

Religious notions of evil and moral notions of evil are not mutually exclusive

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This paper defines religion, morality and evil, and explains how religion and morality are compatible and have similar characteristics. Despite the compatibility, they also have their differences but this does not make them mutually exclusive in my opinion. This paper also makes use of 'Love and Law' by Alison Gopnik to explain the commensurability between religious and moral notions of evil. Gopnik explains the mind of a child and how children are innately empathetic. She shows how morality is grounded by empathy and creative examples and scenarios. Religion is a specific set of beliefs and practices that are generally agreed upon by a number of people. These set of people are devoted to these practices. Religion is very complex and includes social institution and morality. People who do not belief in religion sometimes label it as superstitious. Many religions categorize evil under sin and believe that evil exists from mankind rebelling against God. There is an assumption that man has freewill and as such, he has the choice of doing good or evil without intervention from God. Religious groups and moral philosophers have similar criteria for vehement condemnation of evil doers. Morality, in a descriptive sense, refers to the values, norms and code of conducts that determine right or wrong. Wrong doings are considered to be morally wrong. Evil is known to cause harm and can be triggered by anger or irascibility. Religion and morality are closely intertwined and inseparable. Majority of people who believe in God are likely to have respect and concern people than those who do not. Those who have no religious philosophy usually have different moral viewpoints. Morality does not require religion

but religion requires morality. Morality can stand alone without the influence of religion and still have good effects. I believe religious and moral notions of evil can be interchanged. Without religion, almost everything is permissible. Moral standards are derived from many religious beliefs put together for the society. Many religions have different views on evil with respect to its origin, nature and end, such that it is impossible to give a definite religious notion of evil. Christianity believes that evil is derived when one misuses God's resources by following the wrong directions. Some other religions believe that matter and embodied existence, are evil and as a result, humans inevitably cannot refrain from doing evil. The only difference between morality and religion is that in morality, the notion of breaking a rule and causing harm is understood by the individual. Whereas, in religion, one does not necessarily have to understand the set rules in order to follow them. One simply has to follow them without question. It is also possible for an individual to adjust his moral philosophy but it is not possible for religious believers to change the set rules of their religion. People chose their religions depending on how the particular religious philosophy matches their moral beliefs because they feel they understand that religion better. Some moral standards go against religious moral standards but the general religious moral standards are similar to that of the laws and norms of the society. According to Gopnik, innate morality starts right from childhood (Gopnik 2009). It is almost impossible to lose religion and keep morality. Gopnik makes use of babies and young children to explain the issue of morality. She says it might be possible to see signs of moral intuitions in young children contrary to other philosopher's views of learning morality which is having no

prior or genuine moral knowledge. Gopnik demonstrates the link between empathy and morality by explaining how children imitate and show empathy. Like adults, anger and revenge impulses are also shown in children. By imitating facial expressions, newborns somehow map expressions to feelings. Newborns also understand desires and intentions (Gopnik 2009). Gopnik uses all these examples to show that empathy grounds morality. Love and Law addresses the attachment between mother and child. Mothers feel their baby's pain and the babies also feel their mother's pain. The moral intensity between mother and child can be compared to the moral intensity between norms and the society. This intensity can also be compared in religion and religious believers. Empathy is intertwined with morality and religious rules are set by empathetic beings. Babies show appreciation to their mothers for their care. God also rewards and sacrifices when religious believers behave morally. As babies imitate their mothers, religious believers also imitate God's rules. Reciprocation is a factor in this example. Gopnik also compares child psychopaths to normal children. This can be used as comparison to religious believers and evil doers. Child psychopaths do not show the reactive aggression that typical children show just as religious evil doers are known to react to events differently from firm believers who hardly do any wrong (Gopnik 2009). Just as babies try hard to help someone else, believers try hard not to offend their superior by obeying their commandments. These children who act in genuinely moral ways also make genuinely moral judgments and this can be seen in a religious situation. Gopnik uses ethical theories in philosophy for better understanding of morality; she makes use of utilitarian and deontological ethics to explain the

" trolley" debate. This debate is used to explain how ordinary people sometimes act like utilitarian's and sometimes like deontologists, all with the motive of attaining moral goals. Religious believers extend moral concern to people who don't share their religious views, just as other human beings deny moral concern to people who are not like them. The article better explains this with the use of young children. They classify human beings into groups like gender, race and language. Young children show explicit and implicit preferences for people who they think are similar to them. Even when adults teach them not to treat people differently, they unconsciously do (Gopnik 2009). This scenario can also be seen in religious settings. Gopnik says that classifying other people into groups gives us a way to decide how to extend our empathy (Gopnik 2009). Just as our moral intuitions tell us the difference between right or wrong, having a religion helps one maintain these moral intuitions. Someone without a religious belief tends to follow the rules of their prior religious belief or of another religious belief if they had no prior one. Religion and moral notions of evil have more similarities than differences. They work hand in hand to create generally accepted rules and norms. Gopnik explains how morality and empathy are intertwined. Empathy is necessary for morality and can sometimes interfere with the ends of morality. Religious believers show extreme empathy because of the nature of religion in comparison to non-believers. This is why Religious notions of evil and moral notions of evil are coextensive. BIBLIOGRAPHY Gopnik, Alison. Love and Law: The Origins of Morality. In The Philosophical Baby: What Children's Minds Tell us About Truth, Love, and the Meaning of Life. New York: Farrar, Straux and Giroux, 2009. ----- [1].

Alison Gopnik, Love and Law: The Origins of Morality, In *The Philosophical Baby: What Children's Minds Tell us About Truth, Love, and the Meaning of Life*, (New York: Farrar, Straux and Giroux, 2009), 203-233.