

Morality Transcends Religious Belief

The argument is sometimes made that morals are a by-product of, or otherwise contingent upon religion (or God). Much data suggests that morality transcends religion or religious belief; here's a small sample:

Great moralists

Here is a short list of great, morally-minded individuals who were/are agnostic or never joined a religion. They were/are motivated not by God or religion but rather by 1) concern for the well-being of their fellow man and 2) principle.

- [Jawaharlal Nehru](#) (Hindu agnostic) - wrote India's declaration of Independence; first prime minister of free India; incredible moral leader imprisoned many times for his political activism. Here's [an example of his moral thinking](#).
- [Ayaan Hirsi Ali](#) (atheist) - leading opponent of female genital mutilation and Islam reformer.
- [Edward Snowden](#) (agnostic) - a person may disagree with how he acted, but he acted from a sense of moral duty and at great personal sacrifice (and potential loss of life).
- Abraham Lincoln (called an infidel by some in his younger days; drifted closer to religion as his life progressed, but never joined a Church) freed the slaves, acting primarily in opposition to the [religiously buttressed institution of slavery](#).
- [Pat Tillman](#) (atheist) - left an NFL career to join the military.

Scientific studies

Several scientific studies suggest that the non-religious are as moral in everyday life as the religious.

- [Morality in everyday life. Science 2014](#) - "Religious and nonreligious participants did not differ in the likelihood or quality of committed moral and immoral acts."
- [The Negative Association between Religiousness and Children's Altruism across the World. Current Biology 2015 \(summary\)](#) "Across all countries, parents in religious households reported that their children expressed more empathy and sensitivity for justice in everyday life than non-religious parents. However, religiousness was inversely predictive of children's altruism and positively correlated with their punitive tendencies."

Philosophy

Atheist philosophers regularly argue for moral realism (i.e., morals are real) and that we should be moral people.

- [How Morality Has the Objectivity that Matters—Without God](#)
- [The Case for Objective Morality](#)
- [Morality without religion](#)
- [Arguments about atheism and morality on Quora.](#)
- Sam Harris discussions:
 - [What is moral progress](#)
 - [Being good and doing good](#)
 - [The virtues of cold blood](#)

Conclusion

The data suggests that atheists and agnostics often make great moral leaders, tend to act morally in day-to-day life in a manner similar to religious people, and routinely promote moral thinking. While it is true that some atheists promote reductionistic and nihilistic philosophies (which tend to align with a-moral and immoral thinking) they are not representative of most atheists and agnostics.

The Dalai Lama [offered this perspective](#):

All the world's religions, with their emphasis on love, compassion, patience, tolerance and forgiveness, can and do promote inner values. But the reality of the world today is that grounding ethics in religion is no longer adequate. This is why I am increasingly convinced that the time has come to find a way of thinking about spirituality and ethics beyond religion altogether.