

Whose Ethics? Whose Point?

Posted on **May 20, 2010** by **Baron Bodissey**

Jack Marshall, who is a professional ethicist and blogs at [Ethics Alarms](#), has posted [his response](#), “An Unethical and Pointless Exercise”, to my [opening salvo](#) at [Public Square](#).

The post hasn’t been confirmed, so I don’t have a permalink yet. But here’s what I said in my riposte. Update: The permalink is [here](#).

Whose Ethics? Whose Point?

I’ll tackle some of Mr. Marshall’s assertions in detail, but first we need to define our terms.

I’m totally ignorant concerning the discipline of the ethicist, but I have extensive experience in logic and mathematics. In those two disciplines one must clearly state one’s premises — which may be postulates that are considered true without the necessity of proof, or theorems that are logically derived from postulates and previous theorems (which can be cited as required). A process of syllogism or symbolic demonstration is applied to these premises to produce a new result, which may then be used as the premise of a future argument.



A number of undefined words in Mr. Marshall’s response carry emotionally charged meanings. I won’t tackle all of them here, but the most prominent example needs to be addressed.

Wrong. Something unethical is undoubtedly wrong. But what does “wrong” mean?

Everybody knows what it means — “doing something bad or immoral or unethical.” Whoops: circular logic here. But circular logic is virtually unavoidable in this case. A definition of the word is merely a list of synonyms.

Even so, everybody knows what “wrong” means, in the same way they know what “love” and “duty” mean.

But how does an ethicist prove that any given behavior is “wrong”?

1. Does he cite the words of the Bible or other scripture?
2. Does he refer the reader to the Constitution ? Or the Magna Carta? Or maybe *Danmarks Riges Grundlov*?

3. Does he put the matter to a federal judge?
4. How about a majority vote? If more than fifty percent of the population considers an act “wrong”, is it in fact wrong?

I happen to believe that state-sanctioned marriage of persons of the same sex is wrong. Of the above criteria, #1 supports my judgment. The latest opinion polls, at least in the United States, show that #4 also makes my case. #2 is generally silent on the issue, and in most cases #3 seems to go against me.

So who is “wrong” in this case?

Thus the word is incoherent in context, even when used here by a professional ethicist to discredit my statements:

Baron’s explanation of the rationale behind the event is eloquent, logical, historically correct — and still dead **wrong** in its conclusions. [emphasis added]

Mr. Marshall: don’t just *tell* our readers that I am wrong. *Demonstrate* it.

And so he does, going on to make further assertions. But how well-supported are these? How many emotionally-charged terms are defined? And are his arguments free of logical fallacy?

Let’s take a look.

“Everybody Draw Muhammad Day” is self-important grandstanding, and nothing else.

Begging the Question is a common fallacy in which the premises include the claim that the conclusion is true or (directly or indirectly) assume that the conclusion is true. This sort of “reasoning” typically has the following form:

- Premises in which the truth of the conclusion is claimed or the truth of the conclusion is assumed (either directly or indirectly).
- Claim C (the conclusion) is true.
- This sort of “reasoning” is fallacious because simply assuming that the conclusion is true (directly or indirectly) in the premises does not constitute evidence for that conclusion. Obviously, simply assuming a claim is true does not serve as evidence for that claim. This is especially clear in particularly blatant cases: “X is true. The evidence for this claim is that X is true.”

I’m sure many of its supporters think otherwise, but it is an exercise that does harm without doing anything productive to counterbalance the harm, a good definition of unethical conduct.

The first assertion includes the fallacy of mind-reading: it presumes to know the motivations of others without offering any evidence. But we’ll put that aside for the moment.

What is the proof for the second assertion?

Here are some contrary assertions, which are at least as plausible, and easier to demonstrate:

- It does good if it alerts people to the shutting down of free speech.
- It does good if it permits people to respond to the attacks on free speech by the well-known and useful device of ridicule.

Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" worked its "good" by bringing to public awareness the plight of those starving in the Irish famine.

Everybody Draw Mohammed Day serves the common good in the same way.

Free speech will not disappear suddenly by edict, it will be eroded *when good people say nothing*.

Ridicule and satire are time-honored devices for pointing out knotty problems.

I was shocked at the cowardice of Comedy Central, as well as its hypocrisy. Here was the edgy, fearless, speak-truth-to-power-with-a smile cable channel refusing to defend the Constitutional principles that make its existence possible. It was afraid. Well, *tough*. That's part of your job if you are going to operate on the edge of convention. Comedy Central was following in the chicken-footsteps of most American newspapers, which similarly refused to show the Danish cartoons, falsely claiming that it wasn't necessary to do so to report the story. Our beef is with them, not the Nation of Islam. A useful demonstration would have been to pressure Comedy Central to show the entire, uncut, South Park episode. I believe that still should be done.

Instead, "Everybody Draw Muhammad Day" is occurring under the dubious logic that it bolsters the First Amendment and shows that American won't be intimidated.

Explain to our readers why the logic behind EDMD is more "dubious" than that of "pressur[ing] Comedy Central to show the entire, uncut, South Park episode". Why, precisely, is the logic of one more "dubious" than the other?

"Dubious" is another one of those pesky undefined terms. Please define "dubious" in this context.

One definition of dubious is "of doubtful provenance or veracity." Who doubted the provenance or veracity of the logic of Everybody Draw Mohammed Day? Under what premises? Are you able to give citations?

There are many thousands of people who disagree with your assertion, and many of those employ lucid and cogent logical arguments to support their case. Which of those are "dubious"? Can you cite any specific examples, and outline your logical case against them?

Referring to my assertion of what EDMD means to its supporters as an expression of the unalienable right to free speech, Mr. Marshall says:

It doesn't say that ["This is our right, and it cannot be taken away from us!"] at all. It says: "*We are really brave in exercising our rights when we have hundreds of allies*"

around us doing the same thing. Our mobs are not afraid of your mobs.” Big deal.

That’s what it says to *you*, Mr. Marshall. But other people experience it differently.

And not all of the “Draw Mohammed” people are protected by a “mob”. Lars Vilks has no “mob”; he stands all but unprotected against whatever his enemies choose to throw at him. Kurt Westergaard is protected by an expensive security detail provided by the Danish government. Do you consider that a “mob”?

I consider the word “mob” to be a loaded term. It is applied indiscriminately to those with whom the writer disagrees. Progressives regularly use the word “mob” to denigrate and demonize conservatives and tea party attendees. It serves to wrap their opponents in a blanket of disapproval which smothers what they have to say and discounts all the valid points they raise.

The use of the word “mob” by a *New York Times* editorialist is understandable — but by an *ethicist*? How does the use of such loaded terminology enhance the discourse or promote understanding between conflicting groups?

“Let’s Gratuitously Insult All Muslims Day” won’t change a thing when corporate suits and newspaper publishers get cold feet in the face of some *jihadist* threat.

This is almost certainly true. But why does that make it *unethical*?

Are the ethics of an action decided by its predicted utility or its success in practice?

Does this mean that the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution was ethically valid, whereas the 1989 protest in Tiananmen Square was not?

Manufacturing a fake demonstration of First Amendment boldness won’t make the real guardians of our rights do their jobs.

Who decides the identity of the “real guardians of our rights” where free speech is concerned?

Who decides that the job done by these “real guardians of our rights” is adequate to the occasion?

If the various portals of public discourse are ignoring “their jobs” then it is up to individuals to guard their rights.

The genesis of EDMD wasn’t “manufactured”. That’s old thinking. It was an off-hand (and now regretted) post by a woman who was disgusted by the cave-in by Comedy Central. Her idea to “Draw Mohammed” went viral, despite her misgivings.

And that is the new thinking — that is, ideas go viral because of technological advances in communication. Thus, these “real guardians” have less say about what is permitted to be voiced. Unless, of course, you live in Pakistan, where the “real guardians” will simply close Facebook and YouTube.

The page objecting to the EDMD had more “friending” than did the Drawing page. So both sides of the argument are being aired.

What was in fact “manufactured” was the original Danish Mohammed cartoon crisis. A Danish imam named Abu Laban took the cartoons to the Middle East with the express purpose of rousing fellow Muslims to righteous fury. To make sure he achieved his objective, he added three extra cartoons that were much more incendiary than the original twelve. To make matters worse, some of them weren’t even intended to be images of Mohammed.

Now *that’s* a “manufactured” crisis.

And it won’t discourage the Muslim extremists from making the threats. The Danish cartoonist was challenging censorship in the Danish government... a brave, important and valuable act. Nobody’s trying to censor the U.S. cartoonists — unless a threat from a Muslim group makes them lose their nerve, as well as their dedication to free speech.

Nothing appears to discourage Muslim extremists. But that’s not sufficient argument to stay silent in the face of their insults and depredations. Western culture is worth fighting for.

The American cartoonists are as censored as reality can make them. A threat from a Muslim group should be taken seriously; we have many examples of murder and mayhem against Americans beginning in the 1980s and continuing today.

A threat from a Muslim group should be taken seriously by people in the public eye. Salman Rushdie, Theo Van Gogh, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Geert Wilders, etc., can all testify to the expense of having to protect oneself against Islamic radicals.

Dr. Gary Hull is an ethicist at Duke University. He is a professional ethicist, which means that “...for a living... he thinks about, writes, and teaches how we determine what is right and wrong”. Dr. Hull also publishes. When Yale University Press pulled the Mohammed images from a book *about* the Mohammed images, Dr. Hull courageously had them printed in a volume entitled *Muhammad: The Banned Images*.

Did you sign “The Statement of Principle, On Free Speech vs. Violence” which many others signed?

Is Yale University Press one of the “guardians”? What price did they pay for their sudden decision to pull the images?

Meanwhile, “Let’s Make Muslims Hate Americans More Than They Do Already Day” sticks a collective finger in the eye of peaceful, respectful Muslims who just want their religion to be respected on their terms and left alone.

This assertion contains several dubious premises.

The “collective finger in the eye” of Islam I will stipulate to. Yes, this is true, and that’s what EDMD was intended to do.

But where is your evidence that most adherents of Islam are “peaceful, respectful Muslims who just want their religion to be respected on their terms and left alone”?

What data can you cite?

Most Muslims are indeed “peaceful”, in the sense that they refrain from habitual violence and don’t become suicide bombers or jihad warriors. But if they are faithful Muslims, they must pay a specified portion of their wealth in *zakat* (Islamic alms) which is explicitly required to fund jihad as stipulated by Islamic law, backed up by the Koran and the hadith and corroborated by the highest religious authorities in Saudi Arabia and Al-Azhar University.

This means that faithful Muslims are “peaceful” in the same way Krupp’s investors were “peaceful” during World War Two: most of them never fired a shot against the enemy.

Furthermore, public opinion polls, including several carried out in Britain, indicate that *a plurality of Muslims support the methods of Salafist terrorists, and a substantial majority support their stated goals.*

The problem is much larger than who is “peaceful” and who isn’t. And huge threatening demonstrations against people who draw cartoons help focus the minds of Westerners against the growing danger to their freedoms and their well-being.

For those who resist the Jihad, whether or not most Muslims are “peaceful” is irrelevant. It’s a diversion from what should be our primary concern.

It’s too much **to demand**, but it is not too much *to ask*. Because we are indignant about Muslim thugs threatening our comedy shows, we choose to set out to insult all Muslims, saying “Deal with it!” Is this vengeance? *That’s* not ethical. Is it hurting people because we can? *That’s* not ethical either.

This is framed incorrectly. It’s another example of Begging the Question (see above). It asserts as a premise that we “choose to insult all Muslims”, from which the conclusion is derived in advance.

We have chosen to engage in a behavior which we realize may insult Muslims. But being insulted by a cartoon is *their* choice, not ours.

I submit that we are offering them a chance *not* to be insulted. We are giving them the opportunity to respect the freedom of non-Muslims, and thereby demonstrate that they are willing to conform to the norms of a civilized society.

If they choose not to practice such restraint and respect, then that is their choice, and we all lose something by their actions.

But we lose even more if we continue to demonstrate a cowardly submission in the face of threats, bullying, and intimidation.

If Comedy Central had shown a spine and followed through on its duty of citizenship, we wouldn’t be having “Let’s Spit On One of The World’s Great Religions Day,” would

we? So every Muslim in the world has to put up with random Americans insulting their sacred icons because Comedy Central is gutless.

This is plainly incorrect. Comedy Central's newfound spine would have had zero effect on Lars Vilks, or Kurt Westergaard, or Jussi Halla-aho, or Lionheart... Need I go on?

Non-Muslims in Western countries are being beaten, harassed, bullied, threatened, ostracized, and arrested *every day* for committing various offenses against the tender feelings of Muslims.

A sudden show of courage by Comedy Central will have no effect whatsoever on the plight of those who are currently being victimized by Islam.

What *will* have an effect is a mass grassroots initiative to reclaim the freedoms that are being trampled underfoot in the name of "cultural sensitivity".

Which is exactly what is happening today. Today we take back our rights.

The price of liberty is eternal vigilance. We have renewed the vigil.

That's not fair. That's not ethical. That's wrong.

Three undefined terms. This is too incoherent for me to address.

I stand with Lars Vilks, so I'll just say this: "Draw the dog again!"

This entry was posted in **Uncategorized** by **Baron Bodissey**. Bookmark the **permalink** [<https://gatesofvienna.net/2010/05/whose-ethics-whose-point/>].

5 THOUGHTS ON "WHOSE ETHICS? WHOSE POINT?"



filthykafir

on **May 20, 2010 at 7:50 pm** said:

Baron, my admiration and my gratitude grow with every post you make on this subject. You speak for me in ways I've neither the literary nor logical competence to achieve. Thank you, again.

For a person supposedly trained in philosophy, the "ethicist" seems to have missed — or dropped — the course in logic.



Zenster



on **May 20, 2010 at 8:16 pm** said:

Baron, thank you so much for deconstructing Marshall's error-riddled riposte. I posted an immediate reply at Public Square because of how offensive and contrived his comment was. Your point by point refutation goes well beyond my own rejection of, what I considered to be, his most egregious proclamation about EDMD being "... a collective finger in the eye of peaceful, respectful Muslims who just want their religion to be respected on their terms and left alone." There was so much wrong about just that one paragraph I almost did not know where to start.

I also wanted to applaud your following historical background:

What was in fact "manufactured" was the original Danish Mohammed cartoon crisis. A Danish imam named Abu Laban took the cartoons to the Middle East with the express purpose of rousing fellow Muslims to righteous fury. To make sure he achieved his objective, he added three extra cartoons that were much more incendiary than the original twelve. To make matters worse, some of them weren't even intended to be images of Mohammed.

Now that's a "manufactured" crisis.

The entire Cartoonifada was stage managed and orchestrated from the very start. Abu Laban and Ahmed Akkari had no other objective than to stir up Muslim hostility where there had been none to begin with. Even today, these two thugs are not being held responsible for the hundreds of deaths that resulted from their mendacity.

Special thanks to you for making an extra effort at highlighting this particularly vile bit of Islamic balderdash.



Egghead

on **May 20, 2010 at 11:59 pm** said:

Great job, Baron!

What is NOT fair, NOT ethical and wrong is the 1400 year old forced conversion, enslavement, rape, and slaughter of the infidel by Islam, a totalitarian form of government that ultimately harms its adherents even more then it harms the infidel...

Let's have an example of a positive peaceful Muslim country before we speculate why the Muslims hate the Americans. Instead, let's speculate why the Muslims hate themselves – could it be because of the tenets of Islam?



laller

on **May 21, 2010 at 2:13 am** said:

“The Danish cartoonist was challenging censorship in the Danish government... a brave, important and valuable act. Nobody's trying to censor the U.S. cartoonists — unless a threat from a Muslim group makes them lose their nerve, as well as their dedication to free speech.”

I'm sorry, but WHAT? WHO is he talking about? And WHEN is he talking about? Kurt Westergaard? The cartoon crisis? It can't be either of those, because then he doesn't know what he's talking about, and it wouldn't be ethical to do that, would it? So: who, what, when, where?

I think it might be a good idea to point out that he doesn't know his facts?

Regards



rebelliousvanilla

on **May 21, 2010 at 4:54 pm** said:

When fruitcakes like this is considered an ethicist(how the heck are people paid for this kind of 'work' is beyond me), something is really wrong.

The fact that I can't exercise my rights in my own country shows that Muslims don't belong in it. That's pretty much it. Also, I don't see why I'd respect a FOREIGN religion in MY OWN country. If they are so offended, they can pack

their bags and leave. This whole thing shows that Islam and its followers don't belong in our societies, it doesn't stick a finger anywhere.

And no, it's not too much to demand. I don't see why it's too much – this is what people with power do. And Islam isn't one of the world's greatest religions, it's a barbaric warrior creed devised by a middle ages slave trader, rapist and paedophile.

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