

“If there is no God, then man and the universe are doomed. Like prisoners condemned to death, we await our unavoidable execution. There is no God, and there is no immortality. And what is the consequence of this? It means that life itself is absurd. It means that the life we have is without ultimate significance, value, or purpose.” (pg 72)

In this chapter Craig asserts, with little argument, that without the existence of God, then there is no immortality and life is meaningless. The lack of immortality entails, according to Craig, that all of our projects and goals are doomed. “This is the horror of modern man: because he ends in nothing, he is nothing.” (pg 73) This is not to say that if we were immortal (but God still did not exist) then there would be objective meaning. If our lives ‘could go on and on and still be utterly without meaning. We could still ask of life, “So what?” So it’s not just immortality man needs if life is to be ultimately significant; he needs God and immortality. And if God does not exist, then he has neither.” (pg 74)

So, we must have both God *and* immortality for our lives to be meaningful. Why God? Because without God then there can be no objective morality.¹ Additionally, without God and immortality there can be no purpose to life. Our society, however, exists in the shadow of the enlightenment and various atheistic movements that sprouted up in the 19th century (e.g. Darwin, Nietzsche, and Marx). Hence, ‘modern man’ is told by society that God is dead and our lives are finite accidents in a purposeless universe. Our lives are absurd.

But so what? When we looked at Nagel and Camus, for example, they accepted such an absurd existence and told us to view with irony / defiance. Craig claims that such an acceptance of life’s absurdity is actually impossible to consistently *practice*. On the one hand, we tend to have certain values that we embrace as though they were absolute and objective. As an example, Craig discusses Richard Dawkins as someone who *claims* that life is meaningless, but also condemns certain cultural practices. Such condemnations require the atheist to act *as though* their values were objective, but they deny such a thing as existing. Hence, a kind of cognitive-practical contradiction arises between what the atheist believes and how the atheist behaves.

Additionally, Craig highlights that all but the most bankrupt of minds will morally condemn certain behaviors. (pg 88) Consistently applying one’s moral relativism is, Craig thinks, an indication that something is wrong with atheism. We certainly want to condemn moral monsters, and praise moral heroes. This would require, however, a standard to which all people can be assessed. But, if there is no God, then there is no such standard.

Hence, Craig has three basic replies to the existentialists.

¹ While Craig does not claim this explicitly, note that in the section entitled ‘No Ultimate Value Without God and Immortality’ Craig speaks only of morality and moral value. Hence, I think it justified to interpret him as endorsing this claim.

- If we focus on just the subjective meaning of life, we will be living in a kind of world of make believe. Such pretend doesn't actually give our lives meaning, and so we should not comfort ourselves with such illusions.
- If we focus on trying to live morally, even though we deny God's existence, we will again be engaging in a kind of make believe. Worse, if we adopt moral relativism, then anything can be justified if enough people approve of it.
- If we focus on just the subjective meaning of life, then we will not be able to distinguish between the worthwhile purposes from the non-worthwhile. The moral monster's purposes are just as meaningless as yours, and so there is no basis for criticism (other than how we feel).

So, the atheist either embraces the absurdity of life (and becomes miserable), or they live as though life had meaning (and generate a kind of cognitive-practical contradiction). Craig claims that such a position is quite unpalatable, and so belief in the Christian God ought to be preferred (a la Pascal, pg 86).

Questions:

- Moral relativism, though perhaps difficult to apply consistently, does have a possible response to Craig: the reason that we tend to make objective moral claims even though we deny there being objective morality is because that is part of *our* cultural background. If we had been raised in a different culture, then making relativised moral judgements would come much more naturally. As motivation for this, look at how art appreciation and rules of etiquette have gone from quasi-objective to almost fully relativized.
- Craig only focuses on moral relativism in contrast to objectivism, but there are many more positions. Some of the moral psychology literature does claim that moral judgements feel so strong (i.e. objective) because they are rooted in what are called 'core emotional responses'. Such responses are typically posited to have been very beneficial to survival, and so we should expect humans to heavily rely on such emotions. This moral position is known as *sentimentalism*.
- Though Craig addresses this in other work, there is a well known challenge for those who tie morality's existence to God's existence known as the *Euthyphro Dilemma*.