

## Patronizing Olive Garden: A Question of Morality?

By Jon Green, PhD

It has been implied that because some might choose to abstain from drinking alcohol, or actively fight against beer in Collegedale, then they exhibit moral dissonance by patronizing establishments such as Olive Garden Restaurant that serves beer. This is a futile attempt to make a moral issue where one does not exist. It is a rather disingenuous argument, intellectually suspect, and, quite likely, politically motivated.

It is easy to insert the word “moral” in just about any context one might wish, however, this does not mean that it is used properly in the context. For example, if I say “drinking water is morally proper” it sounds good, but the context does not support the statement. Thus, just using the word “moral” in the context of beer at the Olive Garden Restaurant is a misuse of the word. The context does not support the use of the word “moral.”

Let us see why the word “moral” does not fit in the context of patronizing Olive Garden Restaurant.

We use the word “moral” often, but would probably be hard put to give a correct definition. This probably explains why it is used inappropriately in reference to Olive Garden Restaurant, as the immediate example. The word has come to us via the Middle English, prior to that the Old French, and, even further back, the Latin, “*moralis*.” It’s meaning is simply “custom.” As it made its way into our modern usage it took on the more popular meaning of “rules” or “habits” of conduct. Nowadays, we often use it as referring to principles or standards of right and wrong behavior. We imply that moral conduct is conformity to established sanctioned codes or accepted notions of right and wrong.

With this background, we can see that there are two perspectives of morals. These are the individual morals and societal morals.

Individual morals are those which I, personally, hold and which become my “customs,” “rules,” or “habits” of conduct. These personal morals may be based upon either my personal beliefs, correct or incorrect, derived from my personal investigation or developmental training. These may be spiritual beliefs, such as Friday, Saturday, or Sunday as my day of worship. They may be health and safety beliefs such as alcoholic consumption negatively

impacts both health and safety. These personally vital beliefs or principles become my “customs,” “rules,” or “habits” of conduct—my morals.

The question of morality comes when I violate my own beliefs or morals. This causes the moral dissonance. The question of morality DOES NOT come, for me, when someone else violates my beliefs or morals. I, alone, am responsible for my morality or immorality. The question of morality only comes when another person violates HIS/HER beliefs or morals, not when someone else violates MY morals. This is why I can associate comfortably with a Moslem, or an Adventist, or a Baptist without a question of moral dissonance with me. But if I, the Moslem, violate my belief concerning the “customs,” “rules,” or “habits” of conduct with regards to spiritual practice on Friday, then I, the Moslem, have violated my morals. You, the Adventist, or the Baptist have not violated your morals.

Because abstinence from drinking beer is my “custom,” “rule,” and “habit” of conduct, the only time moral dissonance would be exhibited while patronizing the Olive Garden would be if I drank beer at Olive Garden! If someone else drinks beer at the Olive Garden, there is NO WAY my morality can be questioned, for his drinking has no relationship to my morality just as my violation of my Moslem “custom,” “rule,” or “habit” of conduct, with reference to Friday worship, has no relationship to the morality of the Adventist or the Baptist.

Social morals are those which my society holds and which become its “customs,” “rules,” or “habits” of conduct. These social morals are based upon the beliefs, correct or incorrect, derived from majority consent. These are most often encoded in civil or criminal law. If an individual habitually deviates from these “customs,” “rules,” or “habits” of conduct then he may be designated as “immoral.” The one who kills someone could, justifiably, be considered “immoral” since he has violated a social moral. However, if I go to visit him on death row, it cannot be implied that I am in moral dissonance. No, because I can only be accused of moral dissonance if I have violated social morals. His violation of the social morals in NO WAY can bring my social morals into question.

Patronizing Olive Garden Restaurant cannot be judged to be a violation of my moral commitment to being a teetotaler. I remain true to my “custom,” “rule,” and “habit” of conduct as regards to my moral stance of abstinence from beer

drinking. Those who float such an implication are treading into the arena of intellectual dishonesty. Only if I have violated society's morals can it safely be implied that I have contravened morals. Abstinence from beer drinking is not a social moral.

Available online at <http://www.eppygreen.com> "Communities Crier," "City of Collegedale," "Patronizing Olive Garden: A Question of Morality?"