

OpenTheo

How Would You Use the Existence of Natural Rights to Argue for the Existence of God?

July 18, 2022



#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how to use the topic of natural rights with someone who believes in them to discuss the existence of God, and whether the saying that “we come from God, and we will go back to God” is an accurate statement or just a form of “mindism.”

* How would you use the topic of natural rights to discuss the existence of God with someone who believes good and evil (and natural rights) exist but does not believe they have divine origins?

* Is the saying that “we come from God, and we will go back to God” an accurate statement, or is it just a form of “mindism”?

Transcript

I'm Amy Hall and you're listening to the hashtag #SDRAskPodcast from Stan Turrizan starring Greg Cocole. Not starring, but you never said that to me before. Just trying to mix it up a little bit.

All right. All right. Coast starring Amos.

So, in the last episode, Greg, we talked a lot about moral relativism. We did. And so following on that, we have a question from Jonathan.

And his question is, how would you use the topic of natural rights to discuss the existence of God with someone who believes good and evil exist because they believe in natural rights, but does not believe they have divine origins? Well, we're back to the grounding question. If there are natural rights, all rights are moral claims. Okay? So if I have a right to speech or if I have a right to bear arms or if I have a right to Medicare or whatever, either it's a right given to me by someone else, that's a governing authority, which governing authority can't take it back again.

Or it is a, well, let me, it's either given to me by a human governing authority, which a

human governing authority can take back, or it is given by a divine governing authority. In our founding documents, the Declaration of Independence, the reference to nature and nature's God was an attempt to ground our foundational rights, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in God, who is the one who is the author of nature. So these are natural rights that we have in virtue of being in God's world.

So these are not grounded in nature. If one is thinking about the natural realm of naturalism, that is not the way they understood these words, these are grounded in the kind of world God made because God's a moral God that granted certain natural rights, that is appropriate rights, don't come from other human beings, to human beings in virtue of the kind of human beings humans were, and that is made the image of God. So natural rights in that sense are grounded in God.

Now, if a person wants to use the word natural rights without God, then the question is, what gives authority to the right that is being claimed naturally? This is where people get confused mixing two categories. And we made reference to it in the last session, but I'll say it again. There is a difference between how we know something is so and what makes that something so.

Let me say it again. There is a difference between how we know something is so, that's the epistemological issue, and what makes that something the way it is that we can then know. That's the ontological or metaphysical kind of element.

So you're driving down a street, okay? Are you doing the speed limit or not? Well you would know unless there was a speed limit sign that you could see. So you might know what the speed limit is by the sign, and you know you're doing the speed limit by looking at your speedometer and matching that to the limit by the sign. Okay, I am obeying the sign.

But notice how this is a strange thing to say, I'm obeying the sign. You're not really obeying the sign. The sign has force because there is some one else, something else which is a group of ones, people's, it's not just a thing.

But the government is the appropriate authority to determine what the speed limit is on that street. So notice that you know the speed limit by the sign, but what makes the sign authoritative, which makes what makes an obligation for you to drive under 35 or not over 35 is that there is some one who has the proper authority to make that demand. That's the ontological or I would just call it the grounding of it.

It's grounded by a proper authority. Okay, lots of people say, well I know right and wrong. I know that's right and I know that's wrong.

I don't need God to know that's right or wrong. Well in a very simplistic sense, that's true. It turns out God has given us the capability to determine what's right or wrong.

We have a faculty there. But for the sake of this discussion, I'll say, no, whatever faculty you have, wherever it came from, that faculty allows you to read the 35 mile an hour sign. But that doesn't tell you why the sign is authoritative or by parallel, why your own ideas of right and wrong that seem to make sense to you are actually authoritative.

That comes from somewhere else. That's the grounding problem and that's where God comes from. Without an appropriate authority, you have no morally applicable or incumbent obligation regarding something.

Okay. I wonder if you could read that question once again Amy because I'm laying a foundation here but I forgot where I was going with it. How would you use the topic of natural rights to discuss the existence of God with someone who believes good and evil exist because of natural rights? Okay, got it.

That doesn't believe there have divine origins. Okay, so what I've done is I laid out these distinctions. They believe that they believe the 35 mile an hour speed limit sign or the stop sign or whatever sign like that is out there.

They believe that and they are calling that natural and I am asking myself the question, well, maybe it's natural, but what gives those natural things their sense of oughtness? And that is what's uniquely characterized characteristic of morality, their sense of oughtness. We ought to do that. Okay.

And what gives it that? That's the grounding concern. Now if there is no God, then natural law is no law at all. And the problem I think here is people think the phrase natural law means you can get law properly grounded in nature.

That isn't what it means. It means that God made the world in such a way that it is natural for us to understand the moral, the moral world. Those who use the language, we're not using it in isolation from God, it was God's world that he made.

Nature's God. Okay. The laws of nature, nature's God.

It's the language of the founders. So, the question then would be what makes the natural law incumbent upon somebody? What makes it obligatory? Now, even if people want to, even if people want to limit, they don't want to talk about God. They just want to talk about the morality of natural law.

What we can, we can figure out is obvious based on what nature tells us. Here's the irony of that. You're not going to get a bunch of leftist notions justified by natural law.

You're not going to get abortion justified because it's not natural to kill your unborn children. That's called a miscarriage. That's why we use that language.

You're not going to get homosexuality because it's not natural to have the kind of sex

that gays and lesbians have. Because what's natural is the kind of sex that accomplishes a natural end, which is reproduction. Now, you're talking teleology and I think they would deny that also.

I know you, but you cannot talk about natural without talking about teleology because natural entails teleology. So what's natural food? Well, natural food is that's the kind of food that our bodies, where you can use this word as general as you want, designed to eat and feel healthy with. So you're not going to be able to avoid teleology.

I think I'm treating natural law as isolated from its grounding because they want to talk like that. But I'm also treating teleology that is good behavior. Things are for other things as isolated also.

We're not going to get God into there. I'm just saying if they want to get rid of God and they just want to stick with nature, they're going to get stuck with a whole bunch of things they don't want because they're not going to get out of natural law using that way of thinking abortion. They're not going to get all these variations of sexuality.

You're getting stuck with binary sexual genders. Okay, you're going to be stuck with all kinds of things that don't comport with leftist social conscience. You're also going to be stuck with a survival of the fittest.

And that's called social Darwinism because, well, nature dictates that the strong beat the weak. We see it everywhere. It is foundational to our entire evolutionary model.

So what is it that keeps us from just living that out in our cultural life? Well, a lot of Darwinists don't want to go there. But how is it inconsistent? It would be consistent if you're isolating natural law just with nature and keeping God out of the picture. And that's what Hitler did.

We are the master race. All right. So based on what natural law characterization if you just isolated in that, are you going to be able to condemn racism? But you know, it's curious that that Darwin was exceptionally racist by today's standards.

If anybody wants to look up the long definition or the long title of, I'm just looking it up right here, just the long title of the origin of species. Okay? The long title of the origin of species. See what I get.

Full title of the book was "On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection and the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life." Oops. But that's what you get if you're stuck with naturalism. So people want to go there.

It is not an adequate approach because it doesn't take morality seriously because morality is not just nature. It's God putting into nature or understanding things that are right and wrong. Okay? But if you want to get rid of God, then all you're left with is the

kind of patterns of nature that you say, let's just do what's natural.

But if you do what's natural, you're not going to get abortion. You're not going to get homosexuality. You're not going to get same sex marriage.

You're not going to get anything beyond gender binary and you're not going to get civilization apart from social Darwinism. So good luck. Have a nice day.

I think the goal here, Jonathan, is to help the person you're talking to think through exactly what it is that he's talking about. So Greg has given a great background for this and has clarified what's going on here. So those are the ideas that you need to get across.

And I think just practically one way that you can help him to think through this is, of course, to ask questions. So he says he believes in natural rights. I can think of three questions right off the bat that you need to ask him.

First, what are natural rights? What are they? Just ask him what they are. Listen to what he says and see if something he says already betrays an idea of God behind it. Secondly, where did they come from? So what are they? Where did they come from? What did they result from? Did they result from evolution? Well, Greg has responded to that.

Where did they come from? And finally, and this one, I think, is really helpful. Who do those rights apply to? I should say who or what do those rights apply to and why? Because now you're getting to the point where what exactly are they and can we exclude some members of the human race from rights? And if not, why not? What are the reasons for that? See if he can ground that. At keep asking him, I just want to understand how what you think about natural rights without God.

Those are all great questions. But one warning I can give you is that you can follow the logic of the conclusion of these arguments in two different ways. First, you can say, yeah, you're right.

I believe in natural rights. Oh my gosh, God exists because God is the only thing that can ground natural rights. Or you can say, oh no, I know God doesn't exist.

So I guess there aren't any natural rights. Now I don't want atheists to go that direction. But obviously you're not going to ignore this topic just because it's a great question.

That's a great, ultimately they cannot go that direction because the human beings made the image of God. This is the inside out tactic, but and you'll get them if they want to go that way, disagreeing with themselves all the time when they're not guarding turf. So another issue.

So anyway, just be aware that that or not be aware, but be aware that there are two

different ways to follow the conclusion. Now when it comes to rights, I think people feel pretty strongly about them. So not many people are going to be willing to bite the bullet there, but they might be willing to say, oh, you're right, they're all man, may they're all man created.

So therefore we can choose who gets the rights. And that's when you make the implications of that clear. So then rights depend on who's in power.

They're not rights then. They're just preferences of whoever's in power. That's all they are.

Well, they're not certainly not transcendent rights. And that's the way people are trying to argue. And incidentally, unless you have transcendent rights, you have no grounds to argue against existing conditions.

You can't say, look at this circumstance, heterosexual marriage only, that is not right. Well, what are you appealing to when you say that is not right? What you're thinking is this culture is the one that decides it will culture decided. That's the end of the issue.

No, there's always this subtle appeal to transcendent rights when there is no foundation grounding for making sense of transcendent rights in their naturalistic world. By the way, we keep using this word grounding and ground and hopefully inductively you're getting the sense of it. But just think of it as the place that you are standing on solidly when you make the claim as opposed to feet firmly planted in mid-air, so to speak.

Where do you stand where you can make this claim that there are obligations that apply to everybody? Well, our grounding is in God. He seems to be an appropriate, at least in principle appropriate authority. And Amy's right.

They could go the other way. If there is no God, then there is none of this stuff. And as people can't get away from that because there is a God and this is God's world and it's thick with morality and people know it because they have faculties that allow them to pursue it and understand it and perceive it.

And this is why they can't stop talking about it, even though their worldview doesn't allow them to make any sense of it. Okay, Greg, I'm going to squeeze another question here. So we get two questions.

Daring. Okay. This one comes from Nathan.

I've heard it said that, quote, "We come from God and we will go back to God." Is this an accurate statement? If we are eternal in Christ, does that mean we don't have a beginning or is this just a form of mindism? Yeah, well, the reference to mindism is the word that I use to describe Eastern, a general concept of Eastern religion in the book that I wrote called The Story of Reality. Excuse me, I don't know if it's actually a form of

mindism the way most people use it. Maybe it is.

When they said, "We came from God and we go back to God," I guess that is, characteristically, because on that view, there's only one thing that exists and that is the divine essence and God, if you will. And everything else is just a manifestation of the divine essence. It's Maya, it's an illusion.

And we are part of that illusion. And what we came from, we as illusory beings, along with every other thing that's physical or just came from God and we will go back to God because strictly speaking, the only thing that really exists is God, the mind. That's classic Hinduism, Vedantic Hinduism.

Other views share some of these ideas. As Christians, though, the "came from God" and "going to God" are phrases that sound similar like they're in parallel, but there's an equivocation here because we mean "came from" in a different way of going to. We don't mean an avenue of approach and retreat.

We were with God and we come from Him to the earth and then we return to Him to heaven. Now, we came from God in that He created us, ex nihilo, or He created the creation, ex nihilo, and then He put together a system by which human beings are created, which includes body and soul. Right, so we came from God, we owe our existence to God, and we personally came into existence as a result of God's purposes, and we will eventually go to where He is to forever be in a relationship with Him and a friendship with Him.

So our beginnings were finite and we will never end. We will never live for an eternity, strictly speaking, going to eternity or living to eternity is a mis-way of speaking. Is that a phrase? Not a name, so I can't call it a misnomer, but it's a misconception.

We just will live forever and ever and ever. So we are not eternal, but we will always have an age. You'll always have a birthday.

Mine's coming up in a couple of days. But our existence will never end. So I think that's the key.

We come from God in that He is our Creator. We go to Him in relationship with Him, to be in friendship with Him forever, in the world He makes for us, heaven and earth. But in the mindism or the Eastern religion sense, there is only one thing.

There isn't you and God. There's just God who's impersonal and all the things that seem to be particulars are just part of the illusion. And so the illusion comes out and the illusion goes back in.

You come from God, you're going to God. But you know the word nirvana, I think the word dawatah means extinction. And so the idea is you just get lost into the Godhead

again.

So it isn't like you're enjoying heaven, you're just gone and you're gone because you're never were there to begin with, you were just an illusion. There's other problems with this. I do talk about it in the book, the story of reality devoted to it, but I think you're onto something there, Nathan.

And I think since this depends kind of on an equification that both Christians and somebody who's not a Christian could say this, what's most important is that you ask again, we're back to Colombo, what do you mean by that? Find out if they mean that we came from God as a place or if God began our existence. Both those things they could mean and one way is, I think true and one way I think is false so you can't know until you ask. Well thank you for your questions.

We love hearing from you. Send those on Twitter with the hashtag #SDRAsk or you can go to our website. Just go to our hashtag #SDRAskPage and you'll find a link to submit a question, but you have to keep it short.

I'm just reminding you again, it has to be tweet size, which is 280 characters. So keep it short, we'd love to hear from you and maybe you'll hear your question on hashtag #SDRAsk. This is Amy Holland, Greg Cockel for Stand to Reason.

[Music]