Morality, Fitrah, and the Need for Ultimate Accountability

A philosophical case for why morality needs God not as its source, but as its guarantee.

There is a question that philosophy has never quite managed to put to rest: If there's no God, why be moral?

Not "what is moral?" — that question, difficult as it is, has generated centuries of rich debate. Atheists say, "If you need God to be moral, you're a terrible person." To which theists reply, "If you need man made laws to control the masses, what does that tell you about the humans?" These giant questions are never really into the realms of settled debates. Let's focus on the harder question: even if we know what morality demands, what actually binds us to obey it — especially when no one is watching, when the law is absent, and when power makes disobedience entirely safe?

This essay defends a two-step answer. First: moral truths are objective and discoverable just like mathematics and the laws of nature— not invented by culture, not imposed by convention, but accessed through human nature and rational reflection. Second: belief in God as ultimate judge is not a psychological crutch, but a philosophically necessary completion of any serious moral framework. Without ultimate accountability, morality retains its truth but loses its teeth.

## I. Morality as Discovery, Not Invention

The most common modern assumption about morality is that it is constructed — shaped by culture, determined by preference, or evolved through social pressure. On this view, moral claims are essentially elaborate ways of expressing what we happen to like or what our group has agreed upon.

This view is mistaken.

Moral truths are not invented; they are discovered. They resemble truths of logic and mathematics more than they resemble fashion trends or political consensus. “Cruelty is wrong”, “torturing an innocent child just for fun is horrible.” These do not become true because a society votes for it, any more than “2 + 2 = 4” becomes true because mathematicians agree. These truths hold independently of what individuals or cultures believe about them.

Plato understood this. For him, genuine knowledge — including moral knowledge — is a process of drawing out rather than constructing. We do not legislate the Good into existence; we come to recognise what was always already there.

Human beings are capable of this recognition because they are not morally blank at birth. Islamic thought captures this with the concept of fitrah — the innate disposition toward truth, justice, and the good that is woven into human nature itself. The fitrah is not infallible; it can be clouded by desire, distorted by culture, corrupted by self-interest. But it provides a fundamental orientation. Combined with disciplined rational reflection, it allows human beings to access objective moral reality.

The upshot: morality is neither arbitrary nor inaccessible. It is out there, and we are built to find it.

## II. Why Evolution Cannot Do the Work Alone

The obvious modern objection at this point is evolutionary. Human beings have moral intuitions, the argument goes, because those intuitions were adaptive. Cooperation, empathy, fairness — these traits enhanced survival and social cohesion over millennia. Evolution produced our moral psychology; what more explanation do we need?

A great deal more, as it turns out. Evolution Cannot adequately account for incessant guilt after committing a crime. Evolution cannot explain why some people tend to exhibit altruistic behaviour when there is absolutely no motivation whatsoever.

Furthermore, evolutionary explanation is descriptive, not normative. It can tell us why we feel certain moral inclinations. It cannot tell us why we ought to act on them. These are entirely different questions.

Consider what follows if morality is reduced to evolutionary advantage. In situations where immoral behaviour serves one's interests — especially when one can act with complete impunity — the evolutionary account offers no compelling reason to act morally. Natural selection equipped us with general tendencies toward fairness and cooperation because those tendencies were useful in ancestral environments. It did not equip us with an unconditional obligation to be just, least of all when injustice is profitable and undetectable.

Evolution explains moral psychology. It does not explain moral obligation. And it is obligation — binding, unconditional, inescapable — that any serious moral theory must eventually account for.

## III. The Problem of Impunity

Here is where the argument sharpens into something urgent.

Even granting that moral truths are objective and discoverable, a critical question remains: what ensures that those truths retain their authority over someone who is powerful enough to ignore them without consequence?

Consider a concrete case. An individual — a ruler, an oligarch, a warlord — has the capacity to commit profound ẓulm (injustice, wrongdoing, oppression) against others while remaining entirely beyond the reach of legal or social accountability. The law cannot touch

him. His reputation is insulated. His social circle approves or stays silent. His evolutionary instincts toward cooperation are easily overridden by ambition or appetite.

In this scenario, what remains?

Moral philosophy can explain to such a person that what he is doing is wrong. It can even explain why it is wrong — with considerable sophistication. But the question he poses, implicitly or explicitly, is not "is this wrong?" but "why does that obligate me, here, now, when nothing enforces it?"

This is the question that most secular moral theories quietly fail to answer. They can diagnose the wrong; they cannot explain what binds the powerful man to care.

## IV. Ultimate Accountability as Moral Completion

This is precisely where belief in God — specifically, in divine accountability — does essential philosophical work.

Let me be clear about what I am not arguing. I am not defending the Divine Command Theory, which holds that actions are right or wrong simply because God commands or forbids them. That view makes morality arbitrary and collapses it into mere obedience. The objectivity of moral truth, argued above, stands on its own ground.

What belief in God adds is something different: the certainty that the moral order is not ultimately defeasible.

When human systems of accountability fail — and they do fail, routinely, catastrophically — the moral framework does not thereby collapse. No act of ẓulm goes finally unwitnessed. No injustice escapes the scope of ultimate judgment. The powerful man who acts with

impunity in this world is not, in fact, beyond accountability — he is simply beyond human accountability, which is a very different thing.

This transforms the moral situation entirely. The authority of moral obligations is no longer contingent on the reliability of human enforcement. It is grounded in something that cannot be outmanoeuvred, corrupted, or evaded.

Dostoevsky intuited this with characteristic intensity. His famous suggestion — that without God or immortality, everything becomes permissible — is sometimes dismissed as an overstatement. And taken with strict literalism, it may be. But its essential insight is sound: without a final, inescapable system of accountability, morality risks becoming practically toothless precisely where it matters most — in cases of extreme power and extreme injustice, where human systems have already broken down.

## V. A Synthesis

The position I have defended steers between two errors that have long bedevilled moral philosophy.

The first error is pure Divine Command Theory: the idea that morality is simply whatever God decrees, with no independent rational or natural foundation. This view makes morality ultimately arbitrary and leaves us unable to recognise or critique genuine injustice.

The second error is the assumption that a secular moral framework — grounded in reason, evolution, or social contract alone — can provide morality with full and unconditional authority. This view underestimates the problem of impunity and overestimates the binding force of reasons that carry no ultimate sanction.

The synthesis offered here holds three things together:

Moral truths are objective. They are discoverable through fitrah and reason, independently of any particular religious tradition. Cruelty is wrong whether or not anyone believes in God.

Their authority is intrinsic. Moral obligations are not merely useful social fictions or evolutionary residues. They make genuine claims on us — claims rooted in what we are and how we ought to live.

Belief in God completes the framework. It ensures that the authority of moral truth is never merely theoretical — that it is backed, finally and without exception, by a justice that no human power can circumvent. These three combined answer the question as to why one should be moral.

This is not a retreat from reason into faith. It is reason, pressed far enough, recognising what it cannot secure alone.

The question “why be moral?” is not merely academic. It is the question that every tyrant answers in his actions, and that every victim asks in their suffering. A moral philosophy that cannot answer it — especially in the hardest cases — has not finished its work.

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