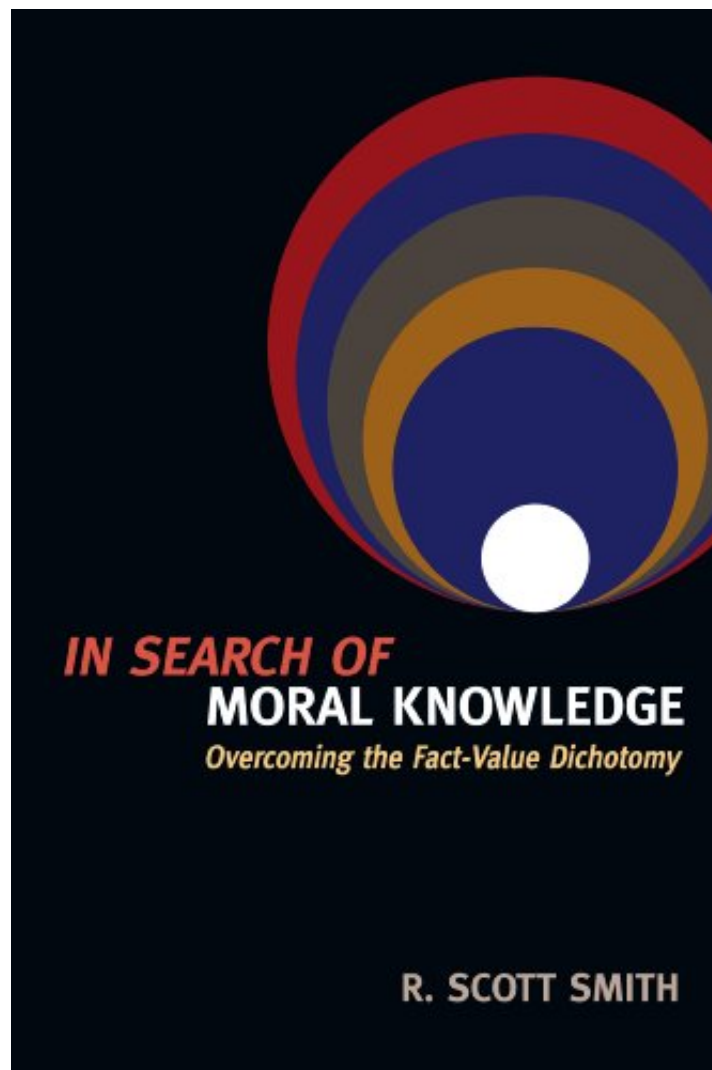


In Search of Moral Knowledge: Overcoming the Fact-Value Dichotomy

by

R. Scott Smith



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Synopsis

For most of the church's history, people have seen Christian ethics as normative and universally applicable. Recently, however, this view has been lost, thanks to naturalism and relativism. R. Scott Smith argues that Christians need to overcome Kant's fact-value dichotomy and recover the possibility of genuine moral and theological knowledge.

Sort review

"Scott Smith, carefully and consciously, with philosophical rigor and clarity of word, offers a defense of moral knowledge that is tightly tethered to more ancient, and Christian, understandings of the good, the true and the beautiful. The result is a compelling case for why philosophical naturalism, including its cousin, nominalism, must be rejected by anyone who sincerely seeks after moral knowledge. Smith's greatest accomplishment in this book, however, is the way in which he interacts, at a high level, with contemporary philosophical schools of thought and ancient traditions in a way fully accessible to the educated layman and college student."-- Francis J. Beckwith, Baylor University

"While ancient and medieval philosophy agrees with Scripture that moral knowledge is possible, the fallout of both modernism and postmodernism is a debilitating moral skepticism. Against this, Smith shows these worldviews to be self-defeating, and defends an ontology of embodied souls and moral essences grounded in God, which rehabilitates the idea of moral knowledge. Anyone dismayed by our culture's creeping nihilism will be encouraged by this important, insightful and timely study."-- Angus Menuge, president of the Evangelical Philosophical Society

"Building on arguments advanced in his two earlier books, R. Scott Smith makes a powerful, carefully reasoned case for real knowledge of the world, moral values and principles. Along the way he presents an insightful history of Western ethics designed to show the many ways in which ethics has gone wrong, especially in separating itself from factual moral knowledge, resulting in today's relativistic approach to knowledge in general and to moral knowledge in particular. Arguing further that moral knowledge cannot be grounded in any form of naturalistic metaphysics, Smith contends that objective moral values (virtues) and principles (duties) must be transcendently grounded in the character of God, specifically the God of biblical revelation, finally the God of Christianity. Smith writes precisely and persuasively but not dogmatically, and clearly invites and often articulates counterarguments at every turn. The book sets the standard for anyone who is drawn to affirm a universal ethic grounded in the character of God."-- John P. Crossley, Jr., University of Southern California

"Scott Smith has done an admirable job of surveying the ethical landscape both past and present. And he both challenges various forms of relativism and naturalism that are so corrosive to moral knowledge and quite effectively dismantles the commonly assumed arguments for the fact-value split. Also, he carefully constructs a case for the foundations of moral knowledge. In doing so, he offers much-needed wise guidance in an era that increasingly

calls such knowledge into question."-- Paul Copan, Palm Beach Atlantic University

"R. Scott Smith's *In Search of Moral Knowledge* brilliantly argues that objective moral knowledge is possible and that this kind of knowledge is grounded in the character of the Christian God. This bold assertion runs counter to much of what is widely accepted in contemporary ethical scholarship. But Smith is undaunted. He meticulously explores origins of contemporary relativistic ethical theories (in which the so-called 'fact-value split' is fundamental), and he claims that these theories simply cannot stand up to close philosophical scrutiny. *In Search of Moral Knowledge* will be used by ethical theorists and students for a long time. Smith builds on a deep knowledge of the history of ethical thought. But his straightforward writing style assures that his arguments will be accessible to people who are just beginning to reflect seriously on their own moral experience."-- John Orr, emeritus professor of religion, University of Southern California

"Over the years, Scott Smith has, time and time again, demonstrated deep insight into the underlying causes of our contemporary cultural chaos. In *In Search of Moral Knowledge*, he has, once again, put his finger on the pulse of the fount of society's moral ills. Smith rightly points out that moral knowledge, and not merely moral belief, is what is needed to live a proper life and form a virtuous society. And he locates the denial of moral knowledge in the views of reality promoted by various extant lines of thought. This is no mere ethics text, examining moral issue after moral issue. This is one of the few books by an evangelical that lays bare the underlying metaphysics and epistemology that generate the various streams of moral thinking today. This should be a text in any ethics class, and I wish for it a wide distribution."-- J. P. Moreland, Distinguished Professor of Philosophy, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, and author of *Love Your God With All Your Mind*

"Scott Smith has produced a powerful new tool for Christian moral apologetics. He clarifies the veracity and strength of received moral wisdom both Christian and classical. He exposes the self-defeating vacuous nature of contemporary moral illusions. And he defends the objective reality of known moral truth grounded in the one true God and accessible to all bearing the *imago Dei* regardless of culture, feeling or locality. I will use this book with my students and urge others do the same."-- Daniel Heimbach, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

"Smith definitely contributes to the discussion of the merits of realism (that is, the legitimacy of exploring dualism), of overcoming the fact-value divide (that is, ethics is grounded in reality), and of critiquing the unwarranted dominance of naturalism (that is, it cannot fully account for knowledge). For these reasons, Smith's book should be read."-- Dennis Sansom, *Christian Scholar's Review*, XLIV:4, Summer 2015

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About the Author

R. Scott Smith (PhD, University of Southern California) is associate professor of ethics and Christian apologetics at Biola University. He is the author of *Virtue Ethics and Moral Knowledge: Philosophy of Language After MacIntyre and Hauerwas* (Ashgate), *Truth and the New Kind of Christian* (Crossway) and *Naturalism and our Knowledge of Reality* (Ashgate).

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What people say about this book

Jacob Brown, "A very timely book in our postmodernism saturated society.. R. Scott Smith takes you on a journey through the history of ethical theories and demonstrates that the ethical theories preceding the modern and post modern period allow for Moral Knowledge, and how the fact-value dichotomy that became prevalent in the modern and postmodern period has eroded the basis of moral knowledge.He then presents several powerful lines of argument for moral realism and argues that to possess knowledge, let alone moral knowledge a substantial immaterial self is necessary. The book is in essence an extended moral argument, it argues postmodern "aspectual" ethical theories are inadequate ways to conceive of morality. Instead he argues that we do have knowledge of moral truths that are metaphysically real, universal, and objective. That fact is best explained by morals being metaphysically abstract, universal moral properties that are ultimately grounded in God's Character.I highly recommend this book."

Miss U., "Excellent Guide on the History of Ethics. Dr. Smith does an excellent job summarizing the progression of moral thought from the Ancient Near East through Postmodernism. This book is a must-read for anyone who desires an in-depth understanding of how we got where we are today and what we must do to return to a solid understanding of morals as objective, universal truths."

M. Farnham, "Exceptional quality and service. The book was in pristine condition and the seller kindly sent a free bonus book on a related topic. Amazing! Will definitely buy again!"

LisaQThinks, "The age of relativism is alive and well not only The age of relativism is alive and well not only in Westernized culture, but in many of our churches, too. Why? This book explains it well."

Ebook Tops Reader, "Overall this is a great book for understanding the arguments of absolute moral truth. Overall this is a great book for understanding the arguments of absolute moral truth. The examples at the end of each chapter help to point out the failings of postmodernist arguments against absolute truth and the existence of a Creator."

Ebook Tops Reader, "Deep Study of the Moral Argument. I wish to thank IVP for providing a copy of this book for a review first off. I find the moral argument to be a highly interesting argument. Now my own variation of it is that I prefer to use the fourth way of Aquinas and have it be the argument from goodness of which morality is a subsection of that. Yet insofar as it goes, the moral argument works fine and Smith has given an impressive tour de force on this.Smith starts off with the history of how we got to this point in understanding morality today. He starts with the Bible and what is found in both testaments. He then goes on to look at the work of Plato and Aristotle and takes us through the medieval period and then through many of the great

philosophers of the Enlightenment period and beyond and even goes up to interacting with postmodern looks at morality. At this point, there can be no doubt that Smith has done his research and done it well. Smith also seeks to be as fair as he can with those whom he is dialoguing with. He admits that he has made errors in understanding past opponents at times and tries to read their works in light of all that they are saying. Smith indeed shows impressive scholarship in the field. At this point, I do think it's important to let the reader know that I think he will need more than a layman's understanding of the field to get the most out of this book. Smith in the end concludes that naturalistic theories not only do not account for moral knowledge, but that they do not account for any knowledge whatsoever. This is true in whatever case he looks at as each position begs certain questions. There is also the problem that many of them deny essences and for Smith, a physicalist explanation of the nature of man is just incapable of being able to provide knowledge. We have to have essences of some sort. Smith then roots the knowledge that we have in God. The book ends in the last chapter with a more apologetic approach looking at various issues such as the case for the resurrection of Jesus and the problem of evil. No doubt, each of these is brief and I would have liked to have seen even more in some areas at least in terms of other works that were cited since these would be out of the field that Smith is normally writing in which is fine. There were a few points on each section that I would disagree with, but they do not detract overall as Smith does provide excellent sources still in each case, though as I said I would have liked still more. One main problem I would have liked to have addressed that rarely is is that I do not often see a definition of good given. It is as if we assume when we get together and debate what is good and what is evil that we all know what these terms really mean. In fact, this is the first question I usually raise when I debate moral issues with someone. I agree with Smith of course that love and justice are good and that murder, rape, and torturing babies for fun is wrong. Yet when I say "X is good" what do I mean? Still, in the end, I think Smith's work is an excellent one that will certainly leave much food for thought. For anyone who is wanting to deal with the moral argument, mark this down as essential reading. In Christ, Nick Peters
Deeper Waters Christian Ministries"

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