

Michael Shermer vs. Greg Koukl debate

HH: Special edition of the Hugh Hewitt Show. As we come to the end of what I call the decade of the atheists, I am taking a day here at the end of the year to look back at what that has been about, and what progress or lack thereof has been made in that conversation, what it meant, and what it ought to mean, and whether or not those of you who are just finished celebrating Christmas were in fact simply involving yourself in a pagan kind of ritual that grew up over the years, or whether you're worshipping the one, true God. All that and more, because this has been the decade of the atheists, Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, many others, but today, I want to ask did they make a difference at all, or is in fact faith in God generally stronger than ever. To join me in this all day special conversation in studio, two guests. Greg Koukl is the founder and the president of Stand To Reason, www.str.org. He is a leading Christian apologist. He's an author most recently of *Tactics: A Gameplan For Discussing Your Christian Convictions* from Zondervan Press. Before that, *Relativism*, he's got a lot of other books and pamphlets as well at Amazon.com. But you can find out most about Greg at www.str.org. Michael Shermer is the editor of *Skeptic Magazine*. He is the founder of the Skeptic Society, author of a number of books, including *The Mind Of The Market: How Biology And Psychology Shape Our Economic Minds*, and *Why Darwin Matters: The Case Against Intelligent Design*. Both Michael and Greg have been guests on the Hugh Hewitt Show before. They're both very generous with their time to spend an entire day doing this, and so welcome to you both. Gentlemen, I believe in biography before everything. Greg Koukl, K comes before S. Give people a little bit of a rundown on who you are and how you ended up doing this.

GK: Well, just a broad background here. I approach the issue that we're talking about today not as a philosopher or a theologian, though I have advanced degrees in both, but really as a human being that's trying to make sense out of my world. What worldview, what picture of reality does the best job of answering the questions? That wasn't always my perspective. I was raised in a religious home, nominally religious. And then in the 60s, during the counterculture, like a whole bunch of other young people, I went crazy. You know, you abandon the views of the establishment, you embrace all these new things that are invading the world in the 60s, and I did that. I was at Michigan State University in their Honors College there as a prelaw student, as it turned out. I had thought I had tried Christianity because of my background. I thought I was too smart to be a Christian. And so I just didn't give real serious consideration to that until I went to the West Coast, and went, I was a student at UCLA. And at that time, I began to give fresh consideration to the claims that Jesus of Nazareth was making on my life. And in 1973, I made a commitment to follow Him. And that began to change everything. In 1976, I spent three months in Europe, five weeks of that behind the Iron Curtain working with Christians who are suffering there as a result of their own convictions as Christians, back when they had

an Iron Curtain. A number of years later, in 1982, I went to Thailand to work with Cambodian refugees. My job was to feed 18,500 people in Sakeo refugee camp, which the result of the Cambodian holocaust of 1975-1976, and then in 1993, I decided to kind of focus my efforts and start an organization with some other people, particularly Melinda Penner, who many who are listening know as The Enforcer. And that organization is called Stand To Reason. And Hugh, I had two basic goals with starting Stand To Reason. One is to train Christians to think more carefully about their convictions. There just was a lot of nonsense being spewed by Christians who I think had the right ideas, but were not communicating them well, and were not thinking well about those ideas. And secondly, I wanted to develop some tools to show that Christianity is actually worth thinking about. Some of these were tools of engagement. There was too much of a bellicose atmosphere between those who believed in Jesus and the Christian worldview and those who don't. And I wanted to see that engagement look more like diplomacy than D-Day. And so there's kind of a general attitude thing that I wanted to see happen, building ambassadors for Christ. Secondly, I wanted to help them with the new tools of evidence, and the information that has been coming out in the last ten or fifteen years that have been very, very powerful, I think, to commend the Christian worldview to the rest of the world – things about big bang cosmology, for example, the design inferences that we find in the universe, the evidence for the existence of the soul, the evidence from the primary source documents about Jesus of Nazareth and his resurrection. All of these things, there's been a lot of work done in the last fifteen or twenty years. And so our goal is to try to bring these things down to a level where people can understand them, throw the ball so that they can catch it, for believers in Christ to do so, but without having a bunch of religious language attached to it, one, and two, using an external approach. In other words, using the philosophy and the science to demonstrate that their views are worth thinking about, instead of simply throwing Bible verses at them, and in the process, I've written a number of books, one of them on abortion called Precious Unborn Human Persons. It's basically a small monograph. The next one, Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted In Mid-Air that I co-authored with Frank Beckwith, who you know. And the one most recently is the one you just mentioned, Tactics: A Game Plan For Discussing Your Christian Convictions.

HH: With that introduction, Mike Shermer, how about you?

MS: Well, I was born and raised in the Southern California area, and my home was, neither of my homes, as my parents were divorced, neither of them were religious, but neither were they anti-religious. They were just not religious. But in the nascent Jesus movement of the early 70s, I became a born again when I was in high school, 1971. And I remember it was a, my best friend, he was a Presbyterian, so on a Saturday night, I accepted Christ into my heart. And then Sunday, I went to the local Presbyterian church with his family, and went up to the alter and all that with the other people that were called forward. And then on Monday, I remember returning back to high school to tell my buddy, Frank, that I had finally become religious and accepted Jesus like he had been telling me about, and hoping I would. And instead of being excited, he was disappointed, because he was a Jehovah's Witness, and that I

had gone to the wrong church, the Presbyterians. Anyway, so that always stuck in the back of my mind like wow, aren't we all on the same bus together in the same journey? Well, not always. Anyway, so...but I took it pretty seriously. I went to Bible study classes. There was a little place in La Crescenta called the Barn, where Christians met and had Bible study classes, things like that. And then I went to Pepperdine University in Malibu there to, really to matriculate initially into theology, but then I switched to psychology, really for logistical reasons. I just wanted to be a college professor, because it's, you know, it's a great gig that you hardly have to work and you get good pay. Don't ever listen to those professors complain about their pay. It's the best gig going. And I wanted in on that. And theology was my field, but to get a PhD, you have to do Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic and Latin. And I could barely get through Spanish, so I realized okay, I have to do something I'm actually good at, which was science, which was experimental psychology. And so I switched fields. But while I was at Pepperdine, I took courses in the New Testament, the Old Testament, the life of Jesus. I took an entire semester course in the writings of C.S. Lewis. We read everything that Lewis wrote, and I really loved C.S. Lewis. I still like C.S. Lewis. I think he's a great writer. But then eventually, when I went to graduate school, when I was in a different environment, not surrounded by Christians, and getting different perspectives. And for a number of reasons, I ultimately lost my faith, and let go of God, and became essentially a secularist, or a non-believer, whatever. I never really call myself an atheist. I mean, I don't like to identify myself or define myself by what I don't believe, because atheism doesn't really stand for anything. There's no principles behind it. There's no platform or set of planks that we live our lives by. We just simply don't believe in God. So then I got into, well, actually I had a ten year span where I was a bike racer living here in Orange County, and did Race Across America five times, and I was the assistant director, and the executive director of the race. And so I spent quite a bit of time in a completely different profession, but teaching part time psychology. Then after ten years of bike racing, I realized my body wasn't going to hold out forever, and I might have to use my brain again. So I went back and got a PhD in the history of science at Claremont, and then became a fulltime professor at Occidental College in L.A. But on the side, we just started the Skeptics thing as just sort of a hobby in my garage. It was nothing, really, just for fun, and a lecture series at Cal Tech. And it just got bigger and bigger, and by 1997-98, when my first book, Why People Believe Weird Things did really well, I had a literary agent that got me a big advance for my next book, and a lecture agent, and so on, and I realized you know, I think I could actually make a living as a writer and an editor and a public intellectual, and actually teach more people than I can teach in a classroom, that is just reach more people. And so I've been doing that every since. I quit teaching at Oxy in 98, and returned to teaching just two years ago at Claremont Graduate University, just one class a year, Evolution, Economics & the Brain. It's a PhD level course. So it's just for fun. So my main job, my day job, is editing and writing.

HH: We've got a minute and a half to the break, so I'll let you go first, Greg. What's your first question for Michael? I'll lead most of this conversation, but in between, I'll let you pose each other questions. Do you have a question or anything that you're curious about his background?

GK: Well, about his background?

HH: Just anything.

GK: Well, I think, and this is just going to seed further conversation, Michael, but I think the biggest, one of the biggest problems, it's not the only big problem, but one of the biggest problems that atheists have to deal with is the problem of morality. Listen, if you have a guy who drags a woman into an alley, and then molests her, and then...that's our music. Okay, I'll finish my illustration in just a few moments. But I want to raise the nature of morality, is the question, or how best to explain the existence of real morality.

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HH: When we went to break, I began just the first opportunity to ask each other a question. So Greg, you were bringing up the...rephrase it for the audience who just tuned in for Michael.

GK: Right. Actually, the big question here, Hugh, is whether it's possible to be good without God. Now I'm not talking about whether it's possible to be good without a belief in God. I certainly think that's possible, but be good without God. And the answer to that question hinges entirely on precisely what you mean by good. And so I was going to give an illustration. So a man drags a young girl into the alley, he sexually abuses her, strangles her, and tosses her into the dustbin. Is that act wrong? Now I think everybody listening is going to admit it is wrong. But here is the real question. What do we mean when we say that that act of rape and abuse and murder is wrong? Are we describing the action itself, the object? Are we saying that the object, the rape, the murder, has a quality of being wrong, and therefore, wherever that rape goes, the wrongness follows it, just like your height, 6' 2", or whatever it is, is an objective quality of you. Wherever you go, your height follows you in the same way. Does the wrongness follow the rape? Well, if it's a quality of the rape, if it's an objective quality of the rape, then it does. And it doesn't matter what people think about it, or what cultures decides, or what your evolutionary conditioning is. The rape is still wrong. The other alternative is that you're not talking about the rape. You're talking about yourself. You're talking about your genetic conditioning. You're talking about your culture's decision about that kind of thing. And if that's the case, then the truth of the wrongness of the rape is simply in the individual or the subject. And this is why philosophers distinguish between ethical objectivism and ethical subjectivism. Now there's lots of different subjectivisms in ethics. But simply put, if you're an ethical subjectivist, you're a relativist. And actual ethics don't exist. Ethics are an illusion. If you conclude that ethics are an illusion, there's lots of different ways to explain it. Michael's written a really great book, I think, called *The Science Of Good And Evil*. I've read most of it, and it's well written, and it's very compelling. But it's a description about how the illusion of ethics has taken place. If you want to go that route, you're welcome to go that route. But what you can't do is you can't then talk about morality as if it's objective when your explanations are

subjective. So this is a problem that I think all atheists, including Michael, have to solve. Are ethics objective or relative? And if they're relative, then how can we make moral judgments that are meaningful on other people?

HH: Michael Shermer?

MS: Wow, let's just get right into it. Well, I don't think it's quite so black and white. That is to say I think there are provisional moral truths that exist whether there's a God or not. In other words, it's wrong, morally, absolutely morally wrong to rape and murder. And that would be true whether there was a God or not. In other words, if...is God saying that it's wrong because it's really wrong, and He's instructing us in his Holy Scripture that it's wrong? Or is it only wrong because He said so? And if it turned out there wasn't a God, would that make it okay? And my answer is no, it really is wrong, whether God says it's wrong or not. That is to say I think it really exists, a real, moral standard like that. Why? Well, because first, you could ask the person who is being affected, we should always ask the moral recipient of the act, how do you feel about being raped or murdered or stolen from or lied to. And the moral actor will tell you, it doesn't matter whether, if I could use a current example, I haven't any idea if Tiger Woods and his wife are religious or not. But you can just ask his wife whether it was morally right or wrong, and she'll tell you. It doesn't matter whether there's a God or not. It's wrong. And so that's the first principle. Just ask. Ask the moral recipient of whether it's right or wrong. But I think Greg's after something deeper, that is to say is there something even deeper still behind the moral actor's feelings about how they're treated. And the answer is yes, I think so. We're a social species. We don't live in isolation. We live as members of a group. And as such, there's no possible way our group could survive, be cohesive, be a unit of any kind of solidarity against other groups, or against a harsh environment. If there were too much violations of social norms, that is if there were constant lying and cheating and raping and murdering, there's no way a social group could hang together. And as such, as we all know, we're very tribal. We're tribal against other groups, but within our groups, we're very pro-social, altruistic, cooperative. We have a good and evil in our nature. So to this extent, I find myself interesting often in agreement with my conservative friends on most of the things they consider morally, moral truths. That is, we share the same moral values, even though I come at it from a different perspective.

HH: Greg?

GK: Yeah, I'm actually not after something deeper here, Michael. At least to start out the discussion, I'm trying to be as simple and clear and precise as possible, because it's very easy to weave together a bunch of things that sound persuasive, but turn out to be different things. Like for example, Darwinian evolution, which is a materialistic process, and here I mean the blind watchmaker thesis, the neo-Darwinian synthesis, natural selection working on mutations, and a kind of a cultural evolution that Michael has just referred to as we work together as a group to survive as a group. Those are two entirely different things. One is materialistic, Darwinian, the other one is intelligent design, quite frankly, where the group gets together and makes some determinations to encourage some behavior and discourage

others. What I'm trying to do is to be able to answer the question that came up initially, is God necessary for morality, which Michael denies. It's to say well, what is it that morality, that we're trying to describe? It is either objective, and therefore an immaterial obligation that applies to certain behaviors, or it is subjective. The things that Michael described were variously subjective, evolutionary elements, subjective cultural elements, but then he affirmed that we all have good and evil in our nature, or an awareness of that. I agree with that entirely. We all are aware of those things. That's why even if we don't believe in God, we can still know morality and follow it. The question is what accounts for real, genuine objective morality?

HH: One minute to the break, Michael Shermer.

MS: I'm not arguing for cultural evolution. I'm actually arguing as part of our, what you described as materialistic, natural selection, Darwinian evolution, that it's not enough to just pretend or fake being a good group member. You actually have to believe it, feel it, and live it. So what I'm arguing is that natural selected certain moral sentiments, as Adam Smith called them, moral feelings, an actual empathy, Adam Smith talked about, we actually empathize with somebody else, we can put ourselves into their shoes and feel their pain, I'm arguing that's very real. It's every bit as real a part of our evolutionary heritage as our eyes and our hands.

HH: Michael Shermer, when we went to break, you were saying that evolutionary biology has produced a real morality.

MS: Yeah, I think really, Adam Smith had it right in his very first book, The Theory Of Moral Sentiments, long before Darwin, that we actually have in our biological nature, our human nature, the capacity to feel other people's pain. He called it empathy, we think of it often either as empathy or sympathy. That is, we really do connect to other people. A lot of good research on this now, brain scans, you can show somebody a little video of somebody they know, or have feelings for, getting pricked with a pin, and the same areas of their brain light up, the pain receptors, as in the person getting the pin prick. In other words, we have an evolved tendency to really be deeply, emotionally connected to our fellow group members. And that's why I say groups like World Vision, where you want to adopt a child, it doesn't help to show a picture of 10,000 starving African kids. What does affect us is one child, a picture of one child with a little biography. That's how you get people to adopt a child to donate. The reason for that is because essentially they're tricking the brain, our brains into making that stranger an honorary family member, an honorary within group member, which is why I argue that free trade is one of the best ways of defusing normal tribal tensions between people. It makes them honorary friends, honorary members. Well, what's going on there is we're tricking the brain into sort of this evolutionary rule of thumb – be nice to people that are like you and that are related to you, and that you know, and that are fellow group members, and don't do what our natural tendency is, is to be tribal and xenophobic against

those other guys. And free trade is one of the best things you can do for that. So I'm arguing that's actually tapping something deep within us.

HH: Greg Koukl?

GK: Yeah, basically, I agree with Mike completely here. We do have this tendency, and it seems to be universal among humankind. The question is, what is that tendency, actually? And what is the best way to explain it? And I see like a handful of significant problems with using evolution to explain morality. The first one is that evolution is a materialistic process. And here, I'm going back to an original point, and I don't want people to lose it. There is no way that you can take molecules, and reorganize them in any fashion, over any length of time, and have pop out of the mixture an objective moral principle that's immaterial, and that applies to human beings. All you're going to get is a reorganization of the molecules. And what they can produce, and this is what Mike has done in his book, and he mentioned just a few moments ago, they can produce sentiments. They can produce feelings. They can produce behavior. But this leads us to the second problem of using evolution to explain morality, is that morality is more than sentiments, feelings and behavior. Morality entails things like motive and intention. I mean, you could have a guy walk into a garage, walk out with a hose, and is that wrong? Well, it depends. Is it his hose or somebody else's hose? Did he intend to take the other person's hose? Is he borrowing the hose? So we can see here are elements that are part of the moral thing that needs to be explained, that are immaterial, and therefore the Darwinian explanation can't even in principle go there. It can't do that job. But here's the worst problem. Regardless of what our sentiments happen to be regarding moral actions, we can feel good or feel bad or whatever, the problem is that morality is prescriptive, not merely descriptive. That is it tells us not just what we did, but what we ought to have done in the past, and what we ought to do in the future. That is not something that any Darwinian mechanism can describe, because nothing about my biology can inveigh upon me to act a certain way for moral reasons in the future. It doesn't tell me why I should be good tomorrow. This is a huge difference between these two views, the descriptive and the prescriptive. Prescriptive is part of morality, and can't even, in principle, be explained by an evolutionary materialistic system.

HH: Michael Shermer, I'll give you a start on that. We have about 45 seconds to the break, so you may want to...we'll come back after the break and pick up. But what's your start to that?

MS: Well, the start would be that again, let's not think of evolution just as nature red and tooth and claw, and it's nasty, brutish and short, but that in fact, we have this whole other social evolution. And I'm not talking about cultural evolution where we consciously make decisions, but subconsciously, because it's in part of our nature to actually, seriously, deeply feel for other people and their actions, and the consequences of our actions, so that we actually have a sense of right and wrong that we're born with, but then culture taps into and tweaks, one way or the other.

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HH: Michael Shermer, when we went to break, Greg had made the argument that the Darwinian model simply cannot explain immaterial concepts like morality, that there's just no way you can rearrange the molecules to get there. You're saying well, yes you can.

MS: Yeah, I think so, because if we think of morality as another suite of emotions that are involved with other people's behaviors, the consequences of our actions, how we feel about them, how people feel about us when we do these things, that's as every bit as important a biological part of our nature as anything else we talk about. So let's take a real simple emotion. When you're hungry, nobody does any calculations about the caloric input/output ratios of eating an apple versus an ice cream, although now it's posted on the walls for us to see. But we just feel hungry, and we feel hungry for certain kinds of foods. The feeling of hunger is a proxy for something else. Evolution's done the calculating for us. You need food, so we're going to, your hypothalamus is going to secrete these certain chemicals that causes your stomach to rumble and so on. When you're attracted to somebody else, a member of the opposite sex, nobody does the calculation by, let's say, a man finds a woman attractive who has a .67 hip to waist ratio, and an hourglass figure, although that is pretty much universal. Nobody walks about with calipers taking measurements of who they're going to want to date or ask out. You just look around, and you just go wow, I really find this woman attractive. It's a feeling you have, okay? So those are kind of simple emotions, but sliding up the scale, the moral emotions are really no different. When I lie to somebody, I've violated a social norm, and they respond in a very angry, hostile way. So those emotions that we both share, guilt, shame, anger, disgust, involved a social relationship that whether it was a norm violation, those are the kinds of emotions that are just like hunger and sexual attraction that are built into us by nature, by evolution. Or, if you wish, this is how God created the moral sentiments, just like He created everything else in the universe, through a process of nature. I think that's equally reasonable to argue. So I don't see that it has to be an atheistic viewpoint versus a theistic viewpoint to get to our moral sentiments. Why couldn't God have used evolution to create the moral sentiments as I've described them?

GK: Yeah, well, you don't actually believe that, I know, Mike, so this is kind of like adding God to the soup, you know, if it makes people feel better. But the basic argument is that evolution all by itself can do the trick. And I think if your listeners are listening carefully, what they're going to hear is Mike has just described, and if I'm being unfair to your assessment here, let me know, Mike, that moral feelings are simply that. They are sophisticated emotions that do some work for us for survival, and even on a group level. Now there's a name for this. It's called emotivism. A.J. Ayer, the famous atheist, offered this description of morality. It's a relativistic scheme of morality. Morality doesn't actually exist, Ayer argued. There is no objective right or wrong. Rape isn't wrong itself. What happens is, we have feelings about it, and we express it in moral language, but rape isn't really wrong. So your listeners are going to have to ask themselves the questions. When they just survey their own moral senses, and we all have access to this, do we want to believe that scientists have figured out that really what we're doing is feeling sophisticated, complicated emotions,

and that the emotions are in us, and we are not seeing anything about the action? Or does it seem like rape is wrong? Look, when I say rape is wrong, I'm talking about the rape. When I say liver is awful, I'm talking about me. I'm talking about my own tastes and preferences. It's interesting, as Michael has given his explanation, though, that he's doing, and I don't know if you are aware of this, Michael, but you're doing the very thing that I kind of warned against. You give a description of the foundations of morality that turn out to be relativistic, but then there's a smuggling of a more objectivistic morality in the back door, like when Michael says you don't have to do what your nature tells you to do, in other words, what you've been programmed by evolution to do. You can kind of rise above that. Well, now we're talking about a morality that isn't dictated by evolution, but a morality that we can employ through our acts of will, to rise above this kind of brutish evolutionary morality. And that sounds suspiciously like the very thing that I'm talking about here.

MS: But I don't mean, there's nothing to rise above by itself. Yes, we have to say rise above our tribal instincts to be xenophobic when we meet somebody who's a stranger, who's different from us. We all struggle against that, particularly in a black and white America, where there's always been this underlying tension. Indeed, so culture helps us do that – education, travel, diversity of exposure to different people. That makes you a little more tolerant. Okay, but I'm not talking about that. What I'm talking about is tapping into the good part of our nature, the fact that in addition to that xenophobic tribalism we have, we also have this other side that almost never gets discussed in evolutionary...even in evolutionary circles, you'll still hear evolutionary biologists talking about, in a way that Huxley did, and Herbert Spencer did in Darwin's own time, that we have to somehow struggle mightily against our genes to overcome that nasty tendency we have to want to rape, kill, pillage and destroy. Well no, actually, we have this whole other side that's just as genetically programmed into our nature. And the point of culture – education, politics, economics and so on, is to tap into the better angels of our nature as Lincoln said.

GK: Okay, here's the question I have for you, Michael, then. You've identified that really, we have good and we have bad. That's part of, under your terms, that's part of our genetic nature, and we can choose to tap into what you call the good side. Why ever should we do such a thing if there is not a higher standard that directs our action to the better side, your words, than the bad side, your words, if really, ultimately, they are both the result of a genetic evolution, and from outside terms, neither is better than the other. Why should we do that, Michael?

MS: Yeah, well I don't see how entering God into the equation changes that problem at all.

GK: Well, that's the next step. What I'm trying to show is that the should comes from the outside, and if we can demonstrate that, then we can ask...

MS: But there's no outside.

GK: That's my point. On your view, morals are relative, and there is no difference.

MS: No, but I don't think even in your view, there's an outside.

GK: Well, we can get to that in the next step.

MS: ...because adding God doesn't add anything.

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HH: Greg, reset the debate. What just happened there?

GK: Well, what I'm arguing is basically, you have two choices. You have objective morality, or subjective morality. Subjective morality means that when we say something's wrong, we're not talking about the action itself, we're talking about ourselves. Now there are sophisticated ways of characterizing how we're talking about ourselves, whether it's culture, whether it's evolution. But ultimately, you end up with no morality. I think that's false. I think people know there is objective morality. And if evolution, no materialistic system can explain it, given the discovery of objective morality, then we have to take the next step and ask what is the best explanation for objective morality. Michael, I think, wants to deny objective morality, but I think he's been smuggling the notion in subtly, as many times happens in these kinds of discussions. And he's, I'm not sure if he's denied that or not.

MS: Well, I think there's only two kinds of people – those who think there's only two types of morality, objective and subjective, and those that don't, which is the rest of us.

GK: Okay.

MS: Seriously, I mean, I reject your dichotomy of there's either objective reality or it's all subjective relativism and anything goes, and what Hitler did is perfectly fine. No, I don't believe that. I don't think anybody, hardly anybody actually really believes that, except for maybe a few academic philosophers who've never been in the real world. Really, I think we all recognize that there are deep, provisional truths, moral truths, that we recognize as real. And so what you want to get at is what's the outside source? And as you know, since you read my book, this is an old problem that everybody's familiar with in your business anyway, and that is Plato's Euthyphro's dilemma, in which Socrates asks his student, Euthyphro, the point which I should first wish to understand is whether the pious, or holy, is beloved by the gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved of the gods. In other words, which comes first, that the moral principle really exists out there in sort of an ideational world, and the gods say hey, look...

GK: They're beholden to that.

MS: ...that's a real, moral principle...

GK: Right.

MS: ...and we're going to instruct you through the holy book that's what you should do.

GK: And that makes the gods contingent...

MS: Or do they not really exist other than in the mind of God, who says listen, I've decided that killing is wrong, and I'm telling you in this particular book, and ignore those other holy books, because they're wrong. And so now we get to the problem of which is, which do you believe, for example?

GK: Okay, this is a famous dilemma you actually mentioned at one of the earlier segments, and it has been answered very carefully. I'll give a possible answer for it.

HH: One minute to the break.

GK: Okay, one minute. One answer is to say that God says something is right because it's, the rightness of it is grounded in His nature. It's not an arbitrary act of His will, voluntarism, it isn't that he has some external standard that makes him now contingent, but that God is good in Himself, and that His commands flow forth from His nature. That's a possible solution for it. What you can't do is you can't jump from evolution and say well, if you go your way, I see a difficulty there, so I can ignore the evidence that's facing me right now for moral objectivism. That, I think, is a false move. So I can answer the objection, but also I think it's a false move.

HH: But you'll do it after the break.

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HH: But I want to go back and pick up the thread that we were at right before the end of the break. And Michael Shermer, I'm going to have you reset the debate for people wandered in off the street in the middle of this. Where are we in the conversation right now between you and Greg Koukl?

MS: Okay, just in case anybody's just checking on online, it's www.skeptic.com instead of...

HH: I'm sorry.

MS: No big deal. Anyway, so, well, is there an outside source to these moral principles that God then recognizes and says yeah, this is part of the universe, it really is wrong to kill other people, and I as the Deity am telling you this is what I know as part of nature? Or, do no such moral principles actually exist anywhere outside of the Deity Himself, and then He tells us through His Holy books? Okay, so which is the right answer to that question? And two, assuming that...well, you did say something about it's in God's nature. Well, if we're made in God's image, wouldn't that also put the moral principles in our nature as well?

GK: It does...

MS: So then we're tapping into those principles that really exist in us. And how is that any different from what I've been arguing already?

GK: No, the difference there, just on that particular issue, is I agreed earlier when you said it's part of our nature. The source is what's different. What's part of our nature is the knowledge of external things. In my case, these things are external. They are external like math principles are external to my mind. I don't invent them in my mind. In your case, the way you account for them being universal, in the sense that they're part of all humankind, is that evolution has created this. These are two entirely different things. In my case, I'm talking about an object of reality, and in your case, you're talking about a subjective reality. And I know you want to jump in. Just one more point here. I am not complicating things at all, or oversimplifying things. The issue is quite simple if you start at the bottom. Either moral obligations are objects, or they're part of the object, or they're part of the subject. They are objectively true, or they're not. There are no other options. Now if you agree that morality is not objective, then it's a crap shoot, really. It's not whatever you want, if what you mean your society isn't going to allow you to do whatever you want. It's not whatever you want if you meant that well, evolution is going to determine certain things for you, that aids the species. But it is whatever you want. What is is right, if there is no outside objective moral standard that's governing you. Now how you want to ground that, that has it's own...that's another issue. And grounding it in God makes a lot of sense, and it even, I'm not even subject to the kind of problems that you Euthyphro dilemma that was just offered there. There is an answer to that, that avoids that problem. But it seems to me if there are objective moral laws, then that suggests an objective moral law giver. And if it's not, then it's just deterministic biology, or it's whatever the group says. And then we could be all over the map.

MS: Well, then you have the problem, it seems to me, of determining which moral values in the Holy book that you embrace, the Bible, which not everybody embraces as the source, other people have different holy books and sources, so...but anyway, granting yours, which of the moral principles are you going to adhere to, and which not? So for example, I presume you would reject slavery, as everybody would today. And yet Christians of centuries past embraced slavery, and used Biblical references as political support for slavery, as you well know. And William Wilberforce, who over, you know, sort of single-handedly, against all his fellow Christians who were standing up against him, said no, this is a bad idea. And so I think you have the problem of, like, which moral principles are you going obey, and which not?

GK: Oh, no, you're absolutely right, Michael. We have the problem as human beings, actually, regardless of our understanding about where morality comes from, of trying to figure out which is the appropriate applicable principle in this given situation. Your system suggests that we're basically kind of following an evolutionary impulse, and that's what we're obeying, and so we're not really obeying goodness itself, where I'm suggesting that the problem of moral decision making is difficult, because there are a lot of competing moral goods. But there is an answer to the problem if we think through it carefully. And you don't have to have a Bible, and I think you understand this, Michael.

People...my view isn't that people have to have a Bible to know right and wrong. The Bible itself, in Romans Chapter

2, teaches that that is on everybody's heart in some fashion that allows him to have access to it, which is what you said earlier. It's in all of our natures. We agree on that particular point. So you don't need to have the Bible. But if you do, then you have a problem with interpretation. That's true of everything. We don't make the issue simpler in a sense by saying oh, well, morals are objective, because now we have to ask which objective moral principles apply in this circumstance.

MS: Well, so...right...

GK: So I readily agree that there's a challenge there in moral decision making.

MS: So how do you know what's right and wrong? How do you personally know? Is it from the Bible? Do you listen to the still, small voice within? Do you pray?

GK: I reflect on my moral nature, on my moral intuitions. Just like I know how math principles are right and wrong, I reflect on those things as well.

MS: Well, me, too. So how is it any different, because I do the same thing.

GK: And I have a...well, the difference is, well, I just described. You are reflecting on a nature that you're compelled by certain evolutionary things to do something, and it could just as well have been that evolution pushed you in an entirely different direction, so that rape or child molesting, or something like that, is wrong. I mean, we're not even talking now so far, Hugh, about the details of how evolution accomplishes this, which is another issue. We're just talking about it conceptually right now.

MS: Actually, I don't do that. I don't even think about evolution or Darwinism or anything like that when I'm thinking about right and wrong.

GK: Right, I know.

MS: Like when I interact with other people...

GK: ...in the explanation, you do.

MS: Yeah, in my explanation. Yeah, but when I think about well, what should I do in this situation, how should I treat this other person, is this really right or wrong, I just try to put myself in their shoes, and think well, how would I feel?

GK: Fair enough.

MS: And I think you do, too. I think that's what we all do.

GK: We are both drawing on the same faculties.

MS: Right.

GK: That isn't the question whether we have the faculties. The question is where do the faculties come from, and what ground them? What makes these things good or bad? You just told me a few moments ago, Michael, that you can go either direction. You could obey your baser nature, which is evolutionary determined, or the higher nature. Well, what is higher and lower in evolution?

MS: Well, this is a good question. Say...take the slavery issue, for example. How do you know that's wrong?

GK: Actually, you raised the question of xenophobia earlier. We could do our tribal instinct thing, which we're by nature dictated to follow, but we can rise above that. So I don't know why...what's above that, unless you're importing some external standard of morality?

MS: Right, so where does it come from?

GK: How do you adjudicate between the two on an evolutionary basis?

MS: I think...yeah, I think that there is a long term trend over the last, maybe, couple of thousand years, to expanding the circle of moral sentiments of who we're going to count as fellow group members that we do not rape, pillage, destroy and kill. And the question is why has that happened, let's say, since the Enlightenment, where we no longer want to treat blacks like we used to, and we want to give women the right to vote, and so on, and now gay marriage is up on the table for discussion and so on. We keep sort of expanding the circle of sentiments. Why would that be? I actually think that it's possible there is sort of a built-in to maybe the universe or something, a tendency toward, well, Robert Wright calls this playing more nonzero games, more win-win games, that is all of us benefit if we have more positive moral exchanges between us. This is why I promote free trade. I think it's one of these mechanisms of generating not just more wealth, but more goodwill between people. And I think that may be very well built into the system, whether there's a God or not. I think it might actually be there.

GK: Well, this is a very important juncture in our conversation, because what Michael has appealed to is something very much like a universal mind, that is this perspective over the whole enterprise, looking down saying as all the things fit together, this would be better for everyone, and that somehow directs the process.

MS: I'm not quite committed to that, by the way. I just think it's an interesting idea...

GK: But if...okay, now fair enough...

MS: And I'm not sure if it's a bottom up process, or a top down process, so...

GK: Well, this is the question then. If it is a bottom up process, if it's in the genes, how is it that the genes, then, in any of their working, can anticipate, in a sense, the greater good for all mankind? That strikes me as completely con...

MS: Not just the genes, no, something a higher order than that, that in the species itself, I mean, we're not talking just about natural selection of individuals, where the organism is the target of selection. But here, I'm talking about group selection. I think group selection has a reasonable case to be built around social organizations, that they themselves are the target of selection. So religion, for example, is a great unifying social force. It brings people together, it unifies them for both good and evil actions, and it's, I think, also part of our nature.

GK: Okay, very good, group selection. There's natural selection, which is on the genes, and then there is group selection. Natural selection is materialistic, and it's unguided. Group selection entails intelligent design, because the group is involved there, encouraging or discouraging the behaviors. And when you form your group, it's kind of a social contract thing, that's fine as an explanation, but just keep in mind that both of them are relativistic. And if one group thinks that their group will do better by destroying other groups, it is certainly "morally" within their rights to do so.

HH: Gentlemen, for people who have just walked in on the middle of this, we've been not going around in circles, we've been actually moving towards a very sharply defined disagreement. But I want you both to state what that disagreement is in one minute or less, not to each other, but for the audience who just walked in. If you had to summarize for them in a minute, or in 90 seconds each, what they missed, Greg Koukl, how would you say that?

GK: You have to make a decision, listener, as to whether morality is objective in some sense, or merely subjective. Is it a quality of the action, so when we say rape is wrong, we're talking about rape? Or are we just talking about our feelings or our emotions, or maybe our biological conditioning? As far as I'm concerned, you can go either direction with it at this particular point, but if you decide to go with a subjectivist view, a relativistic view, which is what the evolutionary explanation offers, then you have to be consistent with that to be fair. You can't start then smuggling what sounds like objective morality in the back door, because now you've got another morality that is not accounted for by your evolutionary scheme. And you've got to find another accounting for that, and I think this turns out to be one of the best arguments in favor of theism of some sort, the moral argument. But this is the essence of it, what we're discussing right now.

HH: Michael Shermer?

MS: Well, I reject what I consider to be a false alternative between objective and subjective morality. I reject subjective morality, I reject relativistic morality. I believe there are objective moral standards. I prefer, I slightly prefer

the word transcendent moral values. I don't believe in God, but I could be wrong. If there's a God, it seems to me that the moral standards, moral principles should exist anyway, whether there's a God or not, and that what God is doing, if He's doing anything, is He's telling us what those are. And here, I see a serious problem you have of interpreting what those are, because there's more than one holy book. People have many claims about moral values based on God, of which we vehemently disagree with. So when I asked you earlier about how do you know what's right and wrong, you said I reflect upon it, and I used the expression the still, small voice within. And so okay, so we all do that. I think it all begins with the Golden Rule. Everything else is commentary after that, as the great rabbi said, that is how do you feel, how would you feel if I did this, how would I feel if you did this to me? Well, maybe I should put myself in your shoes, and that's where morality begins, and I think that's absolute, whether there's a God or not.

HH: Okay, gentlemen, I had a lot to cover that is not related to this, but I don't want to move on too expeditiously. Do you think we have covered this issue?

GK: Yeah, I think we've done a pretty good job, and I think the differences are fairly clear in the, what, hour or so we've been talking about this issue. And I mean, I can take another shot here, then I'd get the last word on it, but I think we've summed up our views fairly accurately.

HH: All right, then let me ask you one question before we move to my second set. Michael, you've referred a few times to the presence of many holy books as though that somehow diminishes the idea that one may or may not have more authority than the other. Is that necessarily true, just that there are many holy books, there may be a hierarchy of authority among them, correct?

MS: Just take the current events of Islam. Clearly, they have a very different view of morality of how women should be treated than we do, and yet they're basing it on similar holy texts, and some different holy texts. And so how are people of goodwill, who genuinely believe to get along in the world? Clearly, appeals to God is not going to solve our problem, is it?

HH: Okay, I didn't state it very well, then. What I was asking is just does the fact there are many holy books in any way diminish the authority of any one in particular? Just because there are many of them, you've said it a few times, and it's usually as an aside that...it's kind of ...

MS: Oh, okay. There could be one, yeah, there could be one that's really right, and the rest are wrong.

HH: You know, there's kind of an implied, and I don't want to put words in your mouth, but when I'm a believer, as I am, in Scripture, and I hear you say that, I hear a sneer, oh, many holy books, but not an argument that one of them can't be right. Do you see what I'm getting at?

MS: Oh, yes, one of them could be right, and the rest wrong, but how do you know which one?

GK: Well, that's a different question.

MS: Because people of genuine belief in faith like you, who are Islamic, believe just as strongly as you do that women should be treated certain ways, and you would disagree. So how are we to settle this?

GK: I'm so glad he put it that way, because that point has absolutely nothing to do with the discussion. You don't cancel out...

MS: But isn't it an interesting point, though?

GK: Wait, let me finish. No, it is an interesting point, maybe, for sociologists, but as to the issue at question, let me finish the thought, Mike, and then you can respond to it. You don't decide whether a book or revelation is true or false, or anything else for that matter, by looking at how strongly different people hold the views. You have to look at the reasons for the views. I mean, let's just talk about science for example. There are very strongly held views by scientists on a lot of different things, even opposing views about how the Darwinian project worked out. It wouldn't be fair of me to Michael to say well, your particular view, I don't know if you're a punctuated equilibrium guy, or you're a classical Darwinist, or whatever, but it would be unfair for me to say to Michael look, you couldn't be right, nor could they be right, because you both have equally strong beliefs that you are true. That is a non-issue in the discussion. Something else has to be focused on to try to break the tie.

MS: Okay, that's a good example, because in that example, at least in principle, it could be settled through more data collection, whether evolution moves along in fits and starts, as described by punctuated equilibrium, or it moves gradually by gradualism. We can at least in principle settle that dispute.

GK: Why can't the other one be settled in principle?

MS: How would you settle the dispute between a Muslim and a Christian on how women should be treated? How would you settle that? I mean, they go look, it says right here in the Scripture, and you say but it says in my Scripture, so how are we going to settle that?

GK: Well...the question here, yeah, well in principle, it can be settled in actually two different ways. One, based on the authority of the book, and so you can look at the books, and say do I have any good, independent reasons, not just leaps of faith, but any good reasons to believe that this is actually a communication of God over and against this one being a communication of God? And there are lots of different strategies to go about that. Or one could just look at the claims themselves, and say look, based on what seems to be a common sense of right and wrong and morality that we all seem to have, and using our best faculties to reflect on it, I have reasons to mistrust this one, and trust this one more. Those are two, at least in principle ways, that you can go about adjudicating between those claims.

MS: I have a better way to settle it. Ask the women. How do you feel being treated like this? Which would you prefer? I think you'll get a pretty straightforward answer there, unless the guy's behind the door with a shotgun, and she has to give a certain answer.

GK: Okay, this presumes that we ought to care what other people think about how they're treated, which presumes an objective morality, and now we're back into that thing again. So that plays into my hands, not his.

MS: And I agree, there's an objective morality.

HH: But I...when I come back from break, we've got to go to break, when I come back, and I'll ask you, Michael, when we start, is there a way to adjudicate between the reasonability of those books, because it seems to me that the audience driving around right now has on their mind, and I always try and put myself in the point of the audience, wait a minute, how do you decide between many books claiming to be the revealed wisdom of God, and if your answer is you can't, don't bother, fine. If your answer is you can, pick this one, fine. But let's get to that. Is there an objective way to pick between the books?

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HH: But I want to get back to the subject I was raising. As between the books that claim to be the revealed wisdom of God, is there an objective way to judge them on their merits? Greg Koukl, let me start with you.

GK: Well yes, let's say, for example, if the documents in question claim that God communicated in an historical way, penetrated history and certain, particular things happened, now you've got an historical test for that kind of thing. You can look at the details that are expressed. Maybe there's some prophecy that is proclaimed at one time, and you have reason to believe was fulfilled at another time. You ask me in principle how it could be done, this is a way in principle that it could be done. You could see whether the view of the world that the books portray seem to comport with one's deepest intuitions about the way the world really is. I actually think religion is a very messy and untidy business. And with my philosophical training, I like to have all the loose ends tied up. But the fact is, life is not tidy. And no matter what view you take, there are going to be problems and unanswered questions. So I take the perspective, as I mentioned at the beginning of the show, Hugh, as a man looking at my universe trying to make the most sense out of it. What picture of the world, what worldview does the best job of answering most of the questions? And I think this worldview-type analysis would be helpful here. If you have a book that gives a worldview that has a certain feature that seem to resonate with your deepest intuitions about the world, that seems to me a plus for the book. If you have another book that seems to indicate something entirely different, like the Vedas, for example, that suggest that the universe is just an illusion, that it's all Maya. Well this, to me, does not resonate with my deepest intuitions. So here's another way that in principle, at least, one could test one worldview against another with their religious books.

HH: Mike Shermer?

MS: That does seem problematic to me, even within your own Holy book, of how much we, how many of the Old Testament rules and laws we no longer obey – death penalty for disobedient children and adulterous people and so on. We would no longer practice that ever in our country. Why is that? I mean, that was once considered to be Holy Scripture, now it's rejected by most believers. So obviously, there are decisions being made in people's minds about what's right and wrong that is external to the source itself, that comes from, what, culture, parents, upbringing and so on.

HH: Okay, I'm going to recede from it, although my question was how would you choose between the books. I want to come back to that, Michael, but Greg has a response to that.

GK: Yeah, of course. Look, the Old Testament law was written for Jews. This is not like we're just making something up out here. It is a proper hermeneutic It was written to Jews under a very specific situation, and it was meant to be applied to them under the theocracy. There are some people who hold this, but certainly not the majority, that these same laws in the same way ought to be applied today. That's why we call it the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. Even within the Christian worldview, there is a place for that, and now there's a place for something new. So there's no contradiction there at all.

HH: Yeah, you know, Michael, that does seem to me, Hitchens has made that argument to me a number of times, and it's just a silly argument.

MS: Which argument?

HH: The argument that the Old Testament rules that have been abandoned somehow indict the New Testament laws and morality. It's just a silly argument.

MS: Well wait. You still obey some of the Old Testament rules. So how do you...

HH: Yes.

MS: Which ones do you pick and choose from?

HH: I'll give you Al Mohler's book. Again, I'm not a participant. I don't want to answer. I want to ask you, though. To me, it was nonresponsive when I said as between the books, how do you judge which books?

MS: Okay, which books? I would just say...

HH: Of all the holy books that claim to have universal wisdom and knowledge about God, and I could name ten of them, is there a way to choose...

MS: I don't think so. I'm answering your question. I don't think there is any outside way to do that. Even in principle, because the ultimate, the original source of those books came through some human source, some revelatory experience that somebody had, that had to at some point put pen to paper and write down what the God said.

HH: Let me rephrase it, then. On the basis of human reason, there is no way to evaluate all those books as to which ones are at least more closely approximating the way that people ought to live or not?

MS: Oh, that's a different question. Maybe I misheard, because I think we could do that, but what's that standard of the way we ought to live? What are we using for that standard? I would argue there is such a standard, and it's not from religion.

HH: And so you would evaluate those books based upon your independently arrived at understanding of what is morality?

MS: I think we do do that.

HH: Greg Koukl?

GK: Yeah, I think we do do that to a degree, too, and here Mike and I have no debate about the existence of a moral sense in human beings. The difference is whether that moral sense is merely an expression of our subjective emotions, which it seems to me what he argues for, though he wants to ennoble that and call that kind of objective morality, or is it our ability to grasp moral realities that are outside of us that would not change, even if our own opinions about it happen to change. That's the difference between objective and subjective. And Mike, you appealed for a kind of third category, but either...I don't see where there is a third category. It's either in the object or in the subject, and that's pretty much the law of excluded middle there.

HH: Remember that thought. We'll come right back to Michael Shermer.

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HH: Michael Shermer, what were you going to say?

MS: Well, so let's take another current example of whether homosexuality is a sin, leaving aside marriage as a political question, but just is homosexuality a sin or not. Now I presume you would argue it is, and it's right there in the Old Testament, a man shall not sleep with another man, it's an abomination. But why stick with that one, which seems to me equally culturally dependent as some of the other Old Testament on small populations struggling in a harsh environment, in which you want lots of marriage, lots of children and so on. I could kind of see that rules back then, but why bother now? I mean, why not abandon that one along with slavery and some of the other ones?

HH: Greg Koukl? Well, okay, this one goes to a matter of authority, because I think there are complicated, and for some, persuasive arguments that homosexuality is wrong, per se, because of natural law arguments or whatever, but those don't resonate with most people. I think what Michael's getting at here is how is it that the New Testament, or now why are you still holding over that from the Old Testament when things have changed? And the reason is, it's not just an incidental part of the Old Testament law. It seems to be indicated there that the behavior itself transcends, morally speaking, any local law. Some of the laws in the Old Testament were for local things, but some seemed to transcend, like it's wrong to kill, or rather, wrong the murder is the Hebrew word. And so in the New Testament, even though we're not in the Old Covenant situation, we have these same kinds of things, these more transcendent things that apply to all human beings, prohibited. And one of those that's spoken to is the homosexuality issue. And the reason that Paul gives in Romans Chapter 1 is that God made human beings for one purpose, the man for the woman, and the man, in the case of male homosexuality, abandoned the woman that God made for them and burned in their passion against someone else. So there's a violation of the natural order. Now this isn't something that I'm probably going to come up with all on my own just thinking about, and this is where I think Divine revelation is helpful to have us dial down on some of the moral things. And you're certainly free not to accept that, but this is what makes homosexuality durable as a sin, in a sense, from the Old Testament times to the New Testament, because of the reasons that God gives that it's wrong.

MS: But using that sort of a moral intuition, and the still, small voice or the reflective aspects of morality, given that we live in a modern world in which we have plenty of people, we don't need more, and somebody, the evidence seems to show people are just born this way, it's like asking a gay person when they chose to become homosexual would be like me asking you when you chose to become heterosexual. And you'd say well, I didn't choose. This is my nature. And that's what gay people say. This is my nature. I've always felt like this. So why would you care? Who cares if somebody finds love with a member of the same sex, and love and marriage leads to fidelity and more moral behavior that we all agree is good for society? Why block that?

GK: Okay, just as a matter of fact, it is not the case that science has shown that this is genetic. There is no gay gene. This has not been demonstrated.

MS: No, not a gay gene...

GK: Or anything like that.

HH: Okay, we're going way off the off-ramp, gentlemen.

GK: Okay, the answer is, why would any Christian object to that?

MS: Yeah.

GK: Because out of fidelity to their God, because they believe that God has said this is wrong, and so they're going to oppose it in principle, even though it is not within their purview, then, to bring persecution upon that person, because there's another value that they hold, and that is that all human beings are made in the image of God.

MS: Okay, here's my prediction.

HH: I don't want a prediction. I want to get back to my question, Michael Shermer.

MS: Yup.

HH: Based upon what I would say your evolutionarily-constructed moral law, what you consider to be the societal moral law, have you evaluated the various holy books, and given them a hierarchy, which is best, which is not so good, which is terrible?

MS: No, I guess I have not.

HH: And why not, if that matters so much?

MS: I don't, I'm not that interested. I love studying religion, though I have not read the Koran, for example.

HH: Greg Koukl, is it necessary for someone who's going to say there's an evolutionary moral law, and talk about God, to have that kind of assessment?

GK: I actually don't, I'm sympathetic to Mike. I mean, there's a lot of books to read, you can't read them all. And if he thinks he has come upon a cogent and powerful explanation for the world as he sees it, then he doesn't have a motivation to go outside of that. My argument has been that it's not adequate, and that's why some other kind of solution is going to be necessary.

HH: Okay, here's my objection. If there's a moral law, and there's a societal good, and one of these books is really bad for it, and one of these books generally support it, then you ought to, even as an agnostic, make a choice between that which is really horrific, a Hitlerian approach to, you know, a Nazi, Mein Kampf, don't read that one, that's horrible, versus the New Testament is pretty nice. I think...

MS: Yeah, I guess I would attest that the New Testament's better than the Old Testament. I guess I would agree. I think Jesus was a big step forward. I think the feminization of some of the morality in the book of Ruth toward the end of the Old Testament is a big improvement over the early books, so yeah, I guess I do evaluate.

HH: And where do you put the Koran in that? You haven't read it at all, it just doesn't matter?

MS: Oh, I've read it, of course since 9/11, I've read lots of parts of it that everybody quotes, which are all the, you know, the horrific parts. And that seems to me far beneath the Bible in terms of what we would consider moral values. But anyway...

HH: Do any of the books have a better grounding in natural science?

MS: No, I don't think so.

HH: Do any of the books have a better grounding in history?

MS: It depends on which books. I mean, parts of the Old Testament have some good grounding in history, and others don't.

HH: This is a transition. Greg Koukl, how is the historical evidence for the accounts of these various books?

GK: Well, it depends on which one you're talking about. Some of these books aren't history books. They're poetic books that are meant in poetic language, the Bhagavad Gita, for example, to tell something about reality. I think the unique thing about the Judeo-Christian revelation is that principally, the theological story is told through history, so the history is really important. The big event of the Old Testament is the exodus, you know, and this was the salvation event where God intervened. The big event in the New Testament is similar to that, parallel to that, is the resurrection of Christ. Now obviously, we have a lot more access to information about the life of Jesus of Nazareth than we do about the exodus. In fact, there's a kind of a big hole there in terms of archaeology for that period of time. But there's not a big hole when it comes to the life of Christ. And the documentary evidence is quite extensive. And not just the primary source documentation for the life of Jesus, which we call Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, which by the way, should not be simply dismissed because they were written by Christians. Historians don't dismiss them for that reason. But we have to look at these as historical documents. And when we do, we find a tremendous amount of powerful testimony from those documents about the person of Jesus, what He taught, and what He did, which also points to a literal time-history resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Now if that actually happened, that puts this worldview in a whole different category.

HH: Well, that's my transition, is to the person of Christ, because most of our audience is Christian. And a lot of this argument has been, as I've had with many of the new atheists, silly to believe in Jesus.

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HH: Mike Shermer, as I said at the end of last hour, last segment, is it silly to believe in the historical person of Jesus Christ? And is it silly to believe in the claims and the accounts of him as recorded in the New Testament.

MS: I don't like the word silly, because it trivializes a serious issue. I think it's an empirical claim on one level, whether Christ rose from the dead or not, but on the other hand, I think it's an article of faith. You can show all 13 million Jews in the world that evidence for the risen Christ, and eyewitnesses, and the rock was rolled away or whatever, and they almost universally, except for the small population of Jews For Jesus, reject the evidence. So I don't think it's ultimately provable. I do think it's an article of faith, like many other articles of faith of religion. I don't like the word silly at all. I think that trivializes it unnecessarily.

HH: Greg Koukl?

GK: Yeah, a frustrating situation for atheists is that the vast majority of people in this country, the rank and file, don't believe in Darwinian evolution. But I wouldn't be free then to say well, this is just, evolution's obviously an article of faith, because look at all the people who look at the evidence that you provide so persuasively and don't believe it. This is an observation that leads to no conclusion about this issue at all.

HH: And so, and it's frustrating as well, because it seems to me central for agnostics, atheists, to answer the question about the empirical evidence, and whether it is of high quality...I had this conversation with Richard Dawkins. Dawkins likes to argue you know, I'm a Latin teacher, and I'm just arguing that Rome existed, and a lot of people are arguing Rome didn't exist. And it's the same with evolution. And I challenged him, I asked him the historical evidence for the personhood of Jesus is overwhelming, isn't it?

MS: Yes.

HH: And so, is the proof...

MS: Well, I don't know about overwhelming. I think Jesus existed.

HH: Well, is it overwhelming? Or just a guess?

MS: I think there's good enough evidence for us to conclude that somebody named Jesus of Nazareth existed.

HH: And on the basis of what we know generally about historical text, isn't there pretty good, and perhaps even overwhelming evidence that the Gospels are reliable, historically tested accounts about what this person did?

MS: Well now, it's getting a little fuzzier, because of the inconsistency of the accounts. And you could say well, okay, eyewitnesses saw things slightly differently. Yeah, but there's some important differences between the four Gospels. And what about the other Gospels that are not in the canonical books, the gospel of Thomas, for example? And there's legitimate, theological research on these other books, and why can't those be concluded?

HH: One minute, Greg.

GK: Well, there is legitimate, theological research, and not only on Thomas, but a whole bunch of other pseudepigrapha that come afterwards. There are all kinds of literary documents that make claims to write about Jesus that we know, because of their dating, couldn't possibly have the eyewitness accounts of the information that the Matthew, Mark, Luke and John canonical Gospels have. So just because there are other things that claim to be gospels, it doesn't mean that they're contenders as source of historical information. And the scholars in the field make this distinction. Now Thomas is one of those few documents where they seem to take seriously, but our documents of Thomas are like 3rd Century, and looks to have been written in the 2nd Century. So why is it that the 1st Century documents of the Gospels don't get preeminence there as historical documents? They should.

HH: When we come back, the third hour is given over to do the anti-God people have to put up with the same rigorous defense of their beliefs as they ask the theists to put up with theirs. Stay tuned.

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HH: And I want to spend this hour talking really about the debate over the debate. And it's occurring at an unusual time, because just a couple of weeks ago surfaced one of the greatest scandals in the history of modern science, Climategate, in which incredibly unscientific behavior on the part of scientists has been revealed. The atheists have often in the past few years tried to position the debate as between reason and faith. But now we find the tactics that people of faith are often accused of, absolutely evident on the part of the behavior of scientists – data manipulation, witch hunts against scientists with whom they disagreed with, a refusal to confront contrary evidence. And I took that, and I applied it to this debate over intelligent design, Michael Shermer, and I'm wondering whether or not the opponents of intelligent design have been using the same tactics that the Climategate scientists, who are now deeply scandalized, embarrassed and discredited, have been using for the last, obviously, we just learned about it. But have the proponents of the anti-God view been just as intellectually dishonest as the Climategate scientists?

MS: Well, on the Climategate thing, I think the smoking guns are not what I thought they would be. I have some sympathy for the global warming skeptics. I was once one, and could be persuaded again. I think that's just a data question there. But what I think it revealed was how political scientists are. They're very liberal and very tribal, and like everybody else, they circle the wagons when they think they're being attacked from outside. And I think that's what we saw. So to that extent, do atheists, have atheists done that? Yes, they have. They've circled the wagons, they feel like they're under siege. At time, I think particularly since 9/11 with the fear of Islamic terrorism, and then since the Bush administration pushing an Evangelical agenda into politics, way more than Bush Sr., ever did as a Methodist, and certainly more than Reagan ever did, I think that's what caused non-believers to feel like they needed to push back somewhat. And then you just get specific cultural phenomenon like Dawkins' book takes off, or Hitchens' book takes off, something like that. I mean, the book sales on those books are more than cumulative all the

other books they've ever written, plus all of a bunch of other books, so I think you get a combination of those events there.

HH: Greg Koukl, first your response, then I have a follow up.

GK: Well yeah, I think that there is kind of a shell game and a muscling going on, and we see it in the field. And I think what people don't realize, and I didn't realize this until maybe six or seven years ago when this was explained to me, and when explained, I really saw this, that there are actually two definitions of science that are in play here, Hugh. One of them is a methodological definition, the scientific method. You know, follow certain methods, and you come up with the right results. Now if you don't follow that method, then that's called bad science, and you can't trust the results you come up with. But there's more going on here. It isn't just a methodology. There is also a philosophical definition. This philosophical definition is metaphysical materialism, or called naturalism. A metaphysical view is a total view of reality, and on this view, nothing exists but the molecules in motion. That's materialism. That's also part of the definition. So currently, in the state of science, in order to be doing science, good science, you have to be doing the right methodology, but you also have to come to the right kinds of conclusions. You have to come to conclusions that comport with naturalism and materialism. And if you don't, you're accused of doing religion instead of science. I just want people to see that there's a difference here, and lots of times in this discussion, this metaphysical issue trumps the methodology. Notice that a lot of times, the arguments aren't against ID proper, that is the evidence that they've offered. It's a dismissal by saying you're not doing science, you're doing religion. This isn't real scientists at work like we are, these are phonies. And so it's a way of discrediting based on the kind of conclusions that they come up. Now this happens all the time, and you can see a bullying that's going on in the field, and a lot of people have identified this, Guillermo Gonzalez for example, a famous example from Iowa State University, denied tenure though very qualified. Francis Beckwith, for goodness sake, a philosopher, not a scientist, but the same kind of thing happened to him at Baylor before it got reversed, and a lot of other people. There's a political game going on here, and it seems to me that if the evidence for Darwinian evolution is so powerful, then why do you have to do these political moves that are driven not by the methodology, but largely by the metaphysics doing the magic? Why? And I think because the metaphysics are doing a large part of the work, and the method doesn't give the evidence that's necessary to convince the most people.

HH: Michael Shermer?

MS: Of course, other fields of science don't deal with these issues, like why are Christian groups not up in arms about the Krebs cycle being taught in biochemistry classes and biology classes. Why not? I mean, if you're going to object to methodological naturalism, why pick on just one, particular little subfield?

GK: Because it doesn't have any ramifications for these other things.

MS: Yeah, of course. That's right.

GK: But it does...

MS: Because certain fields of science do bump up against political and religious implications.

GK: But it's not just that, Michael. It has to do with the evidence in question. Nobody has, even from my side of things, has any difficulty with the Krebs cycle, because methodological naturalism is the thing that governs day to day science.

HH: Why don't you explain the Krebs cycle for our audience.

MS: Oh, it's just a...

GK: I can, but he...

HH: I know, but don't use terms like that for the audience.

MS: It's just a biochemical process in cells of using energy.

GK: Yeah. And so at this point, to finish my thought, though...

MS: Yeah.

GK: What this points out is that these kinds of issues are not the kind of thing that affect day to day science. But when it comes to the issue of origins, then it's something entirely different. You have a different category that you're talking about, and this is where the muscling has been done, and that's why the complaints have been raised, muscling that is illegitimate considering what's at stake.

MS: Well, muscling on both sides. I mean, it's political on both sides, so the left and the right both push back against each other, all the way back to the Catholic Church and Galileo.

GK: Well, okay, I'm glad...

MS: I mean, that tension has always been there. Let's not...

GK: Great. And it was wrong with Galileo, and it should be wrong now. That's my point. If it was wrong then, and with the monkey trial and everything, now everything is in reverse, and I think this is what Hugh was getting at. If the power plays were wrong in the past, then they should be wrong now, and why don't we just let everybody lay their cards on the table and play fair, and then let the best idea win?

MS: I agree. So just put it out there. Like the Climategate? Yeah, let's get that original data. I agree. Sure. Now let me just back up for a second on an example not related to religion, but on another field that I deal with, extra sensory

perception. Can we actually read the minds of other people? Okay, setting aside the TV psychics and all that silly stuff, there are some scientists who actually believe that mind exists separate from brain, and that we can connect to each other, and there's a famous physicist named Roger Penrose, who has this theory about that quantum mechanics explains how when neurons fire, the collapse of the wave function inside the atoms, inside the nerves, fire in a sequence that my cells can read your cells. They're actually communicating, somehow, across a distance, all right? I don't happen to think that's true, but let's say it turned out to be true, and that now we have a naturalistic explanation for extra sensory perception. Well, that would no longer be the paranormal, would it? Now it would be quantum neuroscience, or neurophysics, or something like that. So at some point, you need some kind of a natural explanation for the phenomenon in question that we can test. So for example, when somebody, when cosmologists talk about well, the galaxies are structured in this odd way where there must be more matter out there, we'll call it dark energy or dark matter, they don't actually mean that as an explanation. It isn't an explanation. It's just a word filler until we can figure out what's going on. So at some point, it's not that no one's allowing you to introduce the supernatural, it's just that no different than calling it ESP, that doesn't explain it. We need some kind of a mechanism that causes it.

GK: Okay, to be fair, Michael, I was at the debate one week ago that you did with Professor Prothero and Steve Meyer, and the others from the ID thing. And you started out your presentation by saying this is all about religion, it's not about science. That's the first thing you said. And then you referred to the other guys as, you and your partner, as 'those guys,' and we are doing real science, and they're not. In fact, Steve Meyer raised a complaint at the personal attack there, because both of them have advanced degrees in their fields. Now I mean, this is an example of the kind of thing that I'm talking about. It's like, you didn't say to these guys well, you're real scientists, we're real scientists, but really, the facts matter, so let's look at the facts. There are all of these kind of subtle and sometimes not so subtle invectives, or shout across there. Now I've been in debates before. I know how that works. I'm just simply saying that your kind of tone of innocence here, it strikes me as disingenuous, because this is a game that you guys play all the time when in public circumstances. And sometimes, it's not just invectives, it's actually muscling, we won't publish your paper, we won't let people know about it, we're going to criticize you in front of all these people and try to discredit you.

HH: A response coming back from Michael Shermer when we return.

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HH: Michael Shermer, I was not at this debate. I have no idea what Greg just referenced. So I want to give you a chance to go back to what he was just talking about. Did you attack Steven Meyer's scientific credentials?

MS: Actually, I didn't. My partner did. Well, you know...

HH: Did you correct your partner at that point?

MS: Well...

GK: Steven Meyer corrected him, actually, is what happened.

MS: Yeah, I mean, this is a part of the format of debate, right? I mean, it's a contest. It's competitive. You're supposed to, you know, you're supposed to come out...like a lawyer, you're supposed to defend your position. You're not supposed to...if it's a panel discussion, that's different than a debate. This was a debate. I actually do think that it's perfectly fine for Steven Meyer to publish books like his new book on DNA, and put forth testable hypotheses. Okay, at least now we're getting somewhere, where if you give us something we can take back to the lab and test, then we're doing science. If it's just I infer that there's a designer behind this, okay, that's nice, but what am I supposed to do with that? So the analogy I made is that let's say it turns out life did not originate on Earth, that it was seeded here either through meteorites or comets, or maybe even extra-terrestrials brought it here and seeded it, and they are from the Planet Vega, a planet around the Star Vega. Let's say something like that.

HH: A dysfunctional GM car, okay.

MS: Yeah, exactly, yeah. Right. Good, we needed some humor there. And...but and let's say we found a little pod out in Blythe or something in the desert with the blueprints of how they made DNA. Well, that would be interesting, but we'd still want to know well, where did the Vegans come from? I mean, who made those guys? Did they evolve on this planet? Or were they seeded there from someplace else? Or did God do it? Or...in other words, at some point, we need some natural explanation for where life came from. And if you take this back far enough, you will end up at an infinite regress. Well, God, outside of space and time, came into our space and time, stirred the particles, and created life. Okay, but where did, if not God, the intelligent designer, where did He come from? Did he evolve? Or is he a standalone, the last causal link? And there, we bump up against the great unknown. I don't see how that's resolvable.

GK: I've got so much to say about this, I'm not sure where to begin. Let me just start with the power play. At that debate, Richard Sternberg was the other I.D. guy there, and Richard Sternberg used to be with the Smithsonian. But he had the audacity of publishing a paper by Steven Meyer in a journal, a peer review journal that was associated with the Smithsonian, and he got bounced. This is the kind of thing that I'm talking about.

MS: You know, I just called them. He's still there. At least, he's still on their list.

GK: Okay, well, the firestorm...

MS: I don't think he got bounced.

GK: ...surrounding that, you don't...okay, forget the bounce thing. The firestorm surrounding it you don't deny?

MS: Yes, of course. We're all emotional, yeah. Right.

GK: Well, it goes beyond that. And so the point to bringing up the debate, I understand that there is these things you do in debates, but this in the debate was the microcosm of the bigger issue, and that's why I pointed that out. Now with regards to, you know, life beginning on other planets, and then who designed the Designer and that kind of thing, it's a very odd question. And virtually all the guys on Mike's side of this debate ask the same question – who created God, or some variation of that. And what's curious is that Mike and none of these other guys believe that God was created, because they don't believe in God. I don't believe that God was created, because I think that God is eternal. So nobody in the discussion believes that God was created or designed. So why does the question come up that who designed the Designer, or who created God? Frankly, it's a distraction. It's a distraction from the evidence in front of us, for intelligent design. If I'm walking down the beach as we could here in Newport, Hugh, and I see a footprint in the sand, a shoeprint in the sand, I don't need to know who the manufacturer of the shoe is before I can properly conclude from the evidence that a shoe made the print. The same thing is true here. We're focusing on one issue, and that is whether the evidence suggests an intelligent designer. If we come to the conclusion that that's the case, much like forensic pathology, there's a dead man with five holes in his chest from bullets, gee, it doesn't look like natural causes, now let's go search for the person who did it. That's the next step. But we can't say, I think, vacuous challenges like who created God when none, all of these guys know that nothing about our view requires God's creation. They say this to, I think, distract from the main issue, the evidence for design itself, which is compelling, Hugh.

MS: Oh, I don't say it as a distraction. I think it's a really interesting question. Where did the universe come from in the first place. And if there were multiple universes, you still have the same problem – where did those come from.

GK: I agree. I agree.

MS: And I do think, Greg, at some point, we do bump up against limitations of our knowledge, of our language...

GK: Right.

MS: ...of what our brains are capable of solving. And there is a leap of faith for all of us. You either decide to believe, or you decide not to believe. And I don't think it's ultimately provable one way or the other. Now on the other question positing a designer from the evidence of design, I think there is an inference there in which we have vast experience of people shooting each other, and we know what that is. And so you come across somebody with five bullet holes, okay, there's a natural inference there based on experience. And we've seen people make tennis shoes, so we know that they're made when we see the print. Okay, there's a natural inference there. But we've never seen any designer

design DNA. We just have the product, the artifact, from which we infer what? And there, it isn't the same as an artifact that's made by us.

HH: All right. Now gentlemen, I want to switch for the last three segments of the show leading into a larger question about belief in God generally. Is it good or bad for people? And regardless of whether it's true, or the true true, to use Francis Schaeffer, but is it good or bad? Because that leads me to the second question, are the new atheists involved in an evil project or a good project? Because these are both obvious question. So Greg, you want to take a first pass?

GK: Yeah, I'll take a shot at it, and again, I want to go back to my earliest comment when we started talking about morality. It depends on what you mean by good. And I'm just weighing in now to say that when you're using the word good, I'm taking this as good in the objective sense.

HH: Yes.

GK: Do objective goods, oughts that we should do and whatever, come to pass better when there is belief in God? There's a famous story of a Hassidic Jew that was standing in front of a German machine gun having just dug his own grave. And he said just before he was gunned down, he said God is watching. Now one thing that the German officer didn't believe at that point was that God was watching. Nor did Mao, nor did Lenin, nor did Stalin, nor did many other people who did great atrocities, did they believe that God was watching. As David Berlinski has pointed out, that's actually the definition of secularism. God is not watching. Now I don't think it takes, you know, a lot of deep thinking to realize, and Michael might call this a shallow motivation regardless, to realize that if people really believe that God is watching, their behavior is going to be better on balance than if they really believe that God is not watching.

HH: Michael Shermer?

MS: Well, I do think that religion and belief in God is good when it does good, and evil when it does evil. And we can make a laundry list of goods and evils that religion does. You have Hitchens' book here, and he's got a laundry list in there of all the evils.

GK: And we agree on that, by the way, Michael.

MS: And you could take David Brooks' book, *Who Really Cares*, and he documents how Republicans and conservatives and religious people give more money and more time, and donate more blood and so on than secularists, atheists, nonbelievers, and Democrats. So I would say that's great. I mean, I sponsor a child through World Vision, because I think they do the job. They put the boots on the ground, and they make things happen. And religion is really good for that. And so I think it's too simple to say is religion good or evil. I mean, come on, it's a big, complex, social, historical force that does lots of good things, and lots of bad things.

HH: When we come back, I'll follow up, because I don't think it's too simple. I think it's actually the question about whether or not the anti-God people are engaged in evil if they're destroying belief in God.

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HH: So Michael, I come back to this. You said yeah, religion's done a lot of good and a lot of bad, but generally speaking, and the utilitarian view, is belief in God good for the planet? And if it is good for the planet, have the anti-God people been involved in an evil project?

MS: I don't think they have been involved in an evil project. I think what it...it makes it okay to not believe in God. Remember, atheism isn't a thing. There's no, like, central set of tenets that we adhere to or believe in, or anything like that as you would a Republican or conservative, or something like that, or a Christian or a Jew or whatever. We don't have anything like that, because there is nothing. It's just simply we just don't believe. Now because we're social creatures, we like to feel like we belong to a family, an extended family, a group of friends, a bowling league, social capital, this is called. Everybody likes to feel like they belong. Because religion is so dominant in America, particularly the Christian religion, those of us who are either not Christian or not believers, we feel a little alienated, a little lonely, and a little left out. And we'd like to have our own group. So in part, what the new atheist movement is tapping into is that social feeling of wanting to belong to a group. And I don't think there's anything wrong with that. I think it's good that there are people out there, groups out there that make that okay.

HH: Greg Koukl?

GK: Yeah, your question was not whether religion does good, but whether belief in God does good, if I recall it correctly.

HH: Yup.

GK: And so I want to return specifically to that. The atheists do have a code. It's not very complicated. It's just that as Michael just put it, there is nothing. So what is the moral consequence on a people if they believe there is nothing? That's really the question. The 20th Century, which we just left, was the bloodiest century in the history of the world. And just a casual adding up of the numbers shows over 100 million that were dead at the hands of just three people – Lenin, Stalin, and Mao Tse Tung. Now these people had a particular ideology at which atheism was its foundation. Because they didn't believe in God, and there is a natural kinship here between worldviews and the actions that follow them, because they didn't believe in God, it was the state that was the greater power. And if the state is the greatest power, and they were the state, then they had no one to answer to. And consequently, they were able to do these things that everyone views as an atrocity. Now this, I think, is logical. This follows from that worldview. I'm not saying that atheists are all evil like that. They're not. Mike is a fine guy. What I'm saying is that given the atheistic

worldview, you are allowed to do those kinds of things, because there is no transcendent rule that's keeping you from doing otherwise.

HH: Michael Shermer?

MS: Nobody kills or dies in the name of atheism, because there's nothing to kill or die for. People kill and die for causes, for ideologies, for beliefs. And communism is a faux religion. It is exactly like a religion, a set of tenets that people adhere to, and then we're going to go out and change people's minds, or impose our views on them and so on. That's what social groups do, whether they're political, ideological, economic, religious, whatever. And that's what communism is. And it's nothing more than that. Nobody killed in the name of that. In any case, Hitler's not a good example, because as we've seen now...

GK: I didn't use him.

MS: ...with the indictment of the Catholic Church, they were very much involved in the whole Nazi process there...

HH: That's...time out, Michael. That's simply not true, but let's not go there. I would want to have an expert in the Vatican's many, many interventions to save lives, and then we'd have a long conversation...

MS: Oh, of course they did. Yes, yes.

HH: Let's just not throw it out there. Let's just not throw it out there.

GK: The real issue here is not whether people did it in the name of atheism or not. But it has to do with the kinship of behaviors to worldviews. Whether people are thinking of this as a rationale, gee, I'm an atheist, so I can go kill people, is not the issue. The issue is how is it that people actually live out the deep beliefs that they have about the world? And it seems obvious that when people have believed that there's nothing else but us and our rules, what we make, for whatever reasons we do, and we answer to no one, and there isn't going to be any final justice or final judgment or final reckoning, well, it seems very clear to see how this is going to have a deleterious effect on behaviors.

MS: Yeah, but if Torquemada had gas chambers, wow, what would the numbers have been in the Inquisition? I mean, in the name of God, Torquemada...

GK: So you're saying there is no relationship between the worldviews?

MS: Well, you brought up the numbers.

GK: Right.

MS: It isn't numbers that's important. It's what your capable of doing. And religious beliefs and political ideologies are no different as belief systems driving behavior that's moral or immoral. People kill in the name of religion just as much as they do in the name of a political ideology.

GK: This is false, just quantifiably, first of all.

MS: No, I disagree.

GK: But secondly, there is the idea...

MS: Not by the numbers.

GK: The idea is what's important. People just have to reflect in the idea. Which one is a better encourager to good behavior, that God exists. That was your question.

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HH: It seems that we're onto something very important here, and Michael, I sense defensiveness on your part, so I'm going to let you go first. If, in fact, the new atheists launch a series of responses that lead people to not believe in God, and those people in not believing in God act a certain way, that's causation. That's responsibility. Ought the new atheists ought to own their responsibility? If they kill God, ought they not to own the results of killing God?

MS: First of all, I don't think that's going to happen. It didn't happen at the turn of the 20th Century.

HH: Didn't ask that question, though.

MS: Yeah, yeah, I know. Sure, okay, I'll stand up and be responsible. Why not?

HH: Greg Koukl, have they been? It's a flippant response. That's okay. But...

GK: Yeah, well...

MS: No, it's a true response. Yes...

GK: What I was...okay, great. So what do we take away from that?

HH: Right.

GK: Listen, I'm arguing if there is no God, then everything is permitted. There is no objective morality.

MS: I don't agree with that. Come on.

GK: I understand that. I understand you don't, but you have ground objective morality...

MS: Yes, you can. We're back to where we began.

GK: Your morality is subjective.

MS: No, it's not.

GK: It's something that's in the subject. It's in the genes...

MS: That's objective.

GK: And it creates...yes, okay. Well, it is objective, but it's not objective in the way that I'm talking about it. It's objectively in the subject, and ethicists have made this distinction for a long time between objective and subjective. I'm not going to go there again. Let me just finish the equation here. If there is no God, then everything is permitted. If the new atheists are right, then there is no God. Therefore, if the new atheists are right, then everything is permitted. Now I think that follows. And I think this, then, creates a problem. Again, I don't think that all of the atheists are bad people in everything that they do. They're just as bad as the rest of us religious people. Let's face it. The question has to do with the impact of worldviews, and that is really what's in play here.

HH: I do agree, Michael, that's where I'm coming back down to. I take responsibility for it if in fact the people who allowed and facilitated the rise of the atheist monsters of the 20th Century were around today, they would deny responsibility for them, even though they facilitated it with the collapse of the orders that previously held back the monsters. It seems to me now that Dawkins, et cetera, your rhetoric is much milder than Dawkins, but that they were about unleashing the beast again, because the beast is eager. The most eager thing in the world for the Devil, the Christians have always said, is not to be believed in. And you guys are doing a good job.

MS: If they, if Dawkins and Hitchens and so on were promoting some kind of a political agenda hooked to the atheism, whereby you're supposed to go out and do this or do that, then yes, I'd think you have a point, and I'd be concerned about it. That is, is it leading to greater liberty, or greater tyranny? That's the question, liberty and tyranny, is at stake in terms of the boots on the ground, actual change.

HH: Greg Koukl, if you take down a dam when it's not raining, and nothing happens for give years, ten years, fifteen years, twenty years, and then the hundred year flood comes, which happens every hundred years, and you destroy everything in front of it...

GK: Then you're in trouble. Right.

HH: You're responsible.

GK: Well, you made the point. And actually, Sam Harris is very explicit about this in his book. He said that there are some beliefs that are so dangerous, and he's talking about theism here, that it's justified to even kill people for that belief. Now two things are in play here. Sam Harris acknowledges the relationship between worldviews. You believe

certain things that have certain consequences, which I think is true and that's what I'm arguing, and then he exemplifies it himself with the danger of atheism. He thinks that they, atheists, not all believe this, and certainly Michael doesn't, he is not going to get involved in this, but he seems to suggest that some people should be killed for their beliefs. And whether Dawkins has a political agenda or not is irrelevant. If he is laying the foundation that justifies a certain political agenda, then the dominoes are going to fall. It's a logical slippery slope, and it's one to be concerned about.

MS: You see, I place at the feet of the monstrous evil of the 20th Century Marxism, Leninism. If Marx and Lenin just simply said we're atheists, and they wrote atheist books, nothing would have happened. It's that they hooked it to something else, which is the confiscation of private property, the confiscation of individual liberties, the ownership of productivity. That's what destroyed those societies and led to the monstrous problems.

HH: Greg Koukl?

GK: Well yeah, I agree with that as far as it goes, except to say that there was something else that was in place that allowed them to do such a thing, and that there was a, again, a kinship between the belief system and the results of that belief system, the particular things. Now could religious people have done that? Yes, but it's a lot harder to hang the behavior of Christians who say they're Christians that's evil, on Jesus Himself, because Jesus didn't teach that kind of thing. Instead, you have Christians that are acting contrary to Jesus' own behavior and teaching. In this case, you have behaviors that are fully consistent with an atheistic worldview.

MS: But you left out the first World War, which was Christian nations fighting Christian nations – Germany and France and England were all Christian nations. They all believed God was on their side. And they imposed just as much destruction as happened in World War II. They just didn't have any...

HH: I actually don't believe any of them believed God were on their side when they went into that war. I know the history of World War I fairly well. They did not march to war on the basis...

MS: Well, but you would call them Christian nations.

HH: But they did not, then went to war on the basis of economics...

MS: Well, okay...

GK: But even if they did, it's not the point.

HH: It had nothing to do with God.

MS: Okay, I would agree.

GK: The point is what is it that, does the worldview that they have justify what they did? And now we're back to Jesus again, which they can't put it on Jesus, but the atheists can put it on atheism.

HH: Very quickly, this segment and last, of the various world religions, which has contributed the most to human progress in the alleviation of suffering? It's an objective question. It's not a question about which is correct or which is true. Just if you look through of all the world religions, which has contributed the most to human progress and the alleviation of suffering? Michael Shermer, do you have an answer to that?

MS: I'd say probably Christianity.

HH: Greg Koukl?

GK: Yeah, this is well documented. Under The Influence, for example, is one of the books that has been written to show this is the case.

MS: Oh, that's a Judeo-Christian...

HH: Does that necessarily tell us anything about the truth claims of the religion, Greg Koukl?

GK: Well, when you look at the particular truth claims, I think it does. These things were done in a way that were consistent with the Christian worldview, and seem to resonate with the other people who didn't share their worldview as something that's good. This is why going back to worldview perspective is so valuable. I think these are outliving of a worldview that deeply resonates with our deepest intuitions about the way the world actually is.

MS: I'm in favor of any ideology that gives more people more freedom and liberty and individual power, whether that's religious or nonreligious.

HH: We'll be back. I'm going to give a minute to each of my guests to wrap this up. Don't go anywhere, America.

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HH: I want to thank Michael Shermer of Skeptic Society, www.skeptic.com, and Greg Koukl of Stand To Reason, www.str.org for their time and their patience. Greg Koukl, a minute, fifteen for you.

GK: Yeah, I started out talking about worldviews. And as a man trying to make sense of my world and finding a worldview that seems to fit reality as I experience it. I think atheism is way too austere for me, Hugh. It commits me to too many counterintuitive things – everything comes from nothing, like comes from nonlife, consciousness comes from matter, morality comes from a reorganization of molecules. None of this seems to make sense to me. There is another alternative that seems to make a lot more sense, that a big bang needs a big banger, that a moral law comes from a moral lawgiver, that design comes from a designer. These notions are captured well, I think, in the Biblical account of life. And the person of Jesus, especially, exemplifying these notions, and then giving us a way to live that

makes sense. And this is why I'm a Christian and not an atheist. I think it makes the best sense of the world as we know it.

HH: Michael Shermer?

MS: I'm an atheist, because I don't believe in God, and there's nothing to follow from that. I think we have an absolute moral standard, we have objective moral truths, we all know what they are, we listen to our small inner voice within that comes from our evolutionary heritage as a social primate species, in which we care deeply about our fellow group members. We have empathy and sympathy, and that's where the moral emotions come from. In terms of religion, I think religion is good when it does good, it's bad when it does bad. In general, I'm in favor of anything that leads to greater freedom, greater liberty, greater autonomy for more people in more places. And that has been the trend for the last five hundred years, that I attribute to the general secular idea, from the Enlightenment, that people have value in and of themselves, and I think religion has fostered, after the fact, sort of just slightly behind the wave, reinforcing those good, human values, and attenuating the bad ones. And that's why they've discarded so many of the Old Testament values that we no longer adhere to. So I think that's the long term trend, and I think we should continue to count people, more and more people as part of our fellow in-groups, and I think free trade and travel and the internet is the best way to encourage that.

HH: Thank you, Michael Shermer of Skeptic Magazine, www.skeptic.org, Greg Koukl of Stand To Reason, www.str.org. Once again, all their books I've been talking about are linked at Hughhewitt.com. I want to thank Adam and Generalissimo for all their work in producing today.

End of interview.