fundamentalist Christians typically treat abortion as a species of murder, as unjustified taking of human life. Clearly to murder a person is to harm that person. But when Bruggencate has the opportunity to tell everyone the specifically Christian reason why they should not harm anyone, he remains silent. Indeed, there is no injunction against abortion in the bible so far as I can see. So believers must be *inferring* the alleged immorality of abortion from what they do read in their bibles (and yet this use of reason is apparently acceptable and not an instance of deviating from their god as "lord" of their reasoning).

When Dustin Segers, in his [conversation with Reynold Hall](#), asks (at 39:02) in discussing the morality of abortion:

Why is it okay for people to be pro-choice, but God can't be?

it should be obvious that this question can easily be turned around on the Christian:

Why is it okay for the Christian god, which is supposed not only to be morally perfect, but in fact the very *standard* of morality, to be pro-choice, but man should not be?

This rephrasing of Segers' question becomes all the more potent when we consider the facts that an eternal, immortal and indestructible being which has no needs would have nothing to gain from any chosen action, or even a need to act in the first place, while man *must* act in order to preserve his life and those values which make it possible. In light of this tremendous contrast, we can note that a person electing to have a child faces the potential risks of childbirth, the responsibility of caring for it, and very likely a sizeable imposition upon his own ability to produce values (since his time and energy will now have to be divided between productive work and caring for a child). So there could be some solid, values-based reasons for choosing to abort a pregnancy.

On the other hand, on Christianity's premises, the Christian god could at any moment decide to take the life of either the child or the child's caretaker, simply because it's part of some "plan" whose particulars are unknowable to men. In the meantime, a Christian mother-to-be who decides to abort during pregnancy, might take solace in the belief that her unborn child has "gone to the Lord," and has been spared not only the "veil of tears" in terms of which Christianity characterizes human life, but also the very strong potential that the child may never otherwise be "saved." If Christians believe that fetuses have souls, then abortion seems to be a sure bet for its salvation. Indeed, it could be said that the Christian god decided to abort his only begotten son when he was in his 30s, and millions of others souls in the case of miscarriage. So the mother-to-be in this case has ample precedent supporting her decision to abort.

Indeed, if the Christian god is both perfect and pro-choice (since it snuffs out human life whenever it chooses), then being pro-choice must be perfect. Christians who tell us that all of human history is planned by their god, need to answer whether or not abortion is part of their god's "plan." Observe the squirming. Notice also the personal attacks given in response to such questions.

Given the mischief which “God’s plan” can and often does cause to befall man in his efforts to live (think of earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, tsunamis and other natural disasters), the believer should ask himself:

Why should man do anything to protect his values when the god he’s expected to worship so willingly allows man’s values to be destroyed?

Both Christianity’s inherent fatalism and its god’s indifference to human values can only undermine man’s incentive to live. A man can spend his early adult years pursuing his values through productive work, and the god he’s expected to worship could easily come along and destroy it all in a flash. At the same time he’s expected to think of (i.e., imagine) this god as a “loving father.” Does a loving father come along and destroy the values and lives of the children he loves? What human parent would call that “love”? Christians might say that their god does not actively destroy anyone’s values, but hasten instead to say that such destruction comes as a result of the actions of some nefarious spirit, the “devil,” or “Satan,” perhaps. This does not alleviate the anti-value tension within the Christian worldview, for even in such a case the Christian god is said to be all-knowing and all-powerful as well as all-good. The bible even says “God is love” (I John 4:8). What loving father would stand by and watch while a menace to his children’s welfare comes careening into their lives, and allow it to destroy their values? According to Christianity, a god which does precisely this is said to be a “loving father.” That really tells us pretty much all we need to know about “Christian morality.”

To be continued.

by Dawson Bethrick