

Is the God of the Old Testament Immoral?

One popular argument manufactured to reject the God of the Bible is to question God's character, specifically how God is portrayed in the Old Testament. A worldwide famous atheist, Richard Dawkins, said- *"The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully."* These descriptions are based on the view that the Judgements of God as documented in scripture are unjust. If unjust, then God by this view is Immoral. If immoral then the God of the Bible is not the pinnacle of divine reason, since our moral autonomy (judgment) has exceeded His. If so, then the God of the Old Testament doesn't meet the requirement to be labelled as 'God' at all.

Yet it doesn't take long to doubt this conclusion. The nature of this argument assumes that there is objective morality to recognise one's moral judgment as 'better' or 'worse' than the other, that there is a moral line by which we may measure the standard of one's actions. Yet how does the atheist justify this assumption?

In the atheistic view, if ultimately reality is simply matter and its movement, that we are nothing more than electrons and selfish genes, temporary structures of stardust in a purposeless universe which mindlessly came into existence, destined to end in the nothingness it arose from, then what really is right and wrong in itself? The answer is nothing. In a world where matter alone exists there can be no objective standard for morality. Morality is therefore just a man-made control system that changes, alters and differs according to traditional and cultural influences, which means good and evil in itself cannot be anything of definite truth, it's just subjective. You may say your moral judgment is preferred or desired to you or your society as a matter of personal opinion, but you cannot claim it as anything fundamental. For where does our concept of evil come from apart from the changing preference of evidently imperfect humans in a meaningless universe? C.S. Lewis noted this same point saying *"Where do you get the idea that God is either just or unjust if we're in a universe of meaningless fortune and tragedies?"*

Only if you have the view that there is a morally perfect being who transcends us and who by fixed nature defines and purposed us, can there be a fixed reference for moral reasoning, because a fundamental moral law requires an absolute to give that moral law, otherwise it's just relative. This point can be summarised as below.

1. Morals are a subject of meaning,
2. Meaning requires intention.
3. Intention requires a mind.
4. So for there to be objectively true morals to govern reality, there therefore has to be an ultimate mind which intended our reality.
5. That ultimate mind is God.

So to say that God or anyone or anything is by definition morally evil, you first have to admit to some real independent fixed reference of right and wrong to define against, but this of course cannot be explained within an atheistic worldview. The initial argument is therefore self-defeating for the atheist.

Now I have found that there is also another group of doubters, not atheistic, but who acknowledging God, still decide that they cannot support God's judgments as documented in the Old Testament.

Admittedly some of the judgments as recorded in the old testament seem intense and brutal. I suspect many who have read the bible may have felt this way. Still, have we never considered that just maybe God: the ultimate reference for all purpose and meaning, who created the entire natural world with his word, and who from beginning to end holds all things, every good and evil deed into account, that just maybe God knows and sees more than we do? That just perhaps his understanding is perfected and that we may be the ones in the wrong. The book of Romans writes - *"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them? For from him and through him and for him are all things."*

So before we question God on his judgments, what makes us think that we, imperfect humans living in a constant atmosphere of imperfection, understand justice more than him? Are we not made from dust and to dust return? How can we fully understand the full hideousness of evil? We by ourselves have no line to fully comprehend it because we partake of it. The deaf man cannot distinguish between a whistle and a violin, and man, fallen man, I believe, cannot fully understand what a vile thing sin is in the sight of that God whose nature is according to the faith, fully righteous. So I think we need to be in a state of humility before we question the sovereignty of God, and consider with evident reason that He sees something of good and evil which we don't. The scripture writes, *"Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! Who are you, O man, to answer back to God?"*

When we see a Sobibor or an Auschwitz there's something in the human heart that aches and cries out *"if there's a God why doesn't he do something about this?"* We long for a God of wrath. God is reluctant to be the vengeful God we desire. Our problem is we're hypocrites, we don't see the evil in our own hearts. God will one day sort out the mess and evil of the world, but thanks to His mercy He's giving you and I the chance to turn away from our part to play in it all before he answers the longing of justice in our hearts. The question is not *"why does God judge"* but *"why is He so patient"*.

Also, in regards to the nature of God, look at the testimony of those who were closely associated with God in the Old Testament. Take the prophets, or the Kings, or any of the individuals whose lives were touched by God. Did they think of God as a vindictive Being? The answer is no. In fact, all who came into contact with God's presence wrote about him as "righteous", "Good" and "Holy". They did not determine his judgments to be wrong, but understood that God, judge of all the earth, will do what is right.

When reading the scripture it is clear that the judgments documented in the Old Testament were often commissioned by God in a particular time and place, and often deferred for many years, even generations. That these Judgements in the old testament were directed toward specific peoples on account of specific sins, and deferred for as long as possible.

Over the course of generations we begin to picture the sovereignty of God, that the whole old testament, throughout its judgments and blessing points to a relationship, a covenant. That as man by his disobedience fails to reach God which is shown throughout the old testament, the likeness of God, Jesus Christ, by his obedience came to reach man, shown throughout the new testament. This is the gospel, that God gave his one and only Son for the sake of humanity and our moral debt, so that we shall not perish, but in him have eternal life. Those who reject this offer reserve themselves for the judgment of God, eternal separation from him.