

## DEFENSE OF AN OBJECTIVE MORALITY

BY: Matthew Graham

One of the more overlooked arguments for God's existence is the moral argument. The cosmological, ontological, and teleological arguments are usually presented because they appear to be more scientific and rationally justifiable. This, however, is unfortunate because the moral argument, like the teleological argument, tends to appeal not only to the intellect, but to the heart as well. Many unbelievers do not have strong convictions about the nature of causality, but most have strong convictions about the moral status of abortion, capital punishment, or communism. This makes the moral argument, in many ways, more accessible to the laity and more personal to the university professor.

The moral argument, simply put, argues for God's existence in the following way:

1. An objective moral law implies a moral Law Giver.
2. An objective moral law exists.
3. Therefore, there must be a moral Law Giver.

Several variations of this argument exist, and each differs in persuasiveness and sophistication. One of the main strengths of this argument is found in its ability to provoke the hearer to action. An individual would be hard pressed to honestly deny that the holocaust was morally wrong. Even if that individual were a staunch relativist, that person would most likely describe the holocaust as repugnant. So, while it may seem that the absolutist and the relativist are miles apart from common ground, there is common ground to be found. Once both parties realize this, a case for the objectivity of morals can be made that is not only persuasive, but also emotionally moving.

The project of this paper will not be to present the moral argument for the existence of God; rather, the project of this paper will be to explore and defend the premise 'an objective moral law exists'. Exploring this premise is not only crucial to the defense of the moral argument; it is also quite helpful in illuminating the richness of a moral and virtuous life. Reflection on the nature of morality and virtue gives one a deeper appreciation for the moral argument without reducing moral principles to abstract ideas whose sole purpose is to persuade the relativist of their existence.

### **The Need to Defend Objective Morality**

Why does the objectivity of morals have to be defended? It seems rather obvious that people make moral determinations all the time. In fact, it seems rather irresponsible to deny the continual occurrences of moral judgments. No one can reasonably deny the fact that people deem certain acts to be “moral” or “immoral.” If this is doubted, it would only take careful observation of a co-worker, friend, or family member to see the obviousness of this fact. People continually condemn actions they think are wrong. They continually praise actions that they find noble and good. Therefore, the question is not; “Do people make moral judgments?” It is simply a fact that they do.

Since this is the case, why is it necessary to ask whether or not morals are objective? It is necessary because people have devised alternative ways of explaining the origin, nature, and content of moral judgments. It is not uncommon for the average person to assert that morals are nothing more than a matter of personal opinion.<sup>1</sup> It is even thought, by emotivists, that most evaluative statements are irrational expressions of

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<sup>1</sup>Personal opinion is used in a popular sense. Typically when someone says this they are claiming that morals are expressions of personal taste.

our desires. If this were the case, it would seem that many of man's natural activities are simply irrational.

There are others who believe that moral statements are justified by appealing to one's own subjective standard of the "good." As long as a moral statement corresponds with a deeply held conviction, that statement can be "true." Still others attempt to justify moral positions based on the pooled convictions of a group of people. People of this sort believe that the majority of people determine what is good.

Finally, there is the classical notion that moral truths are discovered, not determined by people. According to this view, a Law of Nature exists. Sometimes nature itself is appealed to as a ground for the truth of moral statements. Others appeal to God as the basis for their moral convictions. Of these explanations, some form of the last view appears to be correct. However, before that claim is made, it would be prudent to break down some contemporary ethical viewpoints to see which one, if any, withstand rational scrutiny.

### **Contemporary Metaethical Viewpoints**

In the book *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, by William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland, contemporary ethical viewpoints are broken down in the following way:

- I. Noncognitivist Theories
  - A. Emotivism
  - B. Imperativism / Prescriptivism
  
- II. Cognitivist Theories
  - A. Subjectivist Theories
    - 1. Private Subjectivism
    - 2. Cultural Relativism
  - B. Objectivist Theories
    - 1. Ethical Naturalism

## 2. Ethical Nonnaturalism<sup>2</sup>

To be more precise, these are the basic contemporary metaethical views.

Metaethics evaluates the language of morals. It asks about the meaning of moral terms such as "good", "bad", and "ought."

### Noncognitivism

Noncognitivist theories attempt to show that moral statements do not convey cognitive content. Moral claims are neither true nor false; they are simply non-cognitive emotive expressions. Not much time will be spent on noncognitivist theories because they are patently absurd. One may not believe in an objective moral standard, but to deny that moral statements convey cognitive content is nothing more than an *ad hoc* defense of an indefensible criterion for meaning. For even figures of speech convey cognitive content. Language may be flexible, but it is not so flexible so as to reduce "Rape is wrong" to some noncognitive status. It is difficult to see any good reason for holding this sort of metaethical theory.

Noncognitivism is usually predicated on some sort of logical positivism. Alfred Jules Ayer was of this sort. Logical positivists believe that only empirically verifiable statements and analytically true statements are meaningful.<sup>3</sup> Since moral claims meet neither of these criteria, moral claims must not be meaningful. Ayer elaborated on this point in his book *Language Truth and Logic*. Unfortunately for Ayer and the positivists, their criterion for meaningfulness is not meaningful. For it is neither analytically true, nor

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<sup>2</sup>J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 397.

<sup>3</sup>Robert Audi, ed., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy: Second Edition* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 514-16.

is it empirically verifiable. Since this criterion is self-stultifying, it is at least possible for moral claims to be meaningful.

Further, Noncognitivist theories such as Emotivism and Prescriptivism suppose that moral language is not for the purpose of relating information; rather, it is to relate an expression like "Hurrah for X" or to give a command like "Do X."<sup>4</sup> However, moral statements do, in fact, carry cognitive content. This is evidenced by the fact that people seek reasons for the truth of moral claims. If someone gives a command, "Do X," a hearer may respond, "Why should I do X?" Obviously, if someone gave a command that disagreed with the hearer's moral compass, the hearer would seek some kind of reasonable explanation for acting contrary to his own moral compass. One does not seek a rational explanation for the expressing of a feeling; the individual's expression of his psychological state is a sufficient explanation for his statement.<sup>5</sup> However, one does offer reasons in support of moral stances, because it is clear that an individual's expression of his psychological state is not a sufficient reason for moral action.<sup>6</sup>

### Cognitivism

Cognitivism, in contrast to noncognitivism, does not deny that ethical or moral statements possess cognitive content. All cognitivist theories agree that when a person

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<sup>4</sup>James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1986), 31.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 33-34.

<sup>6</sup>I am addressing emotivism and prescriptivism together. There are more detailed evaluations of these theories individually, but for purposes of this paper, I believe that the reasons I have given are sufficient to reject these theories.

makes a moral claim, he is actually conveying something meaningful. The two branches of cognitivists are Subjectivism and Objectivism.<sup>7</sup> Private subjectivists suppose that our moral claims correspond to an individual person's desire. Cultural subjectivists suppose that moral claims correspond to the majority's desire. In contrast, objectivist theories claim that moral statements are not derived from human desire, but discovered by human reason.<sup>8</sup>

### Subjectivism

For the cognitivist, moral statements may be true or false since the statement, "I dislike or do not approve of abortion" may be incorrect. This statement would be incorrect if, in fact, one did like or approve of abortion. Subjectivism, however, denies the existence of an objective moral standard.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, moral claims have only one thing to which they correspond. They may only correspond to the desires of the individual making the claim or the desires of a group of individuals making the claim. This view is problematic for several reasons.

First, if a moral statement were true simply on the basis of what an individual desires, it would be the case that multiple contradictory statements could be true. If one subjectivist said, "Homosexuality is morally wrong," and another said, "Homosexuality is not morally wrong," both of these statements, according to the subjectivist, could be true

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<sup>7</sup>I do not use objectivism as a reference to the philosophy of Ayn Rand. I use objectivism in a general way to refer to the idea that morals do not depend on people assent for their existence.

<sup>8</sup>Moreland and Craig, 400-402

<sup>9</sup>Rachels, 26.

since they are accurately reporting their thoughts on the subject. But this seems absurd, for contradictory statements are necessarily false.

The subjectivist may respond by noting that it is not necessary for these statements to be statements of fact about something external to them. Surely if one were to make contradictory statements about the existence of a particular chair, it would necessarily be the case that either the chair does exist or it does not exist. However, if moral statements were understood to refer to one's own desires, it would make sense for people to make different moral claims. In each case, a moral statement would have a different referent. One statement would refer to one individual and another statement would refer to another individual. So "X is wrong" and "X is not wrong" are not contradictory because in both cases, the referent is different.

This response is clearly insufficient. When one says, "X is wrong," he is not referring to his own desires. Even if the statement is motivated by some internal desire, the statement "X is wrong" is making reference to some external thing or act. This kind of indicative statement is saying, "That thing or act out there is wrong!" Even if the subject of the moral statement refers to one's own actions, the actions are still objective actions that are deemed right or wrong. Subjectivism simply does not account for this fact.

Second, subjectivist theories can never become normative theories. If moral claims are simply the relating of one's approval or disapproval, moral claims end up being merely descriptive. In other words, moral claims are simply describing the fact that a person either approves or disapproves an act or a thing. Unless the subjectivist can turn an individual's approval of an act into a prescription, subjectivism is doomed to the realm

of the descriptive. This being the case, any time a subjectivist says, "X is wrong," it would be appropriate to respond, "That is an interesting fact about your approval of X."

To put it another way, the question must be asked of the subjectivist, "Why should I do X?" The subjectivist should respond by saying, "Because I approve of X." One might follow up with the question, "Is your approval the sole basis for your prescription?" If the subjectivist was consistent, he would have to admit that it was the sole basis. But how does relating one's approval of something provide the basis for a normative prescription? It certainly does not follow that one "ought" to act in accordance with another person's wishes simply because he wishes it. If the subjectivist wants to be consistent, he should change his speech to reflect his actual meaning. He ought to say, "I do not approve of X," rather than saying, "X is wrong."

Another form of subjectivism is that of cultural subjectivism. This theory, as a metaethical theory, is an aggregation of a particular population's moral attitude. As a normative theory, it attempts to prescribe on the basis of the majority's attitudes. As a metaethical theory, it is not much different from a sociological survey. As a normative theory, it falls prey to the same criticisms of individual subjectivism. It is not clear how one person's attitude or a group of persons' attitudes should serve as the norm for some other individual's attitude. There is simply no reason for being obligated to the will of the majority simply because it is the majority.

Furthermore, cultural subjectivism arbitrarily draws marks in the sand. The cultural subjectivist arbitrarily assigns a nation, a tribe, or a city the status of a culture. In this way, he may define the boundaries of a particular enclave so as to defend his position. For example, was Nazi Germany a culture subject to its own cultural attitudes

and leanings? Is Berlin the culture that ought to be examined in order to determine what ought to be normative for the people of Berlin? Why not judge German culture by the common attitudes of Europe? The subjectivist simply can not answer these questions without begging the question.<sup>10</sup>

Even if there were some grounds for defining a culture as city or a nation, the cultural subjectivist has a difficult time dealing with moral reformers. For example, if culture X says that a caste system is the most noble of all social systems, and a moral reformer comes along to change that social system, that reformer would actually be immoral since he went against the cultural norm. This is the case even if the culture eventually agrees with the moral reformer!

At the beginning of the moral reformer's campaign, the reformer is evil, but if the reformer is successful, he is hailed as a hero. Hence he is really a hero. In this case, an action is evil at one time and good at another time. A subjectivist historian looking back at the reformations brought about by Ghandi would have to say that the same actions were both good and bad.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, there are objectivist theories. These theories do not rule out the conclusion of this paper<sup>12</sup> so they will not, at this time, be evaluated. Suffice it to say that objectivist theories account for moral judgments by concluding that these judgments are

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<sup>10</sup>This line of reasoning may be found in J. P. Morelands book, *Love Your God will All Your Mind*. Passim.

<sup>11</sup>This line of reasoning may be found in J. P. Morelands book, *Love Your God will All Your Mind*. Passim.

<sup>12</sup>Ethical naturalism is not consistent with the conclusions of this paper, but there is not time to mention that view here.

predicated on some objective standard. But what possible standard may be given as a basis for the rightness or wrongness of a moral claim? Unless one believes that man has a nature and that man has a natural end, it seems problematic to base one's claims in nature. For what descriptive truth could, in itself, be the basis for an objective prescription?

### **Basis for Objective Morality**

Perhaps one could start with the fact that people make moral judgments. As was mentioned previously, the fact of moral judgments is undeniable. However, one runs into a problem when trying to deduce an objective moral standard from the fact of moral judgments. The fact that people do make moral judgments doesn't necessarily imply that they are making these judgments because of some objective moral standard.<sup>13</sup> It could be the case, as the subjectivist contends, that people make moral judgments because they wish to express some internal desire. While this explanation is rather doubtful, it does appear to force the objectivist to offer some kind of argument for his position.

One route an objectivist may take is to offer a disjunctive syllogism:

1. Either non-cognitivism, subjectivism, or objectivism.
2. Neither non-cognitivism nor subjectivism
3. Therefore, objectivism

The disjunction above resembles the flow of this paper so far. As was explained above, non-objectivist theories do not account for all of the facts surrounding moral experience. Since they are inadequate, it would appear that objectivism is the triumphant view. Further elaboration on this disjunctive may be adequate for the demonstration an

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<sup>13</sup>There are alternative theories that attempt to explain the fact of moral judgments. None of these alternative theories are, in my opinion, viable explanations of this fact. But these alternative theories make it difficult to deduce an objective moral standard from the bare fact of moral judgment.

objective moral standard. While a comprehensive case against non-cognitivists and subjectivists has not been made, it seems clear *prima facie* that non-objectivists theories fail to explain moral experience. However, one could ask if objectivism does a better job of explaining the relevant facts.

A brief survey of the explanatory power of objectivism will suffice. First, if there is an objective standard, it would explain why people condemn others for not acting in accordance with their moral convictions. If morals are objective, then moral investigations discover whether or not an act is, in fact, good or bad. If morals are subjective expressions that evaluate something from a particular person's viewpoint, then moral condemnations end up being little more than the imposing of one person's opinions on another person. Objectivism offers a viewpoint that transcends individual human opinion.

Second, objectivism accounts for the wide agreement on basic moral convictions.<sup>14</sup> No intelligent person would deny that moral disagreements exist. But it is unfortunate that some interpret this disagreement so as to rule out objective morality. Quite to the contrary, moral disagreement supports the notion that morals are objective. The fact that there is argument about moral precepts presupposes that there is something to argue about. One could not argue effectively about morality if there was no agreement from which to begin. Beyond that, the fact that one viewpoint tries to persuade another viewpoint supposes that there is a viewpoint that *ought* to be adopted and others that

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<sup>14</sup>For example, running away from battle has never been a virtue. Even if there were particular circumstances that allowed for the running away in battle, in general cowardice in battle is not counted among the virtues in any civilization. See *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis.

*ought* to be rejected. This could only be the case if there is an objective viewpoint to which all people ought to align themselves.

Third, if right and wrong are discovered, rather than created, there is no need to perform a sociological survey in order to determine the correct course of action. In this way, objectivism avoids the problems of conventionalism or social subjectivism. It may be the case that popular opinion is relevant to moral decisions, but popular opinion does not determine the standards to which a person should adhere. This view fits nicely with common experience in that people rarely make efforts to consider popular opinion before making moral decisions.

Finally, the above reasons, while not comprehensive, do serve to illustrate the strength of objectivism. Objectivism offers an adequate account of moral experience. It allows for moral disagreement without denying that there is a correct moral position on a given issue. It accounts for the agreement of moral judgments around the world. It gives one a platform to stand on when making moral proclamations without involving that person in self-destructive statements. Finally, it is existentially satisfying in that it is a theory that one may apply consistently in life.

### **Methodological Concerns**

If morals are objective and non-objectivist theories fail, why do so many people accept non-objectivist theories? Intellectually speaking, people usually adopt bad theories because of bad methodology. Sometimes, people adopt a bad method because they are trying to answer difficult questions in an overly simplistic way. For example, when one asks, "How do I know that embezzlement is wrong?" he either answers the question with a more basic principle like "Embezzlement is wrong because it is stealing" or he ends up

not knowing why he thinks embezzlement is wrong. When that individual is asked why the more basic principle "Stealing is wrong" is to be accepted, he is usually left speechless. From the lack of ability to answer "How do I know that stealing is wrong?" it is sometimes concluded that there is no such thing as objective morality.

However, concluding that objective morality is illusory based on one's inability to answer moral questions only serves to reveal that individual's inadequate method of inquiry. It does not necessarily demonstrate the inadequacy of objectivism. Whenever a moral claim is examined, that examination always takes place with certain methodological procedures already in place. In other words, when someone asks "Is X wrong?" he already has in his mind a set of parameters by which to judge the moral claim to be true or false.

For example, if person A says to person B, "X is wrong," person B might ask person A, "How do you know X is wrong?" Person A may respond, "Because X brings harm to people." Person B may accept this basic moral precept, or he may question further. He may ask, "Why is it wrong to harm people?" Very often, person A will not know how to answer this question. Both person A and person B may conclude from this exchange that questions of morality can not be answered. However, there is a serious problem with this reasoning.

In the above case, one of the examiner's parameters was that of his own ability, along with person A's ability, to answer moral questions. However, to argue that objective morality is illusory because two individuals can not answer moral questions is to argue from ignorance. It does not follow that because person A and person B do not know why harming people is wrong, that harming people is *not* actually wrong. Further,

it most certainly does not imply that morality in general is illusory or wholly subjective. To argue in this fashion is rather arrogant because the individuals engaged in this conversation are presupposing that if they cannot answer moral questions, then no one can.

There are also problematic criteria in place when a person tries to examine moral claims. For example, one may be a logical positivist and rule out *a priori* the meaningfulness of moral claims altogether. Another person may place moral claims in the category of subjective feeling because he thinks that only science gives us knowledge.

These presuppositions, however, are self-defeating and therefore necessarily false. This being the case, one cannot use these as criteria in the formulation of a sound moral theory. Yet some of these presuppositions remain as the intellectual basis for adopting nonsensical theories of morality.

To sum up, there are presuppositions and faulty criteria that are employed when investigating the nature and truth of moral claims. These presuppositions include, but are not limited to the following:

1. Logical positivism
2. Scientism
3. Naturalism / Monism
4. Nominalism

These views rule out the kind of moral objectivism that this paper advocates, but they do so methodologically. Before one comes to the facts of moral experience, logical positivism rules out the possibility of moral knowledge. Scientism does the same thing. Naturalism and Nominalism are more subtle, but they too, when carried out to their logical ends, do not allow for a consistent objective theory of morality.

C.S. Lewis speaks of the dangers of not correcting bad presuppositions and philosophy in his article, *The Poison of Subjectivism*:

Correct thinking will not make good men of bad ones; but a purely theoretical error may remove ordinary checks to evil and deprive good intentions of their natural support. An error of this sort is abroad at present. I am not referring to the Power philosophies of the Totalitarian states, but to something that goes deeper and spreads wider and which, indeed, has given these Power philosophies their golden opportunity. I am referring to Subjectivism.<sup>15</sup>

This sort of subjectivism is the result of poor thinking and philosophical pigeonholing. Men construct methods for determining truth apart from a careful examination of the facts and then try to impose those criterion on all disciplines. More specifically, men attempt to isolate a particular being, study that being with a particular method, and then generalize that method to all disciplines. This unfortunate tendency is beautifully and masterfully refuted in Etienne Gilsons book, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*. Gilson states;

When, owing to some fundamental scientific discovery, a metaphysically minded man first grasps the true nature of a whole order of reality, what he is thus grasping for the first time is but a particular determination of being at large. Yet the intuition of being is always there, and if our philosopher fails to discern its meaning, he will fall a victim to its contagious influence. That which is but a particular determination of being, or *a* being, will be invested with the universality of being itself. (emphasis his)<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, it needs to be mentioned that the method of a science should take into account the object of study. One does not study Biology in the same way that one studies Math. The same methods are not employed in the studies of Quantum Mechanics and

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<sup>15</sup>C. S. Lewis, "The Poison of Subjectivism" in *The Collected Works of C.S. Lewis* (New York, NY: Inspirational Press, 1996), 223.

<sup>16</sup>Etienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1999), 254.

Sociology. The reason for this is due to the difference in the object of study.

Psychologists attempt to study human motives and behavior patterns. Physicists study objects and motion. Ethicists study morals. No one would say that Physics is a study that does not yield knowledge simply because its object of study is different from Biology. Nor should one say that Ethics does not yield knowledge simply because its object of study is different than that of Biology.

### **Toward An Objective Morality**

One observation needs to be made from which the discussion of objective morality should spring. That observation is this: It is impossible to fully rid oneself of moral inclinations. Trying to rid oneself of moral inclinations would be like trying to rid oneself of one's ability to reason. It is possible to suppress certain moral inclinations by appealing to other moral inclinations, but one cannot avoid participating in moral activities. Contemporary philosophers speak of right, wrong, and obligation, but have no basis or account for their carefully constructed ethical webs. They need not look far to find a basis or account; they need only to look more carefully.

What do they need to look at more carefully? They need to look at themselves more carefully.<sup>17</sup> It is not difficult to see that man is directed toward a particular natural end. One does not prove this with a microscope; rather it is found when one simply makes careful observations about the nature of mankind. Aristotle recognized this over two thousand years ago. He writes, "Every craft and every investigation, and likewise

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<sup>17</sup>While God is the ultimate basis for morality, man can recognize the objectivity of morals by examining the created order; namely themselves.

every action and decision, seems to aim at some good; hence the good has been well described as that at which everything aims."<sup>18</sup> Aquinas also understood this and wrote, "...all human actions must be for an end."<sup>19</sup>

If man is not inclined to be moral, why can man not avoid making moral judgments? Why do all people insist on evaluating whether or not an act is good or bad? Why is there so much agreement on what it is that perfects us as human beings? Again, there may be moral disagreement, but objectivism can handle this. Objectivism understands that just as people can make mistakes in their judgment about physical objects, they can make mistakes in thinking about right and wrong. But subjectivism cannot adequately explain why there is so much agreement on matters of morality.

Many do not accept this line of reasoning, as it does not appear to 'prove' that morality is objective. That is why this paper included a short section on methodology. Often the reason people are not convinced of the objectivity of morals is because they require a certain kind of proof. Usually the kind of proof they have in mind is not able to prove that morality is objective. One cannot prove a set of moral first principles from a set of mathematical principles. Nor can one argue that the law of non-contradiction entails the truth of the moral claim "one ought to love their neighbor." One must grant that there are some moral first principles that may be appealed to as moral first principles.

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<sup>18</sup>Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985), 1.

<sup>19</sup>Peter Kreeft, *Summa of the Summa* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1990), 350.

This does not mean that moral first principles are mere axioms that are arbitrarily chosen so that one may construct a consistent view of ethics. These first principles are grounded in the human essence.<sup>20</sup> Objective morality flows from human nature because humans are moral creatures by nature. This is the starting point for the Realist's conception of morality. The Realist looks at the nature of man and reflects on that nature. Upon reflection, the Realist sees that there are certain activities that seem to flow naturally from man. One of those activities is that of moral reflection and evaluation.

That may be well and good, but how does one obtain knowledge of these moral principles? Knowledge of moral principles is knowledge through connaturality. Jacques Maritain discusses the ontological and epistemological aspects of knowing via connaturality or by way of natural inclination in his book, *Natural Law: Reflections on Theory and Practice*. Natural Law, the objective norm or set of objective norms governing human behavior<sup>21</sup> is known to philosophers and to laymen. One may have a pre-philosophical or a philosophical understanding of this natural law. According to Maritain,

Moral philosophy is *reflective* knowledge, a sort of after-knowledge. It does not discover the moral law. The moral law was discovered by men before the existence of any moral philosophy. Moral philosophy has critically to analyze and rationally to elucidate moral standards and rules of conduct whose validity was previously discovered in an undemonstrable manner, and in a non-conceptual, non-rational way; it has also to clear them, as far as possible, from the adventitious outgrowths or deviations which may have developed by reason of the coarseness of our nature and the accidents of social convention.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Jacques Maritain, *Natural Law: Reflections on Theory and Practice* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2001), 31.

<sup>21</sup>Audi, 599.

<sup>22</sup>Maritain, 22.

Again, man is moral by his very nature. It is interesting to note that the same individuals who deny that man is a moral creature, affirm that man is a rational creature. Are all men always rational? Clearly people make mistakes in their thinking, which is why it is wise to study logic. However, the fact that people make mistakes when making logical inferences does not show that human beings are not rational. Learning more about reason and valid inferences helps one to be more rational. This discipline, like the discipline of ethics did not develop through a study of birds and flowers. Logic developed as man studied his own natural inclination toward rationality.

Ethics is very much like this. When one reflects on the natural inclinations of man, one finds that man cannot help but be moral.<sup>23</sup> Again, C.S. Lewis points this out beautifully,

[The subjectivist moral reformer] usually has at the back of his mind the notion that if he throws over traditional judgment of value, he will find something else, something more 'real' or 'solid' on which to base a new scheme of values. He will say, for example, 'We must abandon irrational taboos and base our values on the good of the community' - as if the maxim 'Thou shalt promote the good of the community' were anything more than a polysyllabic variant of 'Do as you would be done by' which has itself no other basis than that old universal value judgment he claims to be rejecting.<sup>24</sup>

In the process of rejecting morality, one must value his right to reject the views of others. It is often the case that those rejecting traditional morality offer some kind of alternative moral view. This is interesting since one would think the rejection of traditional morality would leave a society without values of any kind, rather than with a new set of values. The fact that people have a moral nature is evidenced by the need for

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<sup>23</sup>By this I do not mean that all men are morally perfect, only that they cannot help but tend toward some kind of morality.

people to replace traditional values like modesty, patience, and excellence with the "new" values of tolerance, ambition, and freedom.

For example, the gay rights community often rejects the traditional notion that homosexual unions are morally wrong. They are usually very quick; however, to point out that it is very wrong indeed for people to be intolerant of their lifestyle. Apparently the old virtue of tolerance is still objective and binding, while the moral condemnation of the gay lifestyle is antiquated hate speech. This is a prime example of what Lewis is talking about in the above-mentioned article.

### **Conclusion**

What then is the punch line? Objective morality may be discovered by reflecting on the nature of man himself. The obviousness of man's moral nature is continually obfuscated by those hoping to push a particular moral or social agenda. Apparently, these people do not realize that their own moral convictions are the platform on which they stand to condemn those who disagree with them. They do, however, understand, and could not not-understand, that people ought to act in certain ways. In fact, all people know that "good" is something for which all people should strive. Further, all people have some notion, however clouded it may be, of what constitutes the good.

The immediate epistemological grounds for objective moral values is found in man's nature. However, one still needs to ask who it is that pointed man's nature in a particular direction? So while man may be the ground for our knowledge of objective morals, one still needs an objective ontological grounding for the objectivity of morality.

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<sup>24</sup>Lewis, 224.

That ground may only be found in the Creator of human nature. The Creator conveyed something of Himself to mankind when He created mankind in His likeness.

Those who suppose then, that values are created by the individual or by society cannot help but be inconsistent because human nature will not allow them to be consistent. Human nature will continually push them to appeal to something beyond their own interests and wants. It will hound them when their own rights are violated. It will comfort them as they perform acts of virtue and it will haunt them when they first commit treason against their own conscience.

As C.S. Lewis so aptly put it,

The human mind has no more power of inventing a new value than of planting a new sun in the sky or a new primary colour in the spectrum. Every attempt to do so consists in arbitrarily selecting some one maxim of traditional morality, isolating it from the rest, and erecting it into an *unum necessarium*.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, it is imperative that people return to the view that morals are objective and binding on all people. Understanding this will not only bring back the necessary checks on human nature, it will also help to unify the individual who believes it. A fragmentation of the self comes about when one adopts a faulty view of ethics. In a very real sense, the relativist does not know himself. He has rejected the notion that he is a moral creature. Rather, he is a self-determining creature that sometimes creates morality for himself. This is to deny what we, as human beings, fundamentally are. It is no wonder why there is so much confusion today. People don't know who or what they are.

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 225.

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