STEVEN D. HALES

THIS IS PHILOSOPHY

AN INTRODUCTION

WILEY-BLACKWELL

Table of Contents

This Is Philosophy

Series editor: Steven D. Hales

Reading philosophy can be like trying to ride a bucking bronco—you hold on for dear life while “transcendental deduction” twists you to one side, “causa sui” throws you to the other, and a 300-word, 300-year-old sentence comes down on you like an iron-shod hoof the size of a dinner plate. *This is Philosophy* is the riding academy that solves these problems. Each book in the series is written by an expert who knows how to gently guide students into the subject regardless of the reader’s ability or previous level of knowledge. Their reader-friendly prose is designed to help students find their way into the fascinating, challenging ideas that compose philosophy without simply sticking the hapless novice on the back of the bronco, as so many texts do. All the books in the series provide ample pedagogical aids, including links to free online primary sources. When students are ready to take the next step in their philosophical education, *This is Philosophy* is right there to help them along the way.

This Is Philosophy: An Introduction
Steven D. Hales

Forthcoming:

This Is Metaphysics: An Introduction
Kristopher McDaniel

This Is Epistemology: An Introduction
Clayton Littlejohn

This Is Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction
Neil Manson

This Is Philosophy of Mind: An Introduction

Pete Mandik

This is Ethics: An Introduction

Jussi Suikkanen

THIS IS PHILOSOPHY

AN INTRODUCTION

STEVEN D. HALES

WILEY-BLACKWELL
A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

This edition first published 2013

Wiley-Blackwell is an imprint of John Wiley & Sons, formed by the merger of Wiley's global Scientific, Technical and Medical business with Blackwell Publishing.

Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

Editorial Offices

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

For details of our global editorial offices, for customer services, and for information about how to apply for permission to reuse the copyright material in this book please see our website at www.wiley.com/wiley-blackwell.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hales, Steven D.

This is philosophy : an introduction / Steven D. Hales.

p. cm. – (This is philosophy)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-470-65882-6 (hardback) – ISBN 978-0-470-65883-3 (paperback) – ISBN 978-1-118-32780-7 (epub) 1. Philosophy–Introductions. I. Title.

BD21.H223 2013

100–dc23

2012026657

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Cover Design by www.cyandesign.co.uk

For Vanessa

Le cœur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connaît point.

How to Use This Book

The problems of philosophy are deeply interconnected, and there is no natural or obvious starting point from which to begin. Indeed, plausible arguments might be given for starting with almost any of the central problems in the field. You might think that we should surely start with epistemology; until we understand what knowledge is and settle the matter of whether and how we can gain any knowledge at all, how can we possibly determine whether we can have knowledge of God, or our moral duties, or the nature of the mind? Clearly epistemology is the most fundamental philosophical project. Wait—how can we be sure that knowledge is valuable to have? Or that we ought to care about gaining truth and avoiding error? We'd better start with axiology and sort out duty, obligation, and responsibility first. Normativity and ethics must be foundational. Of course, how can we determine what our epistemic responsibilities are if we don't antecedently know whether we are free to believe one thing rather than another, or if we are truly at liberty to make choices? Let's begin with the issue of free will and figure that out first. If we're not free, that torpedoes a lot of other philosophical agendas. Yet if we don't know what kinds of beings we are, how can we ever determine whether we are free? Maybe personal identity should be the first stop on the road. And so on.

The chapters in the present book are self-contained units on the topics they address. While there are occasional references within them to other chapters, they can be taught or studied in any order. In *Daybreak* (section 454), Nietzsche wrote that, "A book such as this is not for reading straight through or reading aloud but for dipping into,

especially when out walking or on a journey; you must be able to stick your head into it and out of it again and again and discover nothing familiar around you." To some extent, the same is true of *This Is Philosophy: An Introduction*, even though it is much more straightforwardly systematic and less aphoristic than Nietzsche's *Daybreak*.

That said, the chapters are not randomly distributed, and are placed in one sensible progression. Most people have views about ethics and God before ever encountering philosophy, and so starting with topics to which they have already given some thought is a natural way to entice students into a deeper investigation. Appeal to human free choice is a venerable move in theodicy, and one with which the chapter on God ends. A chapter on free will then follows. Afterwards is a pair of chapters focusing on what it is to be a thinking, persisting person at all—personal identity and philosophy of mind. The final chapter in the book, on knowledge, ties together the threads of evidence, reason-giving, and rational belief that appear, one way or another, in all of the chapters, and ends with a comprehensive skeptical problem.

The problems of philosophy resemble a **Mandelbrot Set**  (see www.youtube.com/watch?v=gEw8xpb1aRA), and the more closely one focuses on the small details, the more complications one finds. Some of the initial hooks and spirals can be found in the annotated bibliographies at the end of each chapter. These bibliographies list primary sources from the great thinkers that one may wish to read in conjunction with the present chapters, as well as some of the more accessible contemporary literature that is the next step for the **Padawan**  philosopher (see http://starwars.wikia.com/wiki/Padawan).

Preface

If this is the first philosophy book you've ever read, then you probably have no idea what you are in for. You pick up a book on chemistry and you expect diagrams of molecules and talk about "valences," a book on German and there will be long multisyllable words and lots of umlauts. But philosophy? What could that be about?

The word "philosophy" comes from two Greek words: "philia," which was one of the Greek words for love, and "sophia," which means wisdom. Thus philosophy is the love of wisdom. You may think that is not terribly informative, and it isn't. However, you have to remember that, back in ancient Greece, to be a scholar at all meant that one was a philosopher. You might have been a stonemason, a fisherman, a soldier, a physician, or a philosopher, a pursuit that would have included mathematics and science. Over the years, as concrete, definite advances have been made in different areas, philosophy has spawned spin-offs, fields that have become their own disciplines with their own specific methodology and subject matter. Mathematics was one of the first fields to splinter off this way, and then in the Renaissance science became separate from philosophy. In the nineteenth century psychology broke away from philosophy and, most recently, cognitive science, which used to be the scientific end of philosophy of mind, has become its own field. In some ways philosophy proper is left with the hardest questions, the ones that we have made the least definitive progress on.

That does not mean that philosophers have made no progress in 2500 years. We have. Nevertheless, the philosophical issues to be discussed in the present book are tough nuts to crack. Let us hope you do not crack your own

coconut in the attempt! In the modern era, philosophy is in the business of giving good reasons for one's nonempirical beliefs. That is, philosophers try to give arguments for believing claims about the nature of the self, or the existence of God, or moral duty, or the value of knowledge. These are topics that the scientific method of performing laboratory experiments and giving mathematical explanations does poorly in addressing. Philosophers take seriously the findings of experts in other disciplines, but we still have our own puzzles to solve.

Some philosophical topics stir great passions, and people find it threatening to ask questions about those issues. Philosophers are proud that one of the greatest philosophers in ancient times, **Socrates**  , was executed by the state because he refused to stop questioning authority (see http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/apology.html). Socrates claimed to know nothing, but he was willing to go down for the *pursuit* of truth, fearless inquiry, and the life of the mind. If you are to find something of value in this book, you too need to be prepared to question your long-standing beliefs, to honestly ask yourself if the things you may have believed your entire life are actually true. All of us believe some things for poor reasons, and to be a philosopher is to try to ferret out those beliefs and either justify them or discard them as unworthy of your intellect. It is a difficult and often painful process to become an athlete of the mind, but there is great joy and thrilling discoveries to be had as well.

Just beneath the surface of your everyday life are chasms of mystery. We will not descend into the furthest reaches of the labyrinth in the present book, but there are wonders aplenty in the beginning passages. **Plato**  wrote that philosophy begins in wonder (http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/theatu.html)—so let us begin!

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Jeff Dean at Wiley-Blackwell for encouraging this book and the This Is Philosophy series. He is the *ne plus ultra* of editors. Thanks also to my colleagues at Bloomsburg University for their support, and to my many Introduction to Philosophy students who have participated in the joint enterprise of learning.

1

Ethics

Preliminary Theories

The Normative Universe

1.1

Life’s just filled with all sorts of things you’re supposed to do. You should be nice to your sister, brush between meals, never mix beer and wine, get your car inspected, tithe to the poor, wear clean underwear, avoid consumer debt, love thy neighbor as thyself, buy low and sell high, read good books, exercise, tell the truth, have evidence-based beliefs, come to a complete stop at a red light, eat your vegetables, call your mom once in a while. The list goes on and on. All these things you should do, various obligations, duties, and responsibilities, form the *normative universe*. Shoulds, oughts, duties, rights, the permissible and the impermissible populate the normative universe. Not all these shoulds and oughts are ethical in nature, however. There are many dimensions to the normative universe, not just the moral dimension. Here are a few examples:

- Jim is deciding whether he should invest his money in gold bullion, mutual funds, or government bonds.
- Vanessa wonders whether it is permissible for her to turn right on red in this state.
- Todd is debating whether he ought to put more cinnamon in his ginger snaps.

- Holly is considering whether she filled out her taxes right.

The first case is about what Jim should *practically or prudentially* invest in; the second example concerns the *legal* permissibility of turning right on red; the third offers an *aesthetic* case regarding what Todd ought to do when baking cookies; and the fourth case is about the *reasonableness* of Holly's believing that her tax form is correct. In these cases, "should," "permissible," "ought," and "right" have nothing to do with morality, even though they are still normative expressions. When exactly those words concern morality is not an easy matter to describe with any precision. But confusion will ensue if we aren't sensitive to the fact that what we ought to do practically or legally is not the same as what we ought to do morally. We will see more of this later.

1.2

Everyone is faced with making ethical choices—decisions about what they should do in some circumstance. We must each decide for ourselves whether a potential action is right or wrong, and contemplate the nature of honor, duty, and virtue. There are standards of correct action that aren't moral standards. Still, it is clear that the following are cases of moral deliberation.

- Your best friend's girlfriend has had one beer too many and is coming on to you at the party. If you can get away with it, should you hook up with her?
- Your friend Shawna knows how to pirate new-release movies, and wants to show you how. Should you go with her and get some flicks?
- Your grandmother is dying of terminal pancreatic cancer and has only a few, painful, days to live. She is begging you to give her a lethal overdose of morphine, which will depress her respiration and allow her to die peacefully. Should you give her the overdose?

- You are a pregnant, unmarried student. Testing has shown that your fetus has **Down Syndrome**  .[1] Should you abort?
- You didn't study enough for your chem exam, and don't have all those formulas you need memorized. One of your friends tells you to get a water bottle and carefully peel off the label. Then write the formulas down on the inside of the label and stick it back on the bottle. Take the bottle of water to the exam; the prof will never know you're cheating every time you take a swig. You should do whatever you can to get ahead in this world, right?

These aren't far-fetched cases; at least a few of them should fit your own experience. Well, how do you decide what to do? If you're like most people, you might reflect on whatever values your parents taught you growing up; or think about what your religion or holy book has to say on the topic; or go with your gut instinct about what to do; or consider the consequences if you do the action; or imagine how it would make you feel later if you did it; or think about whether the proposed action is compatible with some moral rule you believe, like do unto others as they would do unto you. If you look at this list, you'll see that it naturally divides into two main approaches: (1) base your action on some rule, principle, or code, and (2) base your action on some intuition, feeling, or instinct.

Is Morality Just Acting on Principles?

1.3

You might think that moral action means sticking to your principles, holding fast to your beliefs and respecting how

you were raised. Or perhaps morality is acting as you think God intends, by strictly following your holy book. Acting on the basis of your instincts and sympathies is to abandon genuine morality for transient emotions. One person who subscribed to the view that moral action requires strict adherence to principles and tradition was **Osama bin Laden**[2].

1.4

Osama bin Laden was, of course, the notorious terrorist mastermind of the 9/11 attacks. Bin Laden was not a madman or a lunatic, though, and if you read his writings you'll see that he was an articulate, educated spokesman for his views. Bin Laden believed that the Western nations are engaged in a Crusader war against Islam, and that God demands that the **Islamic Caliphate**[3] (the theocratic rule of all Muslims under an official successor to the Prophet Muhammad) be restored to power, and that all nations follow Islamic religious law (sharia). In an interview in October 2001, Bin Laden responded to the criticism that he sanctions the killing of women, children, and innocents.

> The scholars and people of the knowledge, amongst them Sahib al-Ikhtiyarat [ibn Taymiyya] and ibn al-Qayyim, and Shawanni, and many others, and Qutubi—may God bless him—in his Qur'an commentary, say that if the disbelievers were to kill our children and women, then we should not feel ashamed to do the same to them, mainly to deter them from trying to kill our women and children again. And that is from a religious perspective …
>
> As for the World Trade Center, the ones who were attacked and who died in it were part of a financial power. It wasn't a children's school! Neither was it a residence. And the general consensus is that most of the people who were in the towers were men that backed the biggest

> financial force in the world, which spreads mischief throughout the world. And those individuals should stand before God, and rethink and redo their calculations. We treat others like they treat us. Those who kill our women and our innocent, we kill their women and innocent, until they stop doing so.
>
> (quoted in Lawrence, 2005, pp. 118–119)

Bin Laden is clearly concerned with the morality of killing "women and innocents"; he takes pains to note that al-Qaeda attacked the World Trade Center, a financial building that—in his view—contained supporters of an materialist, imperialist nation of unbelievers. WTC was not a school or a home. Moreover, Bin Laden cites religious scholars and interpreters of the Qur'an to support his belief that killing noncombatants as a form of deterrence is a morally permissible act, sanctioned by his religion. Bin Laden was a devout and pious man who scrupulously adhered to his moral principles. If you think that he was a wicked, mass-murdering evildoer, it is not because he failed to be principled. It is because you find his principles to be bad ones.

1.5

What proof is there that Bin Laden's moral principles are the wrong ones? None, really, other than an appeal to our common ethical intuitions that the intentional murder of innocents to further some idiosyncratic political or religious goal is morally heinous. If you disagree, it may be that your moral compass points in such an opposite direction that you don't have enough in common with ordinary folks to engage in meaningful moral discussion. Even Bin Laden worried that it is wrong to kill children and women, which is why he was careful to justify his actions.

1.6

Just because you base your actions on some rule, principle, or moral code that you've adopted or created is

no guarantee that you'll do the right thing. You could have a bad moral code—just look at Bin Laden. Well, is it better to base your actions on your intuitions, on the feelings you have about whatever situation is at hand? Not necessarily. Feelings are immediate and case-specific, and the situation right in front of us is always the most vivid and pressing. Your gut instincts may lead you to choose short-term benefits over what's best in the long term. For example, imagine a mother who has taken a toddler in for a vaccination. The child is crying, not wanting to feel the pain of the needle. Surely the mother's instincts are to whisk the child away from the doctor advancing with his sharp pointy stick. Yet sometimes the right action is to set our feelings aside to see the larger picture. The mother has a moral obligation to care for her child, and so must hold back her protective sympathies and force the child to get the shot.

1.7

If we can't trust our moral principles and rules (because we might have bad principles and rules), and we can't trust our moral intuitions (because our sympathies might be shortsighted and narrow), then what should we do? The most prominent approach is to use the best of both worlds. We should use our most fundamental moral intuitions to constrain and craft moral theories and principles. This approach does not mean that we just capitulate to our gut instincts. Sometimes our principles should override those instincts. But, at the same time, when our principles or theories tell us to perform actions that are in conflict with our deepest feelings and intuitions, that is a reason to reexamine those principles and perhaps revise them or even reject them outright. Such a procedure apparently never occurred to Bin Laden, who was unflinchingly convinced of the righteousness of his cause.

1.8

The idea that moral rules be tested against our intuitions is analogous to the scientific method by which scientific theories are tested against experiments and direct observations. Sometimes a really fine and widely repeated experiment convinces everyone that a scientific theory cannot be right, and sometimes experimental results or observations are dismissed as faulty because they come into conflict with an otherwise well-confirmed and excellent theory. There is no hard-and-fast way to decide how to go. But how would all this play out in the case of ethics?

1.9

Here is a simple example to illustrate the procedure, before we move on to taking a look at the more prominent moral theories. Consider the so-called **Golden Rule**  ,[4] a moral rule dating from antiquity that appears in various forms in a variety of different ancient authors and traditions. It states *do unto others as you would have them do unto you*. What intuitions could be used as evidence against this rule? Put another way, what's counterintuitive about it, if anything? Well, the Golden Rule implicitly assumes that everyone has the same preferences. That assumption seems a bit questionable. Suppose that you like backrubs. In fact, you'd like a backrub from pretty much anyone. The Golden Rule advises you to treat other people the way you would like to be treated. Since you'd like other people to give you unsolicited backrubs, you should, according to the Golden Rule, give everyone else a backrub, even if they didn't ask for one. But some people don't like backrubs, or don't care for strangers touching them. Intuitively, it would be wrong to give backrubs to those people without their consent, or against their will. Since this intuition conflicts with the Golden Rule's implication to administer unsolicited backrubs, we should conclude that maybe the Golden Rule is really iron pyrite after all.

1.10

You might respond that we should revise the Golden Rule to avoid the unwanted implication, or we should replace it with a more precise moral rule. Perhaps *do unto others as they would have be done unto them*, or some such. But then we would have to give others whatever they ask of us, which is surely more than we should have to provide. That's just how moral philosophy proceeds—we modify our moral views in light of compelling arguments and counterexamples, or sometimes go back to the drawing board altogether to come up with better theories.

Divine Command Theory (Is Morality Just What God Tells Me to Do?)

1.11

Morality could be like the law in this sense: an authority is needed to tell us what our moral duties are, and to enforce the rules. Without a lawgiver, a ruler to lay down the moral law, we are adrift with no deeper connection to right and wrong than our own transient preferences. Traditionally, God has been considered to be this moral authority. You might think that if God does not exist, then everything is permitted. The need for God as a source of morality is often cited as a motivation—maybe *the* motivation—to be religious; that the ethical life is possible only within a religious context. It is endorsed, as we saw above, by Osama bin Laden, and promoted by no end of Christian ministers, pundits, and politicians. It is well worth thinking through.

1.12

The view of divine command theory, or religious moralism, is not new, nor is it connected with any particular religion. Orthodox Jews subscribe to the **613 *mitzvot*** [5], the complete list of Yahweh's commandments in the Torah, including not to gather grapes that have fallen to the ground, not to eat meat with milk, and not to wear garments of wool and linen mixed together. Christians recall the **Ten Commandments** [6] that Yahweh gave to Moses or the instructions of Jesus to love God and also to love one's neighbor as oneself. Muslims emphasize the value of having a good character, which is built by following the five pillars of Islam: believing that there is no God but Allah, offering daily prayers, performing charity, engaging in fasting, and going on **a pilgrimage to Mecca** [7]. Such actions and beliefs are all moral obligations as laid down by the deities of those respective religions.

1.13

The proposal that morality is essentially connected to religion has two chief components:

1. God loves (endorses, recommends, advocates) all good actions and hates (forbids, abjures, prohibits) all evil actions.

2. We can figure out which is which; that is, we can know what God loves and what he hates.

Let's consider these in turn. Grant for the sake of argument that there is a morally perfect God, that is, there is a God who loves everything good and hates everything evil (for more on the attributes of God, see Chapter 3). For the purposes of this discussion, it doesn't matter whether goodness/badness is primarily a quality of persons, actions, characters, or what have you. The notion of a perfectly good God is that his attitudes are in perfect sync with morality.

1.14

Plato discussed the idea that morality and religion are inseparable 2500 years ago in his dialogue ***Euthyphro***[8] Plato was no atheist—by all accounts he, like his mentor Socrates, respected and accepted the official **Greek gods**[9] Nevertheless, Plato thought that, even if the gods are perfectly good, that fact is not enough to explain morality. In *Euthyphro* he raises this very subtle and interesting question, here phrased for a monotheistic audience:

> Are things good because God loves them, or does he love them because they are good?

The question presents two very different options about **God's love**[10]

> *Option A.* Things are good because God loves them. This means that it is God's love that *makes* things good, and his dislike that *makes* things bad. Prior to, or considered independently of, God's judgment, things don't have moral qualities at all. If it weren't for God, nothing would be right or wrong, good or bad. Moral properties are the result of God's decisions, like candy sprinkles he casts over the vanilla ice cream of the material world.
>
> *Option B.* God loves good things because they are good. On this option, things are good (or bad) antecedently to, and independently of, God. In other words, things already have their moral properties, and God, who is an infallible judge of such matters, always loves the good things and hates the bad things. Morality is an independent objective standard apart from God. God always responds appropriately to this standard (loving all the good stuff and hating the bad), but morality is separate from, and unaffected by, his judgments.

So which is it? Option A, where God creates the moral qualities of things, or Option B, where God is the perfect ethical thermometer, whose opinions accurately reflect the moral temperature of whatever he judges? Following Plato, here are some interrelated reasons to prefer Option B.

1.15

Think about something you love. You love your mom? The Philadelphia Eagles? The Dave Matthews Band? Bacon cheeseburgers? Your pet dog? French-roast coffee? All good choices. Now, reflect on why you love them. You can give reasons, right? You love your mom, but not everyone's mom, because she raised you, cares for you, is kind to you, etc. Other moms didn't do that. You love the Dave Matthews Band because of their jam-band grooves, jazz syncopation and instrumentation, and catchy hooks. You love French-roast coffee over milder roasts because you really like the pungent, smoky, bitter brew it produces. You get the idea. In other words, your love is grounded in reasons for loving. In fact, it would be downright bizarre if someone asked you why you love one brand of pizza over another and your response were "no reason." It might not always be easy to come up with the reasons why you love one thing over another, but if you literally had no reasons whatsoever, it would be perplexingly mysterious why you love that thing. Your love of that pizza would be arbitrary.

1.16

Our emotions and feelings are in part judgments that respond to the world around us. If you are angry, you are angry for a reason—you believe that someone insulted you, or cut you off in traffic, or whatever. When emotions do not have this component of judgment, we generally think that something has gone wrong. For example, if someone is depressed because they lost their job and their spouse died, then depression is a reasonable reaction—it is a rational response to real-world events. On the other hand, if

someone is depressed but has no good reason to feel blue, then we naturally look for a different kind of explanation of their depression. We may look for a causal explanation involving brain chemistry; perhaps they have serotonin deficiency, say. Irrational depression is a medical problem. Similarly, if someone is angry all the time for no apparent reason, we are liable to say that they have an anger problem, and should seek therapy. In other words, irrational emotions unconnected to facts about the world are a sign of mental stress or illness.

1.17

Under Option A God has no reasons at all for loving one thing over another. As soon as he loves something, then it *becomes* good, pious, and right. So there is no *moral reason* for God to declare murder wrong instead of right. This means that morality is completely arbitrary; the fact that rape and murder are immoral is random. God could have just as easily made rape and murder your moral duty. What's to stop him? He's God after all, and he decides what's right and wrong. You can't very well insist that God would not have made murder your positive moral duty, because murder is immoral—that's to assume that morality is an objective standard apart from God's decisions, which is Option B. We're here assuming Option A is true.

1.18

What's more, God could change his mind at any minute. He might show up and declare that he's gotten bored with all those old commandments and instructions, and that he's issuing some new moral laws. Covet thy neighbor's wife. Do unto others before they do unto you. Eat bacon sandwiches on the Sabbath. Carve graven images of Muhammad. Thou shalt kill. If he were to declare these new rules the moral law, then they would in fact become your moral duties. Perhaps you think that God would never do such a thing. Well, why not? If you think that he is obliged to be

consistent in his moral dictates, then you are setting up consistency as an objective external normative standard that God must respect. Yet the whole idea of Option A is that God's opinions *establish* the normative universe, not that they abide by it.

1.19

To sum up, under Option A morality is random and arbitrary. God chooses some things to be good and others to be bad without any reasons whatsoever for his choice. His preferences are based on nothing at all, and he might as well be rolling dice to decide what to love and what to hate. Indeed, such random emotional judgments, unconstrained by external facts, are more indicative of mental illness or a loss of control than a divinely omniscient mind. Moreover, literally any action could be your moral duty, and will be the minute God declares that he loves it. The cherry on top is that there's no reason God wouldn't or couldn't reverse all his previous opinions and turn morality upside down. Expect the unexpected.

1.20

If you think that those results are a bunch of crazy talk—as Plato did—then you should conclude that God's love does not make things good. Instead, vote for Option B: God loves things because they are good. That is, God's judgments flawlessly track moral reality; he invariably loves the good and hates the wicked. God may be a perfect judge, but he does not make the moral law. In other words, morality and religion are logically separate, which means that whether God exists has nothing to do with whether there are moral facts or what those facts are.

1.21

Now, you might suggest at this point that even if God not does make morality, nevertheless the smart move is to pay attention to his moral advice. God is supposedly morally perfect, so as an ethical role model, there's no one better.

Since morality is a hard thing to figure out, if God's got it all solved for us, we should listen up—scripture's just *Ethics for Dummies*.

1.22

While this is certainly an approach we might try, as a practical matter it is not exactly smooth sailing. Here's what we'll need to do. Step one: prove that a perfectly good God exists. Step two: prove that there are no other Gods whose moral opinions we must also consult. That is, not only is your religion right but also everyone else's is wrong. Step three: show how we can know what God's moral views are. If you think that the Qur'an, the Bible, the Torah, the Upanishads, or whatever, are the word of the Lord, you'll need to prove that. Or if you believe you have God's cell phone number, and he's letting you know what he thinks, you'll need to show why you're not just delusional instead. Step four: offer a clear and unequivocal interpretation of God's moral views. We might be able to pull off all these things. But each of the steps is mighty heavy lifting. If Plato is right, and morality and religion are logically independent, then we *can* investigate ethics without debating religion. Perhaps the smart practical move is to do that very thing.

Egoism (Is Morality Just My Own Personal Code?)

1.23

Maybe morality is just a matter of each individual's personal ethical views, along the lines of the following sentiments:

- Morality is just whatever you believe it is.
- Everyone has his or her own morality.
- Real morality is just "look out for #1."