
DEVELOPING AND STRENGTHENING BELIEF IN GOD II

The Moral Argument and Deciding Whether or not to Believe

In the first part of this series we explored two deductive arguments for the existence of God. Based on the scientific phenomena of the existence of the world and the order it manifests, we deduced that there must have been a Creator Who brought it into existence and designed it with such precision.

In this class we will explore a different approach to belief in God, namely an inductive argument. Rather than basing our conclusions on the existence of objective scientific facts, our starting point will be the subjective experience of moral truth that most people feel within themselves. The Moral Argument for the existence of God challenges us to find an explanation for the moral reality that we already believe in.

Finally, in the last section of this class, we will address the factors that are involved in making a decision about whether or not to believe in God.

We will therefore be seeking to answer the following questions:

- ☞ Is there such a thing as absolute right and wrong?
- ☞ What is the source of man's innate drive for morality?
- ☞ Can moral truth exist if God does not?
- ☞ How does one decide whether or not to believe in God?

Class Outline:

- Section I. The Moral Argument
 - Part A. Establishing Moral Truth
 - Part B. The Argument
 - Part C. Objections
 - i) The Dawkins Challenge
 - ii) Evolutionary Ethics
 - iii) The Social Contract Theory of Morality
 - Part D. Rebuttals

Section II. Making the Rational Choice

SECTION I. THE MORAL ARGUMENT

*Moral truth exists in that there are absolute rights and wrongs.
Such truth is not accounted for by any phenomenon other than the existence of God.
Therefore, He must exist.*

PART A. ESTABLISHING MORAL TRUTH

Unlike the previous two arguments, the Moral Argument has not been developed by any of the classical Jewish thinkers. This argument has been advanced by Christian theologians and western philosophers.

Perhaps the reason classical Jewish philosophers have not relied on the Moral Argument is because, unlike the arguments above, it is based not on scientific fact but rather the human intuition that morality is real. The existence of absolute moral truth is not scientifically verifiable: you either feel it to be true or you don't. Furthermore, from a Jewish perspective, since morality can become corrupted, it is not possible to establish absolute ethical standards unless *yirat Shamayim* (the awe of Heaven) is introduced into the equation.

The first point, then, is to firmly establish the "fact" of a moral truth by helping people identify their own intuition that it exists. A few probing questions will get most people to admit that they believe in some form of absolute right and wrong.

1. Lawrence Kelemen, *Permission to Believe*, pp. 21-28 – Why is murder of innocents always wrong?

Many people believe in universal ethics, i.e. standards of right and wrong that extend across all geographic and temporal boundaries. The popular idea that murder is always wrong – that there is something unethical about slaughtering guiltless, non-threatening human beings in any country at any period in history – is an example of just such a universal ethic.

The moral approach to God's existence begins with the question: Why is murder wrong? That is, who or what has the authority to establish such a universal ethical principle? Who or what made murder wrong?

2. Peter Kreeft, *Fundamentals of the Faith* – Even a self-proclaimed moral relativist will admit to the absolute authority of his own conscience.

Nearly everyone will admit not only the existence of conscience but also its authority. In this age of rebellion against and doubt about nearly every authority, in this age in which the very word *authority* has changed from a word of respect to a word of scorn, one authority remains: an individual's conscience. Almost no one will say that one ought to sin against one's conscience, disobey one's conscience. Disobey the church, the state, parents, authority figures, but do not disobey your conscience. Thus people usually admit, though not usually in these words, the moral authority and binding obligation of conscience.

PART B. THE ARGUMENT

The key with this argument is to demonstrate that if one agrees to the premise, that morality is real, then one must also subscribe to the conclusion, that God exists. Many people will admit, when pressed, that they believe in absolute moral truths like those presented above, nevertheless they still fail to make the logical connection to the source of that morality.

1. **John Locke, A Letter Concerning Toleration, 1689 – Atheism undermines morality.**

[T]hose are not at all to be tolerated who deny the being of a God. Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist. The taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all ...

2. **William Lane Craig, Does God Exist? www.reasonablefaith.org – Absolute morality cannot exist without God.**

If God does not exist, then objective moral values do not exist. To say that there are objective moral values is to say that something is right or wrong independently of whether anybody believes it to be so. It is to say, for example, that Nazi anti-Semitism was morally wrong, even though the Nazis who carried out the Holocaust thought that it was good; and it would still be wrong even if the Nazis had won World War II and succeeded in exterminating or brainwashing everybody who disagreed with them. And the claim is that in the absence of God, moral values are not objective in this sense.

3. **The Moral Argument, existence-of-God.com – A command implies a Commander.**

Some facts are facts about the way that the world is: It is a fact that Paris is the capital of France because there exists a city called Paris that is the capital of France. For most facts, there are objects in the world that make them true. Moral facts aren't like that. The fact that we ought to do something about the problem of famine isn't a fact about the way that the world is, it's a fact about the way that the world ought to be. There is nothing out there in the physical world that makes moral facts true. This is because moral facts aren't descriptive, they're prescriptive; moral facts have the form of commands.

There are some things that can't exist unless something else exists along with them. There can't be something that is being carried unless there is something else that is carrying it. There can't be something that is popular unless there are lots of people that like it. Commands are like this; commands can't exist without something else existing that commanded them. The Moral Argument seeks to exploit this fact; *If moral facts are a kind of command*, the Moral Argument asks, *then who commanded morality?*

4. **Jean-Paul Sartre, Existentialism and Humanism, 1945 – Secular thinkers have also voiced agreement with the Moral Argument; existentialists choose not to believe in morality rather than to believe in God.**

The existentialist ... thinks it very distressing that God does not exist, because all possibility of finding values in a heaven of ideas disappears along with Him; there can no longer be an a priori Good, since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it. Nowhere is it written that the Good exists, that we must be honest, that we must not lie; because the fact is we are on a plane where there are only men. Dostoyevsky said, "If God didn't exist, everything would be possible." That is the very starting point of Existentialism. Indeed, everything is permissible if God does not exist, and as a result man is forlorn, because neither within him nor without does he find anything to cling to.

5. **Richard Taylor, Ethics, Faith, and Reason, 1985, pp. 2-3, 7 – It may be convenient to talk about morality without God, but it is meaningless.**

The modern age, more or less repudiating the idea of a Divine Lawgiver, has nevertheless tried to retain the ideas of moral right and wrong, not noticing that, in casting God aside, they have also abolished the conditions of meaningfulness for moral right and wrong as well. Thus, even educated persons sometimes declare that such things as war, or abortion, or the violation of certain human rights,

are “morally wrong,” and they imagine that they have said something true and significant. Educated people do not need to be told, however, that questions such as these have never been answered outside of religion.

Contemporary writers in ethics, who blithely discourse upon moral right and wrong and moral obligation without any reference to religion, are really just weaving intellectual webs from thin air; which amounts to saying that they discourse without meaning.

PART C. OBJECTIONS

i) The Dawkins Challenge

1. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 2006, pp. 226-7

If there is no God, why be good? Posed like that, the question sounds positively ignoble. When a religious person puts it to me in this way (and many of them do), my immediate temptation is to issue the following challenge: “Do you really mean to tell me the only reason you try to be good is to gain God’s approval and reward, or to avoid His disapproval and punishment? That’s not morality, that’s just [being ingratiating]...” Michael Shermer, in *The Science of Good and Evil*, calls it a debate stopper. If you agree that, in the absence of God, you would “commit robbery, rape, and murder,” you reveal yourself as an immoral person ... If, on the other hand, you admit that you would continue to be a good person even when not under Divine surveillance, you have fatally undermined your claim that God is necessary for us to be good.

Is Dawkins addressing the Moral Argument?

It is important to point out that Dawkins’ argument is attacking a straw man. The Moral Argument does not claim that “without God there is no *reason* to be good.” The argument is that there is *no such thing* as “good” unless God exists to make it so. It does follow that if there is no right and wrong then there is no reason to conform to morality, but that is an outcome of the argument, not the argument itself.

When Dawkins implies that it would still be evil to rob, rape, and murder even if one does not believe in God, he is himself appealing to the reality of moral truths. These acts are wrong whether or not one *believes* in God. But they cannot *be* absolutely wrong unless God says so.

ii) Evolutionary Ethics

The Moral Argument as stated above claims that God is the only logical source for the existence of absolute morality. Below we will take a look at the alternative theories of morality and attempt to expose their weaknesses.

1. Michael Ruse, *Evolutionary Theory and Christian Ethics, The Darwinian Paradigm*, 1989, pp. 262, 268-9 – Evolution as the basis for morality.

The position of the modern evolutionist is that humans have an awareness of morality because such an awareness is of biological worth. Morality is a biological adaptation no less than are hands and feet and teeth ... Considered as a rationally justifiable set of claims about an objective something, ethics is illusory. I appreciate that when somebody says: “Love thy neighbor as thyself,” they think they are referring above and beyond themselves ... Nevertheless, such reference is truly without foundation. Morality is just an aid to survival and reproduction, and any deeper meaning is illusory.

What about altruism?

The main criticism of the Evolutionary Ethics Approach is that it fails to explain altruism, selfless acts on behalf of another. The existence of such a trait in many species flies in the face of “survival of the fittest,” which would seem to favor selfishness. Richard Dawkins addresses this concern:

2. [Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 1976, Ch. 6 – Altruism is the survival tactic of selfish genes.](#)

What is the selfish gene? It is not just one single physical bit of DNA. Just as in the primeval soup, it is all replicas of a particular bit of DNA, distributed throughout the world. If we allow ourselves the license of talking about genes as if they had conscious aims, always reassuring ourselves that we could translate our sloppy language back into respectable terms if we wanted to, we can ask the question, what is a single selfish gene trying to do? It is trying to get more numerous in the gene pool. Basically it does this by helping to program the bodies in which it finds itself to survive and to reproduce. But now we are emphasizing that “it” is a distributed agency, existing in many different individuals at once. The key point of this chapter is that a gene might be able to assist replicas of itself that are sitting in other bodies. If so, this would appear as individual altruism but it would be brought about by gene selfishness. It still seems rather implausible.

Are there any plausible ways in which genes might “recognize” their copies in other individuals? The answer is yes. It is easy to show that close relatives (kin) have a greater than average chance of sharing genes. It has long been clear that this is why altruism by parents towards their young is so common.

To save the life of a relative who is soon going to die of old age has less of an impact on the gene pool of the future than to save the life of an equally close relative who has the bulk of his life ahead of him.

... Individuals can be thought of as life-insurance underwriters. An individual can be expected to invest or risk a certain proportion of his own assets in the life of another individual. He takes into account his relatedness to the other individual, and also whether the individual is a “good risk” in terms of his life expectancy compared with the insurer’s own. Strictly we should say “reproduction expectancy” rather than “life expectancy,” or to be even more strict, “general-capacity-to-benefit-own-genes-in-the-future expectancy.”

Does Dawkins’ theory match up with reality?

3. [Jonathan Rosenblum, *Mr. Dawkins Misfires*, *Jerusalem Post*, December 14, 2006 – Both traditional Darwinism as well as Dawkins’ version fail to adequately explain human altruism.](#)

The Darwinian account, for instance, flounders on widespread altruistic impulses that have always characterized humans in all places and times. Nor can it explain why some men act as heroes even though by doing so they risk their own lives and therefore their capacity to reproduce, or why societies should idealize altruism and heroism. How, from an Evolutionary perspective, could such traits have developed or survived?

The traditional Darwinian answer is that altruism is but an illusion, or a veneer of civilization imposed upon our real natures. That answer fails to explain how that veneer could have come about in the first place. How could the first appeal to higher moral values have ever found an author or an audience?

In 1964, biologist W.D. Hamilton first expounded a theory explaining how much of what appears to us as altruism is merely genes’ clever way of assuring the propagation of their type via relatives sharing that gene pool. The preeminent defender of Darwin – Dawkins – popularized this theory in *The Selfish Gene*.

Among the predictions Hamilton made is: “We expect to find that no one is prepared to sacrifice his life for any single person, but that everyone will sacrifice it for more than two brothers [or offspring], or four half-brothers, or eight first cousins,” because those choices result in a greater dissemination of a particular gene pool.

To which [David] Stove responds: “Was an expectation more obviously false than this one ever held (let alone published) by any human being?” Throughout history, men have sacrificed themselves for those bearing no relationship to them, just as others have refused to do so for more than two brothers.

Here is a supposedly scientific theory bearing no relationship to any empirical reality ever observed.

iii) The Social Contract Theory of Morality

As the name implies, the Social Contract Theory of Morality posits that ethics are a useful social tool made up by the consent of people to live peacefully with one another. All morality boils down to a basic Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you (and vice versa).

1. Epicurus, Principle Doctrines 31 – An early expression of the Golden Rule.

Natural justice is a pledge of reciprocal benefit, to prevent one man from harming or being harmed by another.

It is impossible to live a pleasant life without living wisely, and well, and justly, agreeing neither to harm nor be harmed, and it is impossible to live wisely, and well, and justly without living a pleasant life.

2. David Hume, Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, Section V, Part 1:173 – Ethics are utilitarian.

From the apparent usefulness of the social virtues, it has readily been inferred by skeptics, both ancient and modern, that all moral distinctions arise from education, and were, at first, invented, and afterwards encouraged ... in order to render men tractable, and subdue their natural ferocity and selfishness, which incapacitated them for society.

3. Celeste Friend, Social Contract Theory, The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy – The Social Contract artificially removes man from the amoral state of nature.

According to Thomas Hobbes' argument, morality, politics, society, and everything that comes along with it, all of which Hobbes calls “commodious living” are purely conventional. Prior to the establishment of the Basic Social Contract, according to which men agree to live together and the contract to embody a Sovereign with absolute authority, nothing is immoral or unjust – anything goes. After these contracts are established, however, then society becomes possible, and people can be expected to keep their promises, cooperate with one another, and so on. The Social Contract is the most fundamental source of all that is good and that which we depend upon to live well. Our choice is either to abide by the terms of the contract, or return to the State of Nature, which Hobbes argues no reasonable person could possibly prefer.

4. Ann Cudd, Contractarianism, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, www.plato.stanford.edu – Morality is a product of human self-interest.

“Contractarianism” names both a political theory of the legitimacy of political authority and a moral

theory about the origin or legitimate content of moral norms ... The Moral Theory of Contractarianism claims that moral norms derive their normative force from the idea of contract or mutual agreement. Contractarians are thus skeptical of the possibility of grounding morality or political authority in either Divine will or some perfectionist ideal of the nature of humanity. Social Contract theorists from the history of political thought include Hobbes, Locke, Kant, and Rousseau.

Contractarianism, which stems from the Hobbesian line of Social Contract thought, holds that persons are primarily self-interested, and that a rational assessment of the best strategy for attaining the maximization of their self-interest will lead them to act morally (where the moral norms are determined by the maximization of joint interest) and to consent to governmental authority. Contractarianism argues that we each are motivated to accept morality, as Jan Narveson puts it, “first because we are vulnerable to the depredations of others, and second because we can all benefit from cooperation with others” (1988, 148).

PART D. REBUTTALS

It is important to note that the Social Contract Theory is just that, a theory. Hobbes and his ilk never claimed that they were describing a historical account of the origins of morality. The “State of Nature” never existed. Rather, all that these philosophers were trying to do was to justify the role of government, and in the process they gave a compelling rationale for moral behavior.

Aside from its lack of scientific support, the Social Contract Theory of Morality fails in a more crucial way as well: it does not produce universally-binding moral truths. As history has shown, society can justify to itself the most atrocious acts imaginable.

1. **Lawrence Kelemen, *Permission to Believe*, pp. 25-6 – If morality is a social construct then it is not absolute and will change with the times.**

Maybe a federation of humanity established the eternal, universal moral principles that no person or society can? Maybe murder is always wrong because the majority of mankind decided so? ...

[The problem with this suggestion is that] while there is only one humanity, the members of that group keep changing. Every time someone is born, or someone dies, humanity changes. Which era, therefore, has the right to establish the ethical principles for all subsequent generations? What gives the people of 500 BCE or 1500 BCE more moral authority than the people of 500 CE or 1500 CE? Which humanity is the more logical heir to the moral throne?

Ultimately we must admit that murder cannot always be wrong just because a particular generation said so. Once again, we need a more authoritative source for eternal ethics.

2. **Malbim, *Bereishit (Genesis) 20:11* – Reason alone will not stand up in the face of temptation.**

Abimelech said to Avraham, “What did you see that made you [fear for your wife Sarah]?” Avraham replied, “I said, ‘There is just no fear of God in this place, and [therefore] they will murder me to get my wife.’”

Avraham was telling Avimelech (king of the Philistines) that even when individuals or nations appear to be great philosophers who have laid down just laws, who behave with good character in accordance with reason, and who adjudicate their laws with righteousness according to reason, nevertheless one can never be sure that such a person or nation, when faced with the desire to act wickedly, will always be able to overcome that desire. For when the time comes that his desire burns with a passion for a

beautiful married woman or for someone else's property, at that point even his intellect will justify killing, committing adultery, or any other act of evil. There is only one force found in the soul of man that can ensure that he will not sin and that is the trait of fear that is planted in the soul, from which springs forth the fear of God.

3. **Rabbi Yissocher Frand, Rabbi Frand on the Parsha, pp. 38-41 – Nazi Germany as a case study in the limits of social ethics.**

Rav Elchonon [Wasserman] said over this Malbim [in the previous source] about what can happen in Germany in the decade immediately prior to the rise of Nazi power.

The other Rabbis scoffed at him and said: "Not here. Never Again! Germany is a country of laws, moral standing, technologically advanced, not the Middle Ages. Not here."

Yes, Germany was a country of laws. In 1933, one of the first laws that the Nazis passed was a law against cruelty to animals. Gypsies should not be allowed to perform with dancing bears. Why? Because it was not right for the German people to stand idly by when innocent animals were taken advantage of and perhaps not cared for properly. Those were the "laws" of Germany. A mere five years later there were different "laws" in Germany.

Rav Reuvain Bulka remembers learning in Cheder [school] in Germany after "Kristallnacht." A child came into Cheder and told the Rebbe that his house was on fire. The Rebbe ran and called the fire department, pleading with them to extinguish the fire. The fire department responded, "We are sorry we can't put out the fire in your house. It is the law." The law was changed. Fires in Jewish homes could not be put out.

"There is just no fear of God in this place" (Bereishit 20:11). If there is no Divine Law then laws mean nothing. The Germans, with all their culture and with all their manners and with all their propriety can worry about bears but not worry about humans.

4. **Ibid. – Rabbi Hutner's "Nicht wahr?" story.**

When Rav Hutner was learning in Slabodka he remembers that Rav Avraham Elya Kaplan went from Slabodka, Lithuania to Berlin to be with Rav Dovid Tzvi Hoffman. He came back to Slabodka for an Elul [the month before Rosh HaShanah] and the Alter from Slabodka asked for his impressions of the German people.

Among other things, Rav Kaplan told them that the Germans were a kind people. They had a polite way of speaking. If someone asks directions from a German, he doesn't just give orders (go two blocks and take a right); after he finishes the instructions, he will politely ask; "*Nicht wahr?* (Is this not so?)" This showed refinement. He would not say anything definitive; he would always end the sentence with a tentative, "*Nicht wahr?*"

At that point an argument broke out between the students of the Yeshivah. Was it right to praise the Germans? There were those who argued that it is wrong to praise them. We don't learn manners from other communities. [Their spoken customs might be only skin deep. We need to look into our own sources for ethics that penetrate.] There was one student who persisted and argued that if one sees something nice in another culture, that should be learned and accepted and even praised. *Nicht wahr?* is a sign of politeness and thoughtfulness. It showed modesty and was admirable – why not learn it from the Germans?

Fifty years later, Rav Hutner was saying a shiur in the Chaim Berlin Yeshivah. A Jew walked in and said, “Do you remember me? I was that student in Slabodka that complemented the custom of the Germans and insisted that their way of speaking showed how gentle and fine a people they were.” Rav Hutner indicated that he did remember this student and he stuck out his hand to greet him. The Jew stuck out his hand and there was a hook in place of a hand. He lost his hand in the concentration camp.

He told Rav Hutner, “When the German cut off my hand in the concentration camp, do you know what he said? The German said, ‘It hurts – *nicht wahr?* – Is it not so?’

“You, Rav Hutner were right, and I was wrong.”

When there is no fear of God, when there is no Divine Authority, when there are no absolute laws, then there are no guarantees.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I.

- ☞ The Moral Argument for the existence of God starts with the recognition that there are in fact absolute moral standards that exist independent of time and place. The murder of innocents or the betrayal of one’s own conscience are just a couple of examples of this phenomenon. Nevertheless, since morality can become corrupted, it is not possible to establish absolute ethical standards unless *yirat Shamayim* (the awe of Heaven) is introduced into the equation.
- ☞ The argument insists that such moral truths simply cannot exist if there is no spiritual reality that has determined them. Only if God exists and it is His Will that determines morality can there be absolute standards of right and wrong.
- ☞ While there are other theories as to how society might have developed morality, either genetically or historically, they lack scientific basis and fail to produce the desired result of absolute morality.
- ☞ Ultimately, only the existence of God can adequately explain the phenomenon of morality. The belief in absolute standards of right and wrong is an affirmation of belief in God, whether one recognizes it as so or not.

SECTION II. MAKING THE RATIONAL CHOICE

The arguments for the existence of God presented above do not prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that God exists. As we stated in the first class (Developing and Strengthening Belief in God I), such proof is not to be expected if we are to maintain our free will. Does this mean, then, that it is impossible to be convinced of the existence of God? Can we only offer arguments but produce no proof?

The decision whether or not to believe in God must be approached responsibly. It is a decision that affects not only what we believe, but also how we will choose to live our lives. If there is a Creator and Designer of our world then it matters what He has to say about how we should and should not act. It is of utmost importance then that the decision be made responsibly.

1. **Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb, *Living Up to the Truth* (1996), p. 19 – The position of a skeptic sets up unreasonable standards for decision-making.**

Suppose someone takes the position of a skeptic. (Some say that this is what Socrates did.) “I really don’t know what the truth is. But you say that you do know. Well, I am prepared to listen. Tell me what you think the truth is, and why you think it is the truth. I am prepared to be convinced *if you can prove it*. I am not going to accept what you believe just because you believe it – there are too many different beliefs for that. But if you can prove it, I will agree.” So you present your evidence, your proof, and his response is: “That doesn’t really prove it because something else still could be true.”

Now what is wrong with the skeptic? What is wrong is that *he puts all the burden of proof on you*. What we need to do is be skeptical of his skepticism! If I present some positive evidence that my belief is true, it is not enough for him to merely point out that it might still be false: *he has to present positive evidence that it is false*. The mere fact that *it might be false* is not enough for him to reject it. His absolute skepticism – his demand for absolute proof – is unjustified and unreasonable. The reason that it is unjustified is that we are looking for *evidence which justifies action*. We should ask the skeptic: “All right – we gave positive evidence of truth. If you had to act, would that evidence suffice? Sure, what we believe could still be false. But the evidence is strong enough to require us to act as if it were true. And if you did not act this way, you would be acting irresponsibly. That is enough for us.”

2. ***Ibid.* p. 18, 45 – Real life decisions can’t wait for absolute proof, they rely on choosing the best possible option.**

Whatever is the case in making up our minds about theoretical knowledge, when we come to making practical choices we have a quite different standard for making those decisions in a responsible fashion. We don’t wait for absolute certainty before we act. The standard we employ in making responsible decisions is high *probability vis-à-vis alternatives*. If I have to decide what to do, and I know that what I do depends on my circumstances – i.e. what the facts are – and I don’t know the facts for sure, I use the information I have to determine which of the alternatives is most probable and then I act on it. If I do so I have acted responsibly, and if I don’t do so I have acted irresponsibly...

Now, the key point here is that Judaism is both a matter of *theoretics* (Is there a God? Did He reveal himself at Sinai? Did He create the world in such and such a fashion? What is the nature of the soul?) and a matter of *decision*. Judaism is in part a matter of how one chooses to live. Soon it will be the Sabbath. You will have to decide whether to light up a cigarette. During the week you will have to decide whether to have a cheeseburger. These are life decisions. The criterion for making a life decision responsibly is to make the decision on the basis of high probability of truth vis-à-vis alternatives. A person who waits for the Cartesian standard to be fulfilled, a person who waits for an absolute refutation of all possible alternatives, is a person who is not behaving responsibly...

But, you are asking me to make a decision about my whole life. This is my whole life, it changes everything that I do, my values, my conduct, and so on. Surely for a decision like that I ought to have more than just high relative probability. For that I ought to have a solid proof, or at least something that is very high in probability. Shouldn’t I have higher standards when it comes to my whole life?” ... Even if the stakes are enormous, if they are balanced between the two alternatives, then we still use highest probability to make our decision.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II.

- ✧ Belief in God is not just a theoretical question without consequences for life. On the contrary, it is a practical issue that affects everything.
- ✧ It is only fair and responsible, then, to approach one's belief about God with the same standards one would apply to similar types of decisions. We are forced to act; we never insist on absolute clarity – we follow the most logical and probable of alternatives.
- ✧ Our hope is that one should be able to look at the arguments presented above as creating a preponderance of evidence in favor of choosing to believe in God. If one values logic, science, and common sense then the idea of God's existence should be compelling. The decision to believe in God should be seen as a responsible one and, after the evidence presented here, clearly the most probable choice vis-à-vis the alternatives.

CLASS SUMMARY:

✧ IS THERE SUCH A THING AS ABSOLUTE RIGHT AND WRONG?

The Moral Argument for the existence of God starts with the recognition that there are in fact absolute moral standards that exist independent of time and place. The murder of innocents or the betrayal of one's own conscience are just a couple of examples of this phenomenon. Since morality can become corrupted, it is not possible to establish absolute ethical standards unless *yirat Shamayim* (the awe of Heaven) is introduced into the equation.

✧ WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF MAN'S INNATE DRIVE FOR MORALITY?

Ultimately, only the existence of God can adequately explain the phenomenon of morality. The belief in absolute standards of right and wrong is an affirmation of belief in God, whether one recognizes it as so or not.

✧ CAN MORAL TRUTH EXIST IF GOD DOES NOT?

Moral truths simply cannot exist if there is no spiritual reality that has determined them. Only if God exists and it is His Will that determines morality can there be absolute standards of right and wrong.

✧ HOW DOES ONE DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT TO BELIEVE IN GOD?

It is only fair and responsible to approach one's belief about God with the same standards one would apply to similar types of decisions. We are forced to act; we never insist on absolute clarity – we follow the most logical and probable of alternatives.