

119

GROUP STUDY GUIDE

Answering Atheists: Does God Exist? – The Moral Argument

TEACHING SUMMARY

This teaching presents an argument for God's existence based on objective moral values and duties. It defines objective morality as moral facts and obligations that hold independently of human opinion. It contrasts this with individual preference or social agreement and argues that, without God, neither provides an adequate basis for binding moral judgments.

The teaching connects this question with human dignity and ultimate purpose. It argues that a purely naturalistic account does not establish why humans have objective moral worth or obligations beyond animal behavior. It also discusses the eventual loss of life and achievements in a universe without lasting hope. These claims form part of its case for a foundation beyond human preference and physical processes.

A significant qualification follows: the argument does not claim that atheists cannot be kind, compassionate, or morally responsible in their behavior. Nor does it deny that professing believers can commit evil. The question concerns the basis of objective morality, not whether a person must believe in God to behave well. The teaching maintains that believers and unbelievers alike live as though some actions are truly right or wrong.

The formal argument has two premises: if God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist; and objective moral values and duties do exist. It concludes that God exists. In defending the second premise, the teaching appeals to moral experience and compares trust in that experience with trust in sensory experience. Differences or failures in perception do not, on its account, abolish the reality being perceived.

The teaching then answers objections based on the evolutionary or social origins of moral beliefs. It identifies an attempt to disprove a belief solely by explaining its origin as the genetic fallacy. It also argues that a blanket distrust of beliefs produced by evolution would undermine the objection itself. Romans 2:14–15 is cited in support of the possibility that God has given people moral awareness.

Finally, the teaching argues that objective moral obligation points beyond material things to a personal moral lawgiver. Moral duties concern persons and are not dependent on human

will; the proposed foundation is therefore a transcendent personal God. The conclusion is that a morally perfect God supplies the authority behind commands governing right human behavior.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Objective morality is defined as true independently of human opinion.
- The teaching distinguishes moral obligation from personal taste or social preference.
- It argues that God provides the basis for objective human worth and moral duties.
- It explicitly acknowledges that atheists can be loving, kind, and compassionate.
- It also acknowledges that professing believers can commit serious evil.
- The formal argument moves from two premises about morality to the conclusion that God exists.
- Moral experience is offered as support for the reality of objective moral values and duties.
- The genetic fallacy confuses an explanation of a belief's origin with a refutation of its truth.
- Romans 2:14–15 is used to discuss moral awareness and conscience.
- The teaching argues that objective moral obligation points to a transcendent personal lawgiver.

FILL-IN-THE-BLANK

Basic

1. Morality that is true independently of human opinion is called _____ morality.
2. The argument discusses objective moral values and moral _____.
3. The first premise begins: If _____ does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.
4. The second premise affirms that objective moral values and duties do _____.
5. The teaching explicitly acknowledges that many atheists are loving, kind, and _____.
6. A transcendent moral law is argued to require a moral _____.

Challenging

1. Trying to invalidate a belief solely by explaining how it originated is called the _____ fallacy.
2. The teaching compares moral experience with our experience through the five _____.
3. Romans 2:14–15 says the work of the law is written on people's _____.
4. In the same passage, their _____ also bears witness.
5. The teaching describes moral obligation as agent-relative because it arises in the case of _____.
6. The final conclusion describes God as morally _____.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the teaching distinguish objective moral duties from personal preferences and social customs?
2. Why does the teaching stress that atheists can behave compassionately and believers can behave wickedly?
3. State the argument's two premises and explain how the conclusion follows from them.
4. How does the comparison between moral experience and sensory experience support the second premise?
5. What is the genetic fallacy, and how does the teaching apply it to explanations of moral beliefs?
6. Why does the teaching argue that moral obligation requires a personal lawgiver rather than only an impersonal standard?

ANSWER KEY – GROUP GUIDE

Basic

1. objective
2. duties
3. God
4. exist
5. compassionate
6. lawgiver

Challenging

1. genetic
2. senses
3. hearts
4. conscience
5. persons
6. perfect