



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Articles

## WHERE GOD IS NOT

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In a 1948 debate, Frederick Copleston asked Bertrand Russell to explain how to differentiate right from wrong. Russell said that he did it the same way he distinguished between yellow and blue. Copleston replied that Russell's analogy was flawed because color distinction is based on seeing. When he asked his question again, Russell said he decided right from wrong based on feelings.

After sharing that exchange, Ravi Zacharias noted that Copleston could have followed up this way: "In some cultures they love their neighbors, in others they eat them. Would Russell have had a preference?" (*A Shattered Visage: The Real Face of Atheism*, 55).

I suspect that, had he lived where people ate their neighbors, Russell would have had a preference! I have the same suspicion about his fellow atheists Jean Sartre and Friedrich Nietzsche. But if they were consistent with their worldview, a preference was their only option. They rejected belief in a personal God whose nature and/or commands (the emphasis varies in different theistic formulations) provide the basis and standard for determining right from wrong.

Sartre admitted that believing God does not exist left him "forlorn" (see "Existential Atheism," in William Sahakian, ed., *Philosophies of Religion*, 121). He also said that everything is permitted, declaring, "It is forbidden to forbid." Historian Paul Johnson showed where that view can lead, noting that some of Sartre's disciples were following the implications of his views as they orchestrated horrible atrocities in Cambodia in the 1970s (see Zacharias, 57-58).

Nietzsche, whose writings "Hitler took ... as his philosophical blueprint" (Zacharias, 59), declared, "When one gives up the Christian faith, one pulls the right to Christian morality out from under one's feet." He called Jesus' beatitudes "a damning approach to life for they emphasize the responsibility of man toward the poor and weak of society. According to Nietzsche, a society driven by such an ethic ... is controlled by losers" (Zacharias, 49).

Not all who profess atheism countenance immoral, abusive, or brutal behavior. And it is true that atrocities have been perpetrated in the name of Christianity. But professing Christians are rightly condemned for not conforming to the tenets of their professed faith whereas atheists who do whatever they see fit act consistently with the implications of their view. As Zacharias wrote, "morality as goodness cannot be justified with atheistic presuppositions" (Zacharias, 61).

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The apostle Paul pointed to the same problem 2,000 years ago when he connected a refusal to acknowledge the one true God to behavior that was “filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil [and] malice” (Rom 1:28-32).

Ideas have consequences. We should remember that when we choose what we will read, listen to, and watch. We can also point it out to those we meet whose own ideas have been influenced, however unknowingly, by opinion leaders who see moral choices as indistinguishable from feelings.

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