

Young adults are amoral heathens, but what's new?

By [Adam J. Copeland](#)

September 15, 2011

This week's Theology Pub, a gathering of 20/30-somethings [The Project FM](#) hosts at a local bar to talk about God and life, tackled the topic "Is my truth better than yours?" Though it came out a few days too late, David Brooks' *NY Times* Op-Ed this week, "[If it feels right](#)," would have been great pre-reading.

Brooks builds his column on the work of Christian Smith and colleagues. Smith's previous book, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* has been on my wish list for some time. Now I'll have to add his latest as well, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*.

In his column Brooks opines that young adults these days apparently lack the wherewithal to speak about moral issues. As someone who hosts conversations for young adults to speak about moral issues, two responses immediately come to mind. One: young adults who attend Theology Pub absolutely love speaking about moral issues. Two: we are not particularly well versed in *how* to speak about them.

I could blame this all on standardized testing in grade schools. I could complain about colleges requiring too few philosophy and ethics courses (grad schools too, for that matter). I could lambast parents for not passing along resources for taking on moral subjects. But I won't.

What I will do, however, is refuse to blame young adults themselves for not having been given the resources to take on moral questions — it's not their fault that faith communities, schools, and parents failed them. Let me repeat that: **it doesn't do us any good to blame 20 year-olds for not having the moral sensibilities we wish they had.** (And Brooks, by the way, does well to refuse to do so — mostly.)

I look forward to reading Smith's book, but I'll do so uneasily. When I somehow find the time to pick it up, I'll do so with this question at the forefront of my mind: Is it that young adults truly have fewer moral resources with which to deal with moral questions than previous generations, or is it that today's questions are so much more complex that young adults need more skills and understanding to just tread water in our consumeristic pluralized technologically-advanced globalized world?

After all, it's much easier to teach and theologize that "murder is wrong" than it is to discuss unmanned drone strikes in remote border areas of Afghanistan/Pakistan during an unfunded "war on terror" lasting over ten years.

Originally posted at [A Wee Blether](#).