



If There Is No God, There Is No Morality

Where was God when Adam Lanza went on a shooting spree at an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut, that left 20 children and six adults dead?

Atheists assume that if there is evil in the world, then there can be no God. What they need to realize, however, is that if there is no God, then there can be no morality. This is what Dostoyevsky meant when he noted that if there is no God, then anything is possible.

Morality is objective. It consists of norms that are held to be independent of human will. Morality is not about what we do, or what we want to do. It is about what we ought to do — whether we want to do it or not.

But if there is no God, the Supreme Law Giver and Goodness Itself, then morality loses the only objective ground available to it — and, hence, itself.

Not so, many have retorted. Morality is rooted in reason, or human nature, or biology.

None of this will do. Reason, human nature, and biology may very well have a role to play in the moral life, but only if they are somehow ordained by God.

Reason is fickle. Over the centuries, distinguished thinkers — from Burke and De Maistre to Hobbes and Hume to Montaigne and Pascal — representing a variety of philosophical traditions have recognized this. Adolph Hitler and Osama bin Laden (and Adam Lanza, for that matter) acted no less rationally in the pursuit of their goals than did Mother Teresa and Gandhi act in the pursuit of theirs. Reason is all too easily, and frequently, subverted by the simplest of things, whether passion, impulse, fear, or sickness.

Those who would attempt to use reason as the foundation upon which to lay morality are like a man who tries to build a house on quicksand.

And what is true of reason is just as true of human nature and biology.

Human nature has its angels, for sure, but it also has its demons. Any human being who has dared to look honestly at himself will be compelled to acknowledge this stone cold fact. As we all say: No one is perfect.

Biology is an even less eligible candidate for a basis of morality. Biology gives us instincts and impulses, needs and inclinations — in short, causes of various sorts. Yet it cannot supply reasons. Biology compels. Morality, in stark contrast, presupposes the freedom to make choices.





Written by [Jack Kerwick, Ph.D.](#) on December 20, 2012

If there is no God, then there is no spirit. And if there is no spirit, then all is matter: Reason and human nature boil down to human biology, and biology, in turn, becomes nothing more or less than the latest product of a resolutely non-purposeful mechanical process billions of years in the happening.

If there is no God, then anything is possible.

It isn't just Dostoyevsky, a Christian, who recognized this. Some of the most astute and staunchest of atheists have as well.

Of Christianity, Friedrich Nietzsche said that he regarded it "as the most fatal and seductive lie that has ever yet existed — as the greatest and most impious lie." Yet Nietzsche viewed Christianity as the ground zero of the "campaign against morality" that he openly waged, the prototype of just the notion of objective morality that he so despised.

Thus, when Nietzsche declared "the death of God," it was the death of moral objectivity, of moral absolutes, that he celebrated. Human beings had nothing to go on but their own "Will to Power." They alone are the creators of value.

Jean-Paul Sartre was even clearer on this score. Though an atheist, he scoffed at those atheists who held that we could preserve such traditional moral ideals as honesty, compassion, and justice while doing away with belief in God. Rather, he admitted to finding it "very distressing that God does not exist, because all possibility of finding values in a heaven of ideas disappears along with him." If there is no God, then there are "no values or commands," no principles or ideals, that "legitimize our conduct."

Sartre's verdict is as haunting as it is inescapable. If there is no God, then we "are alone, with no excuses."

The response of believer and unbeliever alike to Adam Lanza's shooting spree in Connecticut is unmistakably moral in character. Yet unless God exists, there is no basis for our conviction that it was an act of evil.

And unless the atheist, in his own peculiar way, needed God as much as anyone else, he wouldn't feel compelled to look beyond his world of material causes and cosmic insignificance to blame Him for not existing.



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