NATURE, THE MORAL LAW AND CONSCIENCE ARE EVIDENCE FOR GOD’S EXISTENCE

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The following are reasons why the moral law and conscience are evidence for God’s existence.

1. **The moral law is written on the hearts of all people.**

   Why do human beings make excuses for our behavior and what do our excuses prove? Why is it that when we do not succeed in living as we believe we should our minds think of a string of excuses?

   In his book *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis gives this answer:

   “In the first place, human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid of it. Secondly, that they do not in fact behave in that way. They know the Law of Nature; they break it. These two facts are the foundation of all clear thinking about ourselves and the universe we live in.”

   Skeptics claim that the moral law is nothing more than instinct. As Lewis points out:

   “We all know what it feels like to be prompted by instinct—by mother love, or sexual instinct, or the instinct for food. It means that you feel a strong want or desire to act in a certain way. And, of course, we sometimes do feel just that sort of desire to help another person: and no doubt that desire is due to the herd instinct. **But feeling a desire to help is quite different from feeling that you ought to help whether you want to or not.**” (Emphasis added)

   Why does Lewis think that the moral law is not just a result of human instinct?

   If we make our impulses something to follow at all costs we will turn into monsters. Hitler comes to mind.

   Skeptics also argue that the moral law is nothing more than social convention. Lewis counters such an argument with his clear logic:

   “The moment you say that one set of moral ideas can be better than another, you are, in fact, measuring them both by a standard, saying that one of them conforms to that standard more nearly than the other. But the standard that measures two things is something different from either. You are, in fact, comparing them both with some Real Morality, **admitting that there is such a thing as a real Right, independent of what people think and that some people’s ideas get nearer to that real Right than others.**”
Those who question the reality of the Moral Law or the Law of Human Nature should realize that just as the law of gravity tells us what heavy objects do if you drop them so the Law of Human Nature tells us what human beings ought to do and don’t do.

The evidence is overwhelming that there is more than one kind of reality; that is, there is something above and beyond the mere behavior of human beings: it is “a real law, which none of us made, but which we find pressing on us.”

2. **Man and society could not function without Law.** Life would become utter chaos if it were not for law and man’s adherence to it.

We have witnessed what has happened when there have been a serious absence of police. Crime in general and plundering, etc. takes placed when man is free to do what he wants.

When God created us, He built into our make-up the capacity to know right and wrong; consequently, when we violate this inner moral monitor we feel guilty. Now while the feelings of guilt may pass away after time, our standing before God is still one of guilt due to the fact we have broken His moral law of righteousness. “Whoever commits sin **transgresses also the law:** for sin is the transgression of the law” (1 Jn 3:4). Furthermore, “whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is **guilty of all**” (Jas 2:10).

We all have done, said, or thought things that brought on feelings of guilt, regret, or remorse. This shows that our conscience has affirmed the truth of God’s Word; His law has been written on our heart. All people have been given the revelation of God through the light of the moral law and conscience, and “**all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God**” (Ro 3:23).

3. **Man is born with a universal belief in a supreme Being.** No tribe has yet been discovered that lacks this. They know that some Being creates and controls (Ro 2:15), which shows the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts accusing or else excusing one another.

4. **The existence of God is written in the human conscience:**

"since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them" (v. 15).

4. **Conscience testified to the Athenians that there was a God though they did not know Him personally:**

"For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you" (Ac 17:23).
The existence of God then is written in the human conscience. All the Athenians and strangers spent their time philosophizing, either telling or hearing some new thing and their conscience told them that there was a God.

Some atheists may claim that their conscience does not tell them about God just as some people are so blind that they may deny the existence of the sun. But that does not alter the fact that the sun exists, rises and sets each day. It is doubtful if a genuine atheist can be found for at best they are men who have stilled conscience by blatant unbelief.

Atheists find it difficult to admit that conscience tells them anything about God because they have stilled their conscience by blatant unbelief.

Some men are so blind that they may deny the existence of the sun in the sky but that does not alter the fact that the sun exists, rises and sets each day. None are so blind as those who refuse to see. The honest man will find that the inner still small voice says that God exists and is alive today. Men deny the existence of God not because they cannot find Him but because they are afraid to face the responsibility of being accountable to Him after death; Atheism is one of the devil’s tools to put men to sleep without accepting salvation. If there is no God then we are not responsible to anyone and we can live and die as we please.

It is difficult for natural man to believe in something that he cannot see, touch or feel (1 Co 2:14).

The problem for the Christian is solved with the first verse of the Bible, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Ge 1:1).

The Bible is not a textbook that attempts to prove the existence of God. Rather, the Bible takes it for granted and opens with a positive fact that God does exist. It did not occur to any other writer of the Bible to prove this fact.

The Bible plainly states that it is the fool who denies the existence of God:

"The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God" (Ps 14:1).

But in the quieter moments of reflection the conscience of every man whispers. “There is a God” and only fools deny it. To look up and see a plane and not see the pilot and say that the plane does not have a pilot is as ridiculous as looking into the heavens and saying that there is no God simply because we cannot see Him. Few of us have ever seen our brains, yet we believe that we possess them because of a centralized control system in the body. Because we see creation, we believe in God.

Milton calls conscience "God's umpire." It is a faculty capable of receiving light and conviction from the Spirit of God.
The conscience has been compared with the eye which is not light in itself, nor is it capable of discerning any object, yet because of solar or artificial light; it has organs properly adapted to the reception of the rays of light and the various images of the objects which they exhibit. When these are present to an eye with healthy organs there is a discernment of those objects which are within the sphere of vision. However, when the light is absent, there is no perception of the shape, dimensions, size or color of any object no matter how perfect the optic nerve may be.

In a similar way the Spirit of God enlightens the “eye of the soul” which we call conscience. Thus the Scripture says, "The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit" (Ro 8:16).

Conscience enables man to discern his motives, attitudes, words, thoughts and actions. This is not possible for him to do without the assistance of the Spirit of God. Otherwise self-love, and every other passion, would disguise and wholly conceal him from himself.

The simple, intuitive point of the argument from conscience is that everyone in the world knows, deep down, that he is absolutely obligated to be and do good, and this absolute obligation could come only from God. Thus everyone knows God, however obscurely, by this moral intuition, which we usually call conscience. Conscience is the voice of God in the soul.

A good conscience is a divine consciousness of living according to the written word of God. It seems that there can be no conscience that does not have a regard to God. Right and wrong imply agreement and disagreement to the will and word of God. And so there is no such thing as conscience in a Christian, if we leave God out of the equation.

The traditional meaning in Roman Catholic theology is the knowledge of what is right and wrong: intellect applied to morality. The meaning of conscience in the argument is knowledge and not just a feeling; but it is intuitive knowledge rather than rational or analytical knowledge, and it is first of all the knowledge that I must always do right and never wrong, the knowledge of my absolute obligation to goodness, all goodness: justice and charity and virtue and holiness; only in the second place is it the knowledge of which things are right and which things are wrong. This second-place knowledge is knowledge of moral facts, while the first-place knowledge is knowledge of my personal moral obligation, knowledge of the moral law itself and its binding authority over my life. That knowledge forms the basis for the argument from conscience.

If anyone claims he simply does not have that knowledge, if anyone says he simply doesn't see it, then the argument will not work for him. The question remains, however, whether he honestly doesn't see it and really has no conscience (or a radically defective conscience) or whether he is repressing the knowledge he really has (1:18; 2:15). In that case, what is needed before the rational, philosophical argument is some honest introspection to see the data. The data, conscience, is like a bag of gold buried in my backyard. If someone tells me it is there and that this proves some rich man buried it, I must first dig and find the treasure before I can
infer anything more about the cause of the treasure's existence. Before conscience can prove God to anyone, that person must admit the presence of the treasure of conscience in the backyard of his soul.

Nearly everyone will admit the premise that there is such a thing as a conscience although they explain it differently, interpret it differently and insist it has nothing to do with God. But that is exactly what the argument tries to show. Once one admits the premise of the authority of conscience, one must admit the conclusion of God.

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 absolute moral authority and binding obligation of conscience.

Such people are usually surprised and pleased to find out that Thomas Aquinas, of all people, agrees with them to such an extent that he says if a Roman Catholic comes to believe the church is in error in some essential, officially defined doctrine, it is a mortal sin against conscience, a sin of hypocrisy, for him to remain in the church and call himself a Roman Catholic, but only a venial sin against knowledge for him to leave the church in honest but partly culpable error.

This means that one of the two premises of the argument is established: conscience has an absolute authority over me. The second premise is that the only possible source of absolute authority is an absolutely perfect will, a divine Being. The conclusion follows that such a being exists.

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

How would someone disagree with the second premise? They would do so by finding an alternative basis for conscience besides God. There are four such possibilities:

- something abstract and impersonal, like an idea
- something concrete but less than human, something on the level of animal instinct;
- something on the human level but not divine
- something higher than the human level but not yet divine.\(^5\)

In other words, we cover all the possibilities by looking at the abstract, the concrete-less-than-human, the concrete-human, and the concrete-more-than-human.\(^6\)
Law Without a Lawgiver

The first possibility means that the basis of conscience is a law without a lawgiver. We are obligated absolutely to an abstract ideal, a pattern of behavior. The question then comes up, where does this pattern exist? If it does not exist anywhere, how can a real person be under the authority of something unreal? How can more be subject to "less"? If, however, this pattern or idea exists in the minds of people, then what authority do they have to impose this idea of theirs on me? If the idea is only an idea, it has no personal will behind it; if it is only someone's idea, it has only that someone behind it. In neither case do we have a sufficient basis for absolute, infallible authority without any exceptions. But we already admitted that conscience has that authority, that no one should ever disobey his conscience.

Biological Instinct Instead of Conscience

The second possibility means that we trace conscience to a biological instinct. "We must love one another or die"7 writes the poet W. H. Auden. We unconsciously know this, says the believer in this second possibility, just as animals unconsciously know that unless they behave in certain ways the species will not survive. That's why animal mothers sacrifice for their children, and that's a sufficient explanation for human altruism too. It's the herd instinct.

The problem with that explanation is that it, like the first, does not account for the absoluteness of conscience's authority. We believe we ought to disobey an instinct—any instinct—on some occasions. But we do not believe we ought ever to disobey our conscience. You should usually obey instincts like mother love, but not if it means keeping your son back from risking his life to save his country in a just and necessary defensive war, or if it means injustice and lack of charity to other mothers' sons. There is no instinct that should always be obeyed. The instincts are like the keys on a piano; the moral law is like sheet music. Different notes are right at different times.

Furthermore, instinct fails to account not only for what we ought to do but also for what we do. We don't always follow instinct. Sometimes we follow the weaker instinct, as when we go to the aid of a victim even though we fear for our own safety. The herd instinct here is weaker than the instinct for self-preservation, but our conscience, like sheet music, tells us to play the weak note here rather than the strong one.

Honest introspection will reveal to anyone that conscience is not an instinct. When the alarm wakes you up early and you realize that you promised to help your friend this morning, your instincts pull you back to bed, but something quite different from your instincts tells you that you should get out. Even if you feel two instincts pulling you (e.g., you are both hungry and tired), the conflict between those two instincts is quite different, and can be felt and known to be quite different, from the conflict between conscience and either or both of the instincts. Quite simply, conscience tells you that you ought to do or not do something, while instincts simply drive you to do or not do something. Instincts make something attractive or repulsive to your appetites, but conscience makes something obligatory to your choice, no matter how your
appetites feel about it. Most people will admit this piece of obvious introspective data if they are honest. If they try to wriggle out of the argument at this point, leave them alone with the question, and if they are honest, they will confront the data when they are alone.

**Society**

A third possibility is that society (others) is the source of the authority of conscience. That is the most popular belief, but it is also the weakest of all the four possibilities. For society does not mean something over and above other human beings, something like God, although many people treat society exactly like God, even in speech, almost lowering the voice to a whisper when the sacred name is mentioned. Society is simply other people like myself. What authority do they have over me? Are they always right? Must I never disobey them? What kind of blind status quo conservatism is this? Should a German have obeyed society in the Nazi era?

To say society is the source of conscience is to say that when one prisoner becomes a thousand prisoners, they become the judge. It is to say that mere quantity gives absolute authority; that what the individual has in his soul is nothing, no authoritative conscience, but that what society (i.e., many individuals) has is. That is simply a logical impossibility, like thinking stones can think if only you have enough of them. (Some proponents of artificial intelligence believe exactly that kind of logical fallacy, by the way: that electrons and chips and chunks of metal can think if only you have enough of them in the right geometrical arrangements.)

**Idea**

The fourth possibility remains, that the source of conscience's authority is something above me but not God. What could this be? Society is not above me, nor is instinct. An ideal? That is the first possibility we discussed. It looks as though there are simply no candidates in this area.

**Aquinas**

In contrast with Kant’s hypothetical view, Aquinas offers a definite answer. Aquinas believed that we have an innate God-given awareness of good (synderesis) and that by using prudence to weigh up our needs against the needs of others we can reason out what is good and that we can then out on these findings. ‘The application of knowledge to activity’ is how Aquinas viewed the conscience, thus he holds the view that conscience does provide evidence for the existence of God as it is the application of God-given reason to reality.

However, whereas believers may manufacture a link between God and conscience as it seems reasonable, this is, as Kant believes, hypothetical. Therefore a-theistic explanations of the feeling of conscience we have are also viable.
Freud

Freud explained how the conscience we feel is not the sign of an objective morality or God, it is, rather, a part of our super-ego. For example, if one was smacked and labeled evil for looking at pornography when young then this experience may permeate into one’s conscience; and this would provoke a negative reaction or effectively a voice saying “that is evil” when one thought about looking at pornography. This has occurred as looking at pornography has been labeled subconsciously as an action which creates condemnation by others; thus the conscience is a reaction to past experiences and a survival technique.

Freud thus views the conscience as something which is restricting and oppressive, this seems a logical atheistic view as if the conscience is not a God-given ability or knowledge of objective good then the way it limits human activity is negative. For example, if I don’t sleep with my secretary, even though I can entice her with a promotion and I can do this without being caught, merely because I have some psychological reaction that it is ‘wrong’ to do this then I am being limited and denied pleasure even though, without God, it is impossible to name “right” and “wrong,” or for there to be right and wrong. Thus it seems that the conscience is not evidence for the existence of God as it is instead a subconscious reaction we have because of previous experiences and a reaction we have to survive in society.

The arguments which undermine Freud’s view of the conscience undermine large parts of the ‘science’ of psychology. Although there are patterns which seem to lead to Freud’s view of the conscience, the lack of proof and the complexity of the human mind make it impossible for the evidence for his view to be weak. It may appear that when studying 100 rapists the lack of sexual relations in their life led them to frustration and then rape, however, there is no way of proving what thought processes or subconscious processes they have been through. Similarly you can say I believe rape is wrong because this is what I have been told, or because I know committing rape would lead to people hating me and me going to jail, however, it is just as likely that God has given me the ability to reason (Aquinas) or he is actually talking to me through the conscience (Newman) and saying that rape is wrong.

Freud’s view relies on being able to predict without any real knowledge or being able to analyze the complex human mind (conscious and unconscious). Even when one says “x is hungry therefore x will eat the donut” there is no way of proving beyond doubt that this is why x ate the donut which they received for doing there essay. Atheistic scientists must accept that it is possible that a God is intervening in our thoughts or that the concept and knowledge of good comes from God as there is no evidence which proves this view wrong. Although Freud comes up with suggestions about how we could have a conscience if there is no God, he does not prove that conscience is not evidence for the existence of God. However, he does show that as conscience can be explained using scientific theory, and thus that it is not the solid evidence for the existence of God.
Newman stated ‘Conscience is the aboriginal vicar of Christ’, that the conscience is essentially God talking to us. For Freud and other scientists this suggestion is absurd and almost laughable, however, as we have discussed there is no scientific fact which can disprove this. If we analyze Newman’s theory, even in such a way a psychologist would, then it appears there is logic and reason to it. Piaget argued that the conscience is developed while we grow into adulthood. He viewed how children growing up and playing act and observed that: first they would play alone, secondly children would play in a group and seek absolution, punishment and justice and third a development into a stage of discussion and compromise would occur. Just as these findings support Piaget’s view, it could argued, that they also back up Newman’s belief that God is talking to us through the conscience and to access this conscience properly we need support, help and guidance.

In conclusion it seems that we cannot know truth about whether or not the conscience is or is not evidence for the existence of God. However, we can know some hypothetical truths. If one believes the conscience is objective then it is necessary to believe that it is God-given as scientific explanations for conscience rely on it being subjective and based on personal experience. This means that if one believes that it can ever be said with authority that something is ‘wrong’ then one must believe in God; objectivity relies on God and the process to realizing this objective conscience and knowledge of good must be God-given. Conscience can be used as evidence for the existence as those who believe in any objective right or wrong have to believe in God-given conscience as this is the only way that objectivity could be established.

It is meaningless to state that it is always wrong to rape if there is no divine law-Giver, the conscience and reason are evidence for God as they are the bodies which show that there is some divine spark and some knowledge of good within us. Whilst it can be argued that this feeling is instigated by the mind and society if this feeling leads to any sort of objective truth then it must be God-given.

However, psychological and sociological explanations for conscience hold credibility and explain how the objective conscience which theists believe exists, may actually be a personal reaction to society or to one’s own experiences. Whether or not the conscience can be used for evidence of God is subjective as the meaning of the word conscience to a theist is an objective, knowledge of good and evil, however, to a psychologist the conscience is a neurosis, subjective and imprinted into the mind by society and experience.

CONCLUSION

The fact that science is able to question the belief that the conscience is God-given to a significant degree means that conscience cannot be declared legitimate once and for all. Just as science cannot prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that the conscience isn’t God-given theists cannot prove beyond doubt that conscience is God-given. This means that while conscience can be held as a part of God’s presence and thus existence the only way it can be convincing is if one is a believer in objective moral laws.
The most notable statement of this argument was written by John Henry Cardinal Newman:

"If, as is the case, we feel responsibility, are ashamed, are frightened, at transgressing the voice of conscience, this implies that there is one to whom we are responsible, before whom we are ashamed, whose claims upon us we fear.

If, on doing wrong, we feel the same tearful, broken-hearted sorrow which overwhelms us in hurting a mother; if, on doing right, we enjoy the same sunny serenity of mind, the same soothing satisfactory delight which follows our receiving praise from a father, we certainly have within us the image of some person, to whom our love . . . and veneration look, in whose smile we find our happiness, for whom we yearn, towards whom we direct our pleadings, in whose anger we are troubled and waste away.

These feelings in us are such as require for their exciting cause an intelligent being; we are not affectionate towards a stone; we do not feel shame before a horse or dog; we have no remorse or compunction on breaking merely human law; yet so it is, conscience excites all these painful emotions: confusion, foreboding, self-condemnation; and on the other hand it sheds upon us a deep peace, a sense of security, a resignation and a hope, which there is no sensible, no earthly, object to elicit.

‘The wicked flees when no man pursueth.’ Then why does he flee? Whence his terror? Who is it that he sees in solitude, in darkness, in the hidden chambers of his heart? If the cause of these emotions does not belong to this visible world, the object towards which his perception is directed must be supernatural and divine; and thus the phenomena of conscience avail to impress the imagination with the picture of a supreme governor, a judge, holy, just, powerful, all-seeing, retributive, and is the creative principle of religion, as the moral sense is the principle of ethics."^{8}

(Emphasis added)

To Newman and others the argument from conscience, or the sense of moral responsibility, has seemed the most intimately persuasive of all the arguments for God's existence, while it was the only classical argument which Kant found persuasive.

It is not that conscience, as such, contains a direct revelation or intuition of God as the author of the moral law, but that, taking man's sense of moral responsibility as a phenomenon to be explained, no ultimate explanation can be given except by supposing the existence of a Superior and Lawgiver whom man is bound to obey. And just as the argument from design brings out prominently the attribute of intelligence, so the argument from science brings out the attribute of holiness and righteousness in the First Cause and self-existent personal Being with whom we must ultimately identify the Designer and the Lawgiver.
Atheistic Argument

But does this reveal a lack of understanding about evolution as atheists claim? They claim that humans are a lot like animals and that a number of other species have demonstrated that they have something that looks like a *rudimentary conscience and a rudimentary (or proto) system of morals*. It has, for example, been observed that chimpanzees will exhibit what appears to be fear and shame when they do something that violates the rules of its group. Therefore, they argue, should it be assumed that the chimpanzee fears God? Their point is that it is more likely that such feelings should develop in social animals.

It is not surprising that something like this would evolve naturally if morals are, basically, the rules by which social groups function. They ensure that things are reasonably fair and that relationships run reasonably smoothly. Social groups simply wouldn't survive without rules, so the evolution of the ability to create and follow rules should be expected. Humans are social animals so it's also to be expected that, like other social animals, we would have social rules which regulate group behavior.

**Our conscience is basically our ability to internalize rules**—we know right from wrong and prefer the right to the wrong regardless of whether we are being observed and regardless of punishment. Again, this is ultimately a more efficient system for social rules and the evolution of the ability to internalize rules is not the least bit surprising, especially in light of animal behavior which is highly suggestive of a rudimentary "moral conscience."

The fact that people and cultures all over the world have many similar ideas about what is moral does not justify the conclusion that there are objective standards, independent of human experience and reason, against which we are comparing our ideas. Yes, we are using some sort of standard—but why assume that standard isn't a part of us? We are all more similar than different and we all share many experiences in life. Wouldn't those experiences lead to many basic and common principles regarding matters like sharing, fairness, and suffering?

In fact, the similarities in people's ideas about right and wrong over time and across cultures helps support the idea that morality has evolved. If morality is part of our evolutionary inheritance, then we should expect there to be some broad similarities and agreements. If moral rules are selected for because they help social groups survive, then it's likely that most social groups around the planet would end up with relatively similar rules of behavior—the possible variety of successful high-level standards won't be that great.

Is the fact that our moral standards have developed over recorded history a further argument for the idea that morality is a product of human social evolution and not divine fiat? If our conscience was created by God, then why does the human conscience say different things today than it did several thousand years ago? But is it true that a number of moral standards are different today than they were 100 years ago and many more a different than they were 1000 years ago?
Response

There is no evidence whatsoever that animals have a rudimentary conscience. The fact that they hang their head is hardly testimony to any form of remorse.

Furthermore, animals play by the rule of the jungle: survival. They act instinctively and thus can be trained, but never educated.

The desperate attempt to compare animals with human beings is foolish at best. They are worlds apart, whether physically, psychologically, morally or spiritually.

A moral agent is a being who takes moral principles into account when deciding on his course of action, which implies that he:

1. Is able to reason, remember, and be aware of himself
2. Has general knowledge of the real world and no fundamental beliefs that are crazy
3. Is aware of moral principles and believes in them
4. Has moral values that he appreciates for their own sake or because they are useful for achieving other things that he wants
5. Has other natural and acquired values that sometimes conflict with his moral values
6. Is free to act

Humans are not the only ones who have sympathy and altruistic tendencies. Animals such as chimpanzees, porpoises, and dogs evidence such tendencies. Scientific studies of apes, monkeys, mice and other animals also show that they have rudimentary reasoning abilities. Does this leaves abstract language and conscience as the only remaining attributes to support the claim that only humans are moral agents? Not really. The so-called rudimentary reasoning abilities of animals are so elementary that they can hardly be considered reasoning ability. Animals have shown they are totally incapable of any philosophical or abstract reasoning.

Many human qualities are not unprecedented yet they differ (often greatly) from other animals in the degree to which we possess these qualities. A case could be made that other animals have languages and can vocalize some concepts and are, therefore, like us. But human languages are so much more abstract and symbolic than animal languages that human languages belong in a separate category.

Only man draws representative pictures, maps, and diagrams, uses musical and mathematical notations, points or draws an arrow to show direction, uses a color for an understood meaning as in traffic lights, and so on. Symbolic capacity is our human advantage and superiority. Is it a difference in kind from other animals or only one in degree? It is a difference in degree so vast that it can hardly be considered one of degree.
Our unique capacity for thinking and communicating at an abstract level is relevant to our being moral agents, because to be a moral agent one must have a capacity for attitudes that have other peoples’ attitudes as their objects.\textsuperscript{11}

To have a conscience and to be a moral agent you have to have the capacity for reflexive thinking. It was in \textit{The Descent of Man} (1871) that Darwin first discussed the conscience, viewing it as a kind of moral compass, a self-judging “inner voice” that appeared to be uniquely human. He saw conscience as innate because he found that among peoples around the world virtually all had the same blushing response to the experience of shame. He also found that certain aspects of social behavior are chosen and promoted by all human groups such as generosity and cooperation while incest, undue self-aggrandizement, cheating and theft are suppressed and even punished. Basic universal characteristics include man’s ability to make distinctions between right and wrong and between what is honorable and what is shameful. Yet Darwin viewed such behaviors and characteristics as the product of natural selection like our large brains, upright posture, capacity for culture, etc. He wrote:

"Any animal whatever, endowed with well-marked social instincts, would inevitably acquire a moral sense or conscience, as soon as its intellectual powers had become as well developed, or nearly as well developed, as in man."\textsuperscript{12}

Thus Darwin believed that “the difference in mind between man and the higher animals, great as it is, is certainly one of degree and not of kind."\textsuperscript{13}

Such a claim is ludicrous since, as far as we know, no other animal has the intellect that approximates that of man. About 140 years since Darwin the data from fields such as primatology, paleoanthropology, cultural anthropology, psychology (especially developmental psychology) and the cognitive sciences have not provided credible evidence for Darwin’s conjectures. James Rachels makes this point using dogs as an example:

“\ldots the dog cannot desire to have a certain attitude, and he cannot regret that he has certain attitudes. A man, on the other hand, can want something (I want to hurt the person who hurt me) and at the same time can regret that he wants it (I disapprove of myself for wanting revenge, and wish that I had a more generous temperament). It is this capacity for approving or disapproving of one's own attitudes that constitutes one's conscience."\textsuperscript{14} (Emphasis added)

Charles Hartshorne makes the point for non-human animals in general:

“A clue to the nature of our symbolic power is in its reflexiveness. If other animals can talk, it is about things other than talk. \textbf{But we can talk about talk, we have the word, also language, foreign language, symbol, analogy, metaphor, and innumerable others.} Until nonhuman animals exhibit something comparable, we need not concern ourselves with the hypothetical possibility that they might attain our level of consciousness, participate with us in conscious ethical and political discussion, and the like."\textsuperscript{15} (Emphasis added)
Not only do animals seem to lack the ability to reflect on their past behavior and past motives, they also lack the ability to understand abstract moral principles. Dogs, for example . . . haven't the slightest inkling of the reasons for the norm. They don't understand why departures from the norm are wrong, or why their masters become angry or disappointed. . . . For dogs, the only basis of their master's "right" to be obeyed is his de facto power over them . . . to suffer a guilty conscience is to be more than merely unhappy or anxious; it is to be in such a state because one has violated an "internalized standard" a principle of one's own, the rationale of which one can fully appreciate and the correctness of which one can, but in fact does not, doubt."¹⁶ (Emphasis added)

The inability to develop a conscience could be related to the limited language and communication capacity of animals:

No animal could understand a moral judgment made about him in any language, natural or contrived. No animal could appreciate the morally blameworthy quality of his deviant act any more than it could appreciate the rational grounding of the violated rule. And no animal could be reasoned with by an appeal to commonly held ideals and convictions.¹⁷

As far as we know, only humans are moral agents.

Experiments have shown that man is the only animal capable of combining memories and experiences to whatever extent he desires. He can, mentally, bring any specific thing in the world into conjunction with any other. He can dream (day dream) while he is awake and steer his dreams in any desired direction. He can devise courses of action for himself and determine if they are reasonable and practical on the basis of past experience. He can combine experience or logic with his imagination and determine the practicality of a course of action. Man's brain provides a screen upon which he can project and construct his ideas. There, future can be blended with past, components removed and replaced with others, the flow of ideas accelerated, slowed, or repeated at will.¹⁸

So far as we know, no animals other than man have the intellectual equipment necessary for the reliable performance of duty and the discharge of responsibility. Animals cannot make promises or enter into contractual agreements nor can they even grasp the concept of a duty or a commitment. These failures of intellect and volition disqualify animals as genuine moral agents who are eligible for our trust and answerable for their failures.¹⁹

Some animals are so unconscious they can't act deliberately at all. Some can act deliberately in their self-interest. Some can also act altruistically to feed their young or to defend their tribe. Humans can do both, but what really distinguishes us from all other animals is that we can act on principle.

Humans are the only creatures that we know of who can be moral agents. So, for most practical purposes, we can substitute man or human for moral agent.
Man is set apart from the rest of the animal kingdom also because **he is the only “animal” (biologically) that worships.** Because animals are not moral agents and thus lack a conscience, they do not worship a higher Being. There simply is no evidence for such behavior.

Skeptics point to the biblical teachings on matters like slavery, war, and the treatment of women as evidence of this. The reason we do not still follow some of those teachings is not necessarily because we have evolved, but **because we did not understand them or chose to reject them in the first place.** The fact that minorities have equal rights in politics, society, and business now does not mean that they shouldn’t have in the past. It only shows the lack of the application of sacred Scripture which informed our moral and ethical standards long ago. Therefore, it simply is not true that human moral standards have evolved because human moral standards are originally products of evolution.

Is it surprising that little work has been done on the evolution of conscience since the time of Darwin? His questions have remained unanswered by humanists or scientists. However, the conscience has either been ignored or taken for granted in studies of human consciousness and morals.
NOTES


5. “Argument from Conscience by Peter Kreeft”


9. “Chapter 3. who has rights and responsibilities?”


14. Chapter 3. “who has rights and responsibilities?”


