

THEISTIC ETHICS: TOWARD A CHRISTIAN SOLUTION

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Despite the theological and popularly conceived connections between religious devotion and moral living, the difficulties attending theological or religious ethics—the attempt to tie ethics to theology or religion in some important sense—are myriad. Thanks largely to Enlightenment thought, morality has come to be construed as independent of God, so much so that the majority of moral philosophers today would without hesitation affirm that even if God exists, morality can exist apart from God—an ontological critique—and, if the precepts or dictates of morality can be known at all, they can be known apart from religious orthodoxy or theological reflection—an epistemological critique.

Since the Enlightenment, at least, and in particular since Kant's epistemological dualism, questions of religion and "speculative metaphysics" have often been considered beyond the ken of rationality.¹ Kant's motivation, it has been suggested, was to spare religion from the rigorous scrutiny of the emerging science of his day; but the actual result proved to be detrimental to religious conviction, for it began to be portrayed as an inescapably subjective affair. Universal truth claims became harder to reconcile with this kind of epistemology, which is likely the inevitable while paradoxical effect of implicitly putting religion and science at odds. Religious truth claims tend to be increasingly construed as devoid of propositional content and rational evidence and are instead seen as empty faith claims rooted in a person's imagination or a group's collective psyche.

The understanding of science and religion as essentially and historically opposed, incidentally, is largely mistaken. Although it is true that certain theologians and churchmen have historically stood in the way of scientific progress, it is far from true that all of them have, even a majority; and in fact, as Alfred North Whitehead has persuasively argued, the origins of modern science, such as faith in the orderliness of

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nature and its ability to be apprehended and described rationally, are largely attributable to the Medieval and Scholastic effort to rationalize the divinely ordered creation.² Stanley Jaki goes further in characterizing such foundations of science as the consequence of orthodox Christology. "A truly divine Logos, in Whom the Father created all, so Athanasius insisted time and again, could not produce a partially disordered universe."³

Nonetheless the mistakenly perceived tension between science and religion contributed to their artificial separation. It was long thought that morality could be salvaged from such a fate by being rooted in reason rather than revelation. Indeed, this effort serves as one effective summary of the Enlightenment: to ground ethics in reason rather than religion and thereby retain its authoritative force. However, severed from its ontological foundations, morality has proved notoriously difficult to undergird by reason alone, so much so that the Enlightenment project has recently often been characterized as a failure. One result is that morality, still often perceived to be in religion's vicinity, is increasingly absorbed into Kant's noumenal realm of the unknowable, inscrutable and, for practical purposes, thereby construed as a purely individual affair. This despite the obvious fact that Kant himself was no subjectivist in ethics.

Pre-modern and what is often called post-modern thought have in common their grounding of morality in God, the salient difference being that pre-moderns, generally, believed in God, whereas post-moderns, generally, do not. If morality is rooted in a God who doesn't exist, of course, then morality is largely illusory; and this seems to be an increasingly common view: that morality is either purely conventional, or a way to keep the proletariat in line, or a repression of our best instincts, and the list goes on. No wonder that some have tried to show that traditional conceptions of morality can exist independently of any appeal to theology, and I have a certain sympathy for such efforts. Nonetheless, like many theists, I also have a nagging sense that morality, ultimately, has to be grounded in God. So, in this paper, what I intend to do is, first, identify some of the philosophical problems for religious ethics in general and Christian ethics in particular. Then I will attempt a short defense of a Christian theistic ethic.

RELIGIOUS ETHICS CRITIQUED

To begin with, morality, as religiously construed, is often thought of as either a requirement or result of salvation. As such it is depicted as necessary for, in one sense or another, a relationship with God and entrance into heaven. Conversely, an immoral life is characterized in terms of an absence of a relationship with God and punishable by consignment to hell. As such, a moral life is enjoined by religion, it is suggested, merely, in J. P. Moreland's words, to "cover one's cosmic rear end to avoid getting flames on it."⁴

One criticism of such ethical views is that morality entails a quality of life that ought to be conducted primarily, if not exclusively, out of a desire to do it and not mainly, if at all, out of a motivation to avoid punishment or earn a reward. The latter, which is argued to be the thrust behind religious ethics, would constitute an egoistic approach to ethics, according to which, as seen, moral decisions are made with respect to "what's in it for me."

Moral philosophers, often influenced by Kant, typically bristle, and rightly so, at the suggestion that morality's motivation is one of earning a reward or avoiding a punishment. Divine retribution or reward seems unable to be a legitimate form of moral motivation, yet

this condition often seems at the heart of basing ethics on theology. Seemingly altruistic behaviors, thus motivated, at their root would then reveal self-interested motivations; rather than feeding the poor, clothing the naked, and housing the homeless out of genuine concern for them and their welfare, the ultimate motivation would instead be sheer self-interest.

The power of God to effect his purposes might certainly constitute a *motive* to live morally in such a scenario, albeit an ethically dangerous one, but not a rational *reason*. Any such purely self-interested moral motivations are necessarily infantile, some have argued. For they are roughly akin to the truncated ethical perspective of children, who also, in the earliest stages of moral development, understand morality in terms of avoiding punishments and earning rewards. Drawing on Piaget's research of young children, P. H. Nowell-Smith argues for such a parallel between religious moralists and children in the heteronomous stage of development, since both groups, while lacking in those marks of moral maturity and adulthood such as autonomy and personal responsibility, view moral rules as sacred and authoritatively imposed from the outside.⁵

At the heart of Nowell-Smith's critique of religious ethics is his concern that it tends to be more concerned with adherence to rules rather than the quality of people's lives and a concern for people's welfare for their own sake. Rules, as seen by the morally mature, exist for a purpose and fulfill distinct functions. But the heteronomous child and religious moralist both regard rules as, in essence, ends in themselves, never to be questioned. Even Abraham, the Old Testament patriarch, is shown laudably willing to sacrifice his own son on the altar at the whim of the divine. By thus relinquishing one's moral autonomy to divine control; being excessively concerned, even pathologically preoccupied, about the welfare of one's soul; and making moral determinations based on God's commands, potentially even capricious ones, religious moralists betray childish elements in their ethical philosophy.

Even supposing that God does issue a command to human beings, such as the "most important" command to love God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself, another problem immediately arises, one which Kant noticed and contemporary philosopher Richard Taylor elaborates on.⁶ Such an edict can't be issued, for love, as an emotion, can't be commanded. An *ought* requires a *can*; no sensible command requires of us to do that which we are incapable of doing. The command to love, as a command to assume an emotional disposition toward God or another, treats human emotion as something under direct volitional control. Since it is not—we can't directly generate emotions at will—the command is nonsensical. Duty and love seem incompatible in an ethical system; yet religious ethics conjoin them, another problem with rooting morality in theology. In this connection, Taylor writes the following:

The insight that love, as a feeling, is incompatible with the incentive of duty, is plainly correct. In the light of it one can expunge feelings of love from theoretical ethics, or one can expunge the incentive of duty. Kant took the former course, and I take the latter.⁷

Besides those problems associated with religious ethics, one philosophical problem, more than any other, has been a thorn in the flesh of theologians and religious moral philosophers since the time of Plato, and has been dubbed the Euthyphro Dilemma, aris-

ing as it does in the Socratic dialogue *Euthyphro*. Socrates, Plato's teacher, meets a young man, Euthyphro, going to the courthouse to sue his father. In ancient Greece, the setting for this story, loyalty to family was a highly exalted virtue, so Socrates is naturally shocked at Euthyphro's intention to do this, and remarks that Euthyphro must have a clearly defined sense of justice to undertake such an ambitious course of action. Euthyphro confidently assures Socrates that in fact he does, and proceeds to define justice, or what we might call morality today, in terms of the commands of the gods, according to the Greek conception of a pantheon of gods. When Socrates begins to point out that, according to the mythical accounts of the gods, their commands sometimes conflicted, problems with Euthyphro's account begin to manifest themselves.

The problems attending the attempt to define morality in supernaturalistic terms soon become applicable to monotheism as well, as the famous Dilemma arises a little further along in the dialogue. Socrates asks Euthyphro a pointed question, and one that has plagued moral philosophy ever since. Does, to put this in monotheistic terms, God *define* the good, or merely *report* the good? There is a difference. When you tell another that the sum of two and two is four, you are merely reporting this to be the case, not somehow making or defining it that way of your own volition. The question is whether God reveals to us the contents of morality irrespective of his own commands or nature, in which case he would be merely reporting on morality and not ultimately responsible for its contents after all, or does He actually define morality, conforming its contents to his own will? If we affirm the former option—that God only reports the good—then we have to agree with the thrust of contemporary moral philosophy that has divorced God from morality's ultimate origins. God would be commanding something because it is already good prior to and independent of his command. If we wish to affirm the latter option—that God defines morality (then and only then perhaps reports it)—then we're confronted with a potential problem. For then something is good because God commands it, but suppose that God, tomorrow, were to decree that torturing innocent children for the fun of it is the moral thing to do. If God is the one exclusively responsible for dictating the contents of morality, there is no recourse for anyone else to claim that such a command is morally perverse. By issuing the decree, God has thereby redefined morality. Morality is thus arbitrary, entirely contingent on the capricious will of heaven.

Of course, the history of religious conquest, holy wars, and inquisitions reminds us that cruelty in the name of God, ostensibly in accord with his purposes, is no academic discussion. Measured by its own standards, Christianity has fallen woefully short of ethical greatness, reminding us that belief in God is by no means sufficient for ensuring a mature ethical way of life, as the number of religious adherents who have perpetrated evils in the name of God so clearly attests. Nor is religious adherence even a needed precondition for moral living, it would seem, for many atheists indeed live exemplary lives of moral excellence. Kai Nielsen thus argues that, even if "God is dead," it doesn't matter for ethics. Arguing from features he finds in this world, Nielsen points out that atheists often live altruistically, find meaning in life, express compassion, thereby going to show that God seems unnecessary for ethics.⁸ Ethics can get by just fine without him.

Given such glaring weaknesses and strong critiques of religious ethics, it is not surprising that Derek Parfit is one among others who claims that holding on to outmoded reli-

gious views is an impediment to moral philosophy that had better be jettisoned as soon as possible. Indeed, some have essentially asserted that theistic beliefs, rather than grounding our morality and enabling us to determine the normative contents and metaethical justification for our moral convictions, can actually perform the opposite function of blinding us to morality as rooted in reason or human flourishing or whatever precisely it is that serves as the true foundation for morality. "Belief in God, or in many gods," Parfit writes, "has prevented free development of moral reasoning." Parfit is optimistic about the possibility of progress in ethics precisely to the extent we extricate ourselves from superstitious religious beliefs and begin to reason autonomously.⁹

THEISTIC ETHICS DEFENDED

Against such arguments, and contrary to the trend in modern moral philosophy, theistic ethics will nevertheless now be defended, with the aim to show that the case against it has yet to be made. What will be provided here, with no pretense that every relevant question is answered or problem solved, are a few suggestive lines of arguments that show promise in salvaging a meaningful connection between God and morality in the face of such challenges.

This section will make reference to *theistic*, rather than religious or theological, ethics to denote the fact that the type of connection between God and morality that will be defended, though it will possess numerous practical implications, will generally be at a higher level of abstraction than the plane on which this topic is usually discussed. It will be more ontological than epistemological and more metaethical than normative. Too often, it seems, theistic ethics have to account for the failings of religionists to live morally, or the successes of atheists in attaining moral excellence, while such phenomena, reflection shows, do little to discount the possibility that God himself is the Author of morality irrespective of what is done by some of his alleged followers or detractors.

No doubt it is particularly a concern the way religious adherents have too often failed to live up to even minimal moral standards, but the attempted defense of theistic ethics provided here will have little difficulty accommodating such empirical sociological realities. Religious affiliation or mere propositional assent is often a poor indicator of genuine religious life and spiritual devotion anyway, it is to be remembered. "The Old Testament prophets bear eloquent witness to this, reserving some of their fiercest denunciation for those who delight in solemn assemblies and external ritual," William Abraham reminds us.¹⁰ Jesus himself issued his most damning indictments to the religious leaders of his day.¹¹

MORAL FACTS

So to begin this defense, it is observed that typically socialized human beings have rather clear moral intuitions about what is right and wrong, or morally exemplary or hideous, which are more than just hunches or prereflective expressions of moral attitudes. As Geisler and Moreland write,

While philosophers differ over a precise definition of intuitions, a common usage defines an intuition as an immediate, direct awareness or acquaintance with something. An intuition is a mode of awareness—sensory, intellectual, or otherwise—in which something seems or appears to be directly present to one's consciousness.¹²

Ethicists like Alasdair MacIntyre and R. M. Hare think ethicists have gone wrong whenever an appeal to intuitions is necessary; but I rather agree with Saul Kripke's view: that it is difficult to see what could be said more strongly for a view than that it squares with one's basic, reflective intuitions. Philosophy ought to be largely in the business of spelling out in more rigorous ways what can be intuitively grasped by nearly anyone. Such intuitive appeals seem both unavoidable and epistemologically significant. Though not infallible, they are at least *prima facie* justified.

The French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, in an effort to argue for his existentialist ethics, uses examples like a young soldier deciding whether to go to war or to stay home and be his mother's consolation.¹³ Sartre employs such examples to show the difficulty of making certain ethical determinations, and writings like his in conjunction with the widespread use of what Christina Hoff-Sommers has called "dilemma ethics"—moral dialogue focused on trying to decide the "hard cases"—have contributed to the notion that the whole field of ethics is colored grey. The old certainties are gone; ambiguity wins the day. Everything is up for grabs when it comes to questions of morality.

Despite the common nature of such views, most decisions in ethics are not fraught with ambiguity and tensions between commensurate competing commitments. As is obvious from clear examples of moral behavior, the vast majority of people's moral intuitions remain intact and quite strong. Perhaps ethics are too often thought about in terms of the peripheral dilemmas and occasional ambiguities, overlooking and thereby skewing our perception of the vast intuitive area of agreement that actually obtains both across diverse cultures and throughout the centuries of human history. Perhaps morality has to be seen at its best, or at its worst, for it is then our intuitions are felt the strongest and the distinctive features of moral facts most clearly apprehended, with no ambiguities or heart-wrenching dilemmas to cloud our vision. Eventually those dilemmas have to be accounted for as well, but the suggestion here is that they are not the proper place to begin. One doesn't learn subtle tennis strategy when he first must learn how to hit a groundstroke.

To elicit such common sensical moral intuitions, consider the following scenario, asking yourself whether you can affirm the moral propriety of such an action:

They brought the boy out of the guardroom. It was a bleak, foggy, raw day—an ideal day for hunting. The General ordered the boy stripped naked. The boy [who while playing had inadvertently injured the General's dog] was shivering. He seemed paralyzed with fear. He didn't dare utter a sound. 'Off with him now, chase him!' 'Hey, you, run, run!' a flunkey yelled, and the boy started to run. 'Sic 'im!' the General roared. The whole pack was set on the boy and the hounds tore him to pieces before his mother's eyes.¹⁴

Those chilling lines from Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* sicken readers, filling them with moral indignation. Common sense moral intuitions declare such an act to be heinous and barbaric. Sartre's point would have been lost had he begun not with a genuine moral dilemma, but with an appeal to people's moral intuitions, such as by asking whether the General should have acted in this way. The answer is clear. Something incongruous is readily discernible about the General's actions, quite irrespective of

whether the General derived pleasure from the act, perhaps accounting for the characterization of such behavior as inhuman.

Just as there is an unfittingness about the General's action, there is an obvious fittingness and congruity about morally good behavior generally and morally excellent behavior particularly, resulting in what has been called the "satisfactions of morality." "Moral people have long testified as to the strength and value of such satisfactions, often claiming that they are the most agreeable satisfactions we can attain."¹⁵

Behaviors characterized as morally exemplary are typically those which, if an agent performs them, she is said to be morally praiseworthy, whereas, if the agent fails to perform them, she isn't blameworthy. Such behaviors are thought of as going beyond what is expected of the moral agent, such as a selfless life of service to the sick, or a sacrifice of a lucrative medical career to serve the needs of a destitute village. Philosophers call such actions supererogatory, and sometimes debate whether such behaviors can even be accommodated according to normative ethical theory. Utilitarianism, for instance, doesn't merely *suggest* maximizing utility, but renders the maximization of utility one's moral *obligation*, thus raising the question of whether there ever really is anything like optional praiseworthy moral action.¹⁶

The aspect of supererogatory actions that will be stressed for this discussion, though, is different. Irrespective of the relative obligation one thinks attaches to such actions, the less arguable and most obvious element of supererogatory actions is their laudable selfless nature that resonates with our, in James Q. Wilson's phrase, "moral sense." Witnessing such behavior gives us, we suspect, a portrait of humanity at its best, a glimpse into life as it was meant to be lived, and perhaps one day will be.

Consulting our intuitions, what can we say about the nature of morality and of moral facts? If moral facts exist, they would seem to be, *prima facie*, ontologically rather odd entities as far as most facts go. Moral facts, in addition to conveying a description of nature, are also ineliminably prescriptive, normatively involving an appeal to what ought or ought not to be done. Moral facts thereby direct us to action, confer obligation, in a way that no merely descriptive fact characterizing some state of affairs can do without being conjoined with at least implicitly prescriptive ones.

Morality is thought to confer obligations and provide evaluative constraints not just on particular acts or ways of life, but even on our motivations. Saving a drowning child in the hope of earning a reward, though resulting in a good consequence, is still generally thought of as less than morally exemplary behavior. Moral motivations, as earlier discussed, need to largely transcend the hope of a reward or the effort to avoid a punishment to include genuine concern for the welfare of others, sincere desire to alleviate suffering, etc.

Morality, in its dominant tradition in western culture, involves rights and duties, rights to which people are entitled and obligations conferred upon people, sometimes at great personal sacrifice. Morality involves the ascription of moral praise and blame, either for actions performed or actions failed to be performed. The moral conferring of obligation and the assigning of blame, it is thought, are not contingent on the satisfaction of the moral agent's personal interest or advantage, but seem to possess a kind of authority irrespective of such considerations. That morality seems to provide intrinsic motives to virtue without at the same time always providing instrumental advantages based on prudence

has been long thought to be one of the great ethical difficulties left unsolved.¹⁷

The oddness of moral facts is obviously in part attributable to this prescriptive feature of theirs which, perhaps, is what motivated G. E. Moore to conclude that no naturalistic proposal for constructing a definition of "good" could suffice.¹⁸ Moore characterized the misguided attempt to define "good" by reducing it to any natural property—such as the maximization of pleasure or the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people—by the term "naturalistic fallacy." No merely naturalistic property seems able to accommodate this prescriptively binding force characterizing morality traditionally understood.

Thought of in terms of this tricky prescriptive element that enjoins a certain kind of behavior, Moore's point can be construed along the lines of David Hume's writing from two centuries before, in which he criticized the attempt to derive an *ought* from an *is*. Such a derivation has been described in various ways, such as going from a *description* to a *prescription*, from a *fact* to a *norm* or *value*, or from an *indicative* to an *imperative*. The same idea would appear later in Kant's insistence that the dictates and imperatives of the moral law can't be derived from any set of propositions about human happiness or the will of God.¹⁹

Rather than discussing Moore's or Hume's point at great length, which has been done elsewhere by numerous writers, here the discussion will instead focus on what constitutes the best explanation of such ontologically odd entities as moral facts, if indeed they exist at all. Rather than morality, given its distinct features, needing to be divorced from God's nature or will, the opposite conclusion has often been drawn, even by no less a thinker than the influential twentieth-century atheist J. L. Mackie. "Moral properties," the late philosopher wrote, "constitute so odd a cluster of properties and relations that they are most unlikely to have arisen in the ordinary course of events without an all-powerful god to create them."²⁰

That is, according to Mackie, moral facts—entities ascribing praise and blame for actions committed or omitted; conferring duties irrespective of the moral agent's cares and interests; calling for sacrifice of self-interest and, quite independent of outcomes, a purity of moral motivation—have for their best explanation, assuming they exist, a theistic premise. Unless God somehow caused such strange facts to come into existence, they are otherwise most unlikely to have developed naturalistically.

As an atheist, Mackie was dubious about the existence of such moral facts; but his sentiment—expressible in terms of the counterfactual conditional "If moral facts exist, then God probably created them"—could not be more eloquently echoed by any theist. Since God's nonexistence or irrelevance would negate the consequent of Mackie's conditional, it is not surprising that he and numerous other atheists before and after him have concluded that their worldview entails a rejection or loss of morality as traditionally understood. Sartre, for instance, expressed such a sentiment:

Towards 1880, when the French professors endeavored to formulate a secular morality, they said something like this: God is a useless hypothesis, so we will do without it. However, if we are to have morality, a society and a law-abiding world, it is essential that certain values should be taken seriously; they must have an *a priori* existence ascribed to them. It must be considered obligatory *a priori* to be honest, not to lie, not to beat one's wife, to bring up children and so forth; so we are going to do a little work on the subject, which will enable us to show that these values exist all

the same, inscribed in an intelligent heaven although, of course, there is no God. In other words...nothing will be changed if God does not exist; we shall discover the same norms of honesty, progress and humanity, and we shall have disposed of God as an out-of-date hypothesis which will die away quietly of itself. The existentialist, on the contrary, finds it extremely embarrassing that God does not exist, for there disappears with him all possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven. There can no longer be any good *a priori*, since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it. It is nowhere written that "the good" exists, that one must be honest or must not lie, since we are now upon the plane where there are only men.²¹

Likewise, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche confidently proclaimed that the "death of God" should have for one of its practical outcomes a Copernican revolution in the way we think of ethics. Traditionally exalted moral virtues such as humility, altruism, and compassion, now seen as expressions of abject weakness, should be eclipsed with the strong virtues of selfishness, ruthlessness, and pride. In Nietzsche's case, then, upholding traditional morality after the death of God wasn't even a concern; it was his agenda to effect his transvaluation of values, according to which good might be called evil, and evil good.²²

Irrespective of one's views of Nietzsche and his legacy, his is one more example of atheists themselves recognizing the vital link between God and traditionally understood moral values, between theism and ethics. The violence potentially done to morality by its divorce from God is not a warning issued only by theists. A number of thoughtful philosophers, both theists and atheists, have drawn the conclusion that, if God does not exist, then morality, understood as something more than convention or conditioning alone, lacks a firm foundation or, to use Paul Taylor's word, "grounding."

W. T. Stace, attributing the emergence of moral relativism to the social, intellectual, and psychological conditions of our time, diagnoses the situation as follows:

We have abandoned, perhaps with good reason, the oracles of the past. Every age, of course, does this. But in our case it seems that none of us knows any more whither to turn. We do not know what to put in the place of that which has gone. What ought we, supposedly civilized peoples, to aim at? What are to be our ideals? What is right? What is wrong? What is beautiful? What is ugly? No man knows. We drift helplessly in this direction and that. We know not where we stand nor whither we are going.²³

Many atheists and secularists, however, wish to salvage a meaningful morality from the unpalatable implications of their worldview, as even Sartre and Nietzsche attempted. Philosophers thus attempt to defend and account for the existence of moral facts without any appeal to God, thereby also accounting for why we ought to live moral lives and for why moral obligations sometimes apply even when they conflict with one's personal welfare. Kurt Baier, for instance, tries this by arguing that morality really is in one's interest after all, thereby accounting for why we ought to live morally. Richard Brandt, as well, acknowledging that duty sometimes violates personal preferences, first concludes that whether such a duty ought to be carried through "may vary from one person to another. It depends on what kind of person one is, what one cares about." But he then proceeds

to write, "It is, of course, no defense of one's failure to do one's duty, before others or society, to say that doing so is not 'reasonable' for one in this sense."²⁴

George Mavrodes responds to such arguments effectively, in my view. In terms of Brandt's point, he writes

And this is just to bring the queer element back in. It is to suppose that besides 'the kind of person' I am and my particular pattern of 'cares' and interests there is something else, my duty, which may go against these and in any case properly overrides them. And one feels that there must be some sense of 'reasonable' in which one can ask whether a world in which that is true is a reasonable world, whether such a world makes any sense.²⁵

In response to Brandt's argument that (a) it is in *everyone's* best interest to act morally and, therefore, (b) it is in *my* best interest to act morally as well, Mavrodes asks whether (a) is to be understood collectively or distributively. If the former, then (b) doesn't follow from it, for it may not be in my best interest for everyone to act morally, even if it is in the best interest of the group as a whole, for the interest of the group as a whole may be advanced by the sacrificing of my interest. If (a) is understood in the distributive sense, Mavrodes notes that another objection arises, namely, that it seems obvious that personal self-interest, at least in the short run, will be further advanced in a situation in which everyone else acts morally but I act immorally, at least in selected cases, than it will in case everyone, including me, acts morally.²⁶

It is no doubt to each person's benefit that *others* act morally, and undoubtedly it is to each person's benefit that he or she *at times* act morally. But clearly there are many occasions when acting *immorally* appears to be in an individual's self-interest (or at least when acting morally is not in the agent's best interest). It was for this reason that Rene Descartes expressed the view that

Since in this life there are often more rewards for vices than for virtues, few would prefer what is right to what is useful, if they neither feared God nor hoped for an after-life.²⁷

Even Philippa Foot's efforts to argue that morality always gives people *some* reason to act leaves unanswered the question of why people ought to live morally when doing otherwise would go undetected. Such a failure to account for a reason to be moral in such a situation has a significance beyond merely the conclusion that what can be motivated are not particular acts so much as a general commitment to rules or a moral disposition. Rather, it goes to show that, even if a non-theistic account motivates altruistic *behavior*, it is still deficient to motivate effectively and justify intellectually an altruistic *character*—a further aspect of morality, captured by the virtue tradition in ethics, and related to the earlier mention of motives.²⁸ In Gregory Kavka's attempt to construct a reconciliation of morality and self-interest, for instance, his project concerns rules of action or ways of life rather than motives or reasons for action.

Even if Kavka's reconciliation project—which makes reference to internal sanctions like

conscience and the satisfactions of morality—succeeds, of course (and I suspect to a large degree it does), that provides no good reason to think that morality's binding force resides in its prudential advantages—the practical or pragmatic benefits for those performing the actions. For such benefits might well be the result of doing what is intrinsically right. Take the case of feeding the poor. Kavka rightly shows that potential prudential benefits accrue to the action of feeding the poor, such as a stronger economy, less risk of rebellion, and greater numbers of competent workers. But clearly the binding prescriptive component of morality, Kavka himself would probably agree, is not located in such social advantages of feeding the poor. Morality dictates the intrinsically right action to be feeding the poor, even if no such social benefits were to result. That they in fact *do* result does not make *them* the grounding of morality, especially in the mind of one like Kavka, it would seem, who retains such a strong set of traditional moral convictions.

Besides accounts like those to make sense of morality apart from appeals to the divine, there is always possible an appeal to brute fact, the theory of metaphysical intuitionism or, perhaps, Platonic realism. Perhaps moral facts, including obligations at times to sacrifice self-interest, are just emergent facts in this world, synthetic necessary truths knowable *a priori* by a moral intuition, with no explanation possible in terms of naturalistic parts. Here the theist is often confronted with a surprisingly formidable opponent. But the theist is not obligated to show that a theistic universe is the *only possible* explanation, but merely the *best* explanation. (To show that it's merely a good and coherent explanation would be an accomplishment in many of philosophy's contemporary quarters!) And many atheists, confronted with the option of this theory of brute facts, on the one hand, and something like a naturalist's account of the strength of moral intuitions in terms of either deeply held, habitually conditioned social mores or in terms of moral facts somehow supervening on natural facts, on the other, have found the latter to be the considerably more rational option. Objective naturalism, in other words, seems the considerably more formidable challenge to theistic ethics than intuitionism; and a fuller explication of theistic ethics would have to confront this challenge more directly. Fruitful lines of inquiry might highlight such challenges naturalism faces in accounting for a sufficiently meaningful free will to undergird morality, how moral prescriptions can be invested with the kind of qualitative force we think they deserve, or how the quest for reproductive advantage can explain moral advantage.

It might be suggested that we ought to believe in moral facts for the same reason we ought to believe in brute epistemological facts—such as the propriety of the principle of abduction: the principle of inference to the best explanation that is being used in this very essay to argue for theistic ethics. Or construe the suggestion like this: the line of argument sketched so far might be applied equally well to epistemology as to morality and thereby shown unsound. Morality and epistemology do, as a matter of fact, seem to be on a par in critical respects; alleged facts in each arena contain both descriptive and prescriptive components, for instance. However, obligations and sacrifices of self-interest are not nearly as involved in epistemology as in ethics; and violations of epistemological principles, even at their most egregious, simply don't *begin* to raise people's ire to the degree that the General's actions do, nor should they. Nor do the most brilliant applications of the principle of inference to the best explanation inspire people (with the possible exception of a

few analytic philosophers) to the degree of seeing a truly selfless act of love or heroism. So if we don't view it as odd, morality retains distinctive features which afford it a unique capacity to inform our understanding of the world.

Of course, some see moral facts as just irredeemably odd, and thus are not convinced of their reality at all. The very epistemological sort of evidence adduced here in support of ontological issues about ethics leads certain anti-realists in ethics to deny that such facts exist apart from the seemingly necessary education of human sensibilities. (These philosophers are not to be confused with those "realists" who would cite only social ontology.) However bedrock our moral intuitions may appear, the argument goes, they are not hard-wired into human nature. What better proof of this is there, a friend writes, than "the casual, even delighted manner in which small children tear the wings off flies and otherwise torture insects and torment pets? Children need to learn what cruelty is, and what counts as cruelty." This point is worthy of much attention, but for now just three brief points will be made. First, to show that a process of socialization is *necessary* for healthy moral development is not to show it is thereby *sufficient* to account for moral intuitions and their corresponding contents. Second, Christianity in particular, with its communal theology of the human condition and its teachings about original sin, seems uniquely capable of accounting for both the necessity of socialization and the cruelty in men (and boys). Third, it's not pretended here that the admittedly rudimentary comments to follow are enough to persuade any committed anti-realist in ethics who would reject even the best explanation of moral facts as inadequate to justify belief in moral facts. But then again, philosophical argument may sometimes be the least effective means of reaching philosophers.

A THEISTIC ACCOUNT

The odd features of alleged moral facts strike many philosophers as strange, leading them to doubt their existence, as we have seen. What these philosophers do, in denying moral facts, is conform their understanding of the world to their picture of the way the world ought to look like. Since they can't make sense of moral facts in a determined world with no God, no libertarian freedom, no essential human nature, no room for genuine moral responsibility or retributive justice, it is only intellectually honest that many of them deny the existence of moral facts altogether, chalking moral convictions up to upbringing and/or society and nothing more.

What will be done here, though, is different: The seeming existence and apparent nature of moral facts will be used to shape our understanding of the world. Why try to hammer morality into categories that really presuppose that we already know what the world is like, all the while turning a deaf ear to morality's instructive nature? Maybe morality should instead be allowed to affect our view of the world, changing *it* to include such entities as moral facts and to accord them epistemic value in our effort at understanding life and its meaning.

If a non-theistic universe fails to provide the best account for the existence of moral facts, what does? Since morality's existence and prescriptive force seem strong, the best explanation of such a state of affairs is, I submit, theism. To put it in Stace's terms, our dismissal of the "oracles of the past" may have been too hasty. The distinctive features of moral facts make them more at home, less odd, in a theistic universe than in an atheistic

one, perhaps making God's obituary premature. Morality in its various features—including its entailment of genuine obligation, libertarian freedom, retributive justice, and sacrifice of self-interest (at least in the short run), with love and relationship as paramount—has for its best explanation a creative God who has in some sense inscribed his own loving and relational nature into the world, fashioning human beings in his image and according to his intentions, and imbuing them with moral intuitions which, if properly socially mediated, provide reliable insight into the ethical nature of God, themselves, and the world.

The details of such a theistic account do not pretend to have been derived through sheer rationality here, out of whole cloth, but are admittedly the salient moral attributes of God as understood in the great monotheistic traditions, and particularly Christianity. That said, most all of what is presented here is also fully consistent with an Anselmian conception of deity as the possessor of the maximally compossible conjunction of the various "omni"-qualities. The suggestive argument here is that a theistic account of the universe and its creation provides the best available explanation of our intuitions of morality as possessing an objective existence and binding prescriptive force. Such an argument, if made more fully, would obviously have to additionally defend theism against pantheism and other religious views that differ radically from Christianity. Potential help here might be found in specifically Christian doctrine about a personal and immanent God offering transforming grace to enable us to cross the "moral gap," to use John Hare's phrase, and live the kind of life to which he calls us.

Whether God exists, of course, is no small debate; it's not a question about whether one more thing exists in the inventory of reality. "It is a question about the ultimate context for everything else," Morris writes. "The theist and the atheist should see *everything* differently."²⁹ Little wonder that Nielsen's arguments, cited earlier, examined features of this world, with the assumption that God doesn't exist, and concluded that morality can escape unscathed without him. It is also little wonder that those committed to believing in God's existence and who find theistic ethics somehow compelling are often unconvinced by such arguments, thinking them hollow and somehow missing the point. Perhaps Dostoevsky was right: if God doesn't exist then everything is permitted. But the theist is only conjecturing in such a case, for he argues that God *does* exist, as creator of theists and atheists alike; and therefore not everything is permitted, negatively, and moral truth penetrates the surface of this universe to its core, positively.

Reconsider moral intuitions in light of this. Morality, as traditionally understood, entails not just rights and duties, but also points toward a whole new set of categories that make a discussion of rights and duties, at best, an emaciated caricature of this new set of realities. Philosopher Eleonore Stump writes that, as C. S. Lewis maintained in *The Pilgrim's Regress*, the vision of certain sorts of beauty fills us with an acute if inchoate longing for something—the source of the beauty perhaps—and a painful sense that we don't possess it, aren't part of it, now.³⁰ Perhaps morality, in certain of its practical exemplifications, is one of those kinds of beauty, like in the sacrifice of Christ, and its privation or perversion a form of ugliness, like the General's treachery.

George Mavrodes, perhaps sensing this same longing, writes

I come more and more to think that morality, while a fact, is a twisted and distorted fact. Or perhaps better, that it is a barely recognizable version of another fact, a ver-

sion adapted to a twisted and distorted world. It is something like, I suppose, the way in which the pine that grows at timberline, wind blasted and twisted low against the rock, is a version of the tall and symmetrical tree that grows lower on the slopes. I think it may be that the related notions of sacrifice and gift represent (or come close to representing) the fact, that is, the pattern of life, whose distorted version we know here as morality. Imagine a situation, an "economy" if you will, in which no one ever buys or trades for or seizes any good thing. But whatever good he enjoys it is either one which he himself has created or else one which he received as a free and unconditional gift. And as soon as he has tasted it and seen that it is good he stands ready to give it away in his turn as soon as the opportunity arises. In such a place, if one were to speak either of his rights or his duties, his remark might be met with puzzled laughter as his hearers struggled to recall an ancient world in which those terms referred to something important.

We have, of course, even now some occasions that tend in this direction. Within some families perhaps, or even in a regiment in desperate battle, people may for a time pass largely beyond morality and live lives of gift and sacrifice. On those occasions nothing would be lost if the moral concepts and the moral language were to disappear. But it is probably not possible that such situations and occasions should be more than rare exceptions in the daily life of the present world. Christianity, however, which tells us that the present world is "fallen" and hence leads us to expect a distortion in its important features, also tells us that one day the redemption of the world will be complete and that then all things shall be made new.³¹

Such an account enables an understanding of love in a far less superficial way than any account whose ultimate components are matter and energy. Jerry Walls writes

Our desire for love and our belief in its importance is supported by the doctrine of the Trinity, which maintains that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit always existed in a relationship of perfect love, even before the world was created. So love and relationship are not relative newcomers in the history of the world, which emerged accidentally from the blind forces of matter. Rather, love and relationship 'go all the way down' in the structure of reality.³²

To put the same point negatively, a theistic ethic adds a qualitatively different and morally relevant flavor to blameworthy actions, according to which we don't merely offend people, but God himself. Now it is even clearer, by the way, why the study of ethics eclipses epistemology in terms of insight into the nature of the universe: God is rational, but more importantly God is love. It is into this reality that supererogatory actions, particularly, provide a window.

Love, as God's nature and morality's pinnacle, while containing an ineliminable affective constituent, transcends mere feeling to encompass attitude, action, and character, a view actually much closer to Kant's meaning (than Taylor's earlier suggestion) when he said that love as a duty *can* be commanded. In this way, love, understood as a duty, can be coherently commanded after all: not as a mere feeling, but as a practical way of life, a

tangible means of treating others.³³ God, aware of our inconstant emotional dispositions, by commanding love for himself and others confers on us the responsibility to exert what control we can—over our actions—with the intent being that the appropriate feelings and proper motivations—character—will eventually be formed within us. As Pascal realized, again in the words of Morris,

Action creates emotion. How we behave can influence, over the long run and sometimes even on the spot, what attitudes and emotions are operative in our lives. And these in turn can open our eyes or blind us to aspects of our objective environment. They can affect deeply our ability to see the world aright.³⁴

Think of husbands who claim to have “fallen out of love” with their wives, and the fact that it is often most obvious that they are not justified to forsake the relationship. Emotions are notoriously fickle, and can fluctuate too easily with the ups and downs of life. An important question for such an individual to ask himself before placing too much stock in his emotions is what actions has he performed or failed to perform which have contributed to this loss of feeling? Action and inaction create emotions, as well as vice versa. That emotions drive actions is well known and not denied here, but that a largely symmetric and reciprocal relation holds between actions and emotions is less recognized.

It should be obvious that none of this is to trivialize feeling, incidentally. Jonathan Edwards issued a warning against such a mistake, depicting it a wicked act

to propagate and establish a persuasion that all affections and sensible emotions of the mind, in things of religion, are nothing at all to be regarded, but are rather to be avoided and carefully guarded against, as things of a pernicious tendency. This [will] bring all religion to a mere lifeless formality, and effectively shut out the power of godliness, and everything which is spiritual and to have all true Christianity turned out of doors.

As there is no true religion where there is nothing else but affection, so there is no true religion where there is no religious affection.... If the great things of religion are rightly understood, they will affect the heart.... This manner of slighting all religious affections is the way exceedingly to harden the hearts of men, and to encourage them in their stupidity and senselessness, and to keep them in a state of spiritual death as long as they live and bring them at last to death eternal.³⁵

Love as understood as encompassing both feeling and behavior is indeed commanded in the New Testament, with the doxastic recognition that the latter can cultivate the former and the former can impassion the latter.

That behavior can affect sentiments and shape character provides a compelling reason why, at some stage of moral development, we as human beings are in need of guidelines and moral rules to establish parameters within which behavior is allowable. Such a recognition enables a defense against Nowell-Smith's charge that obedience of God's commands is necessarily infantile. Eventually adherence to such guidelines can enable the kind of mature moral life envisioned by Nowell-Smith, though with a different understanding

of moral freedom. Moral freedom, according to Christian teaching, is not the autonomy to *make up* what is right and what is wrong, but the capacity to *choose to do* what is good over what is evil. The morally and spiritually free, therefore, are not those who exert autonomy irrespective of the objective constraints on what is right and wrong, but who freely choose to do that which is right and good.

This understanding of freedom is what may provide a way out of the Euthyphro Dilemma. Recall that one of the horns of the dilemma, when morality was rooted in God, entailed the scary prospect of God issuing an immoral command, thereby making it right.³⁶ At least a partial solution to this problem is to call into question God's ability to sin; if God could never issue such a command, the problem never arises. The problem with such a solution is that it doesn't seem a logical impossibility to consider God issuing such a command, despite Aquinas's attempt to portray it as such. Nevertheless theists like Robert Adams wish to assert that it remains necessarily the case that God would not, and in some sense could not, issue such a command. But how can such a limit be placed on the activities of a God who, in the Anselmian sense, is omnipotent, able to do anything logically possible?

Such contemporary questions presuppose an understanding of freedom as the freedom from the constraints of standard rules or the impositions of others, the autonomy to do whatever you want. But that construal of freedom is itself rather morally infantile, more germane to our contemporary political context than to the moral and spiritual realm. A deeper understanding of freedom construes it as the freedom *not* to actualize certain possibilities. Stories abound of people who, in their expressions of personal autonomy, become enslaved to their vices. Genuine freedom is not just freedom *to*, but freedom *from*. God is free not to sin, and therefore free not to issue an immoral command.

However, if the statement "God is good" is understood as synthetic and substantive, and not merely analytic and a function of language, then its denial can't be self-contradictory and therefore remains a broadly logical possibility. So how, you might ask, can an event (like God issuing an immoral command) which is in *some* sense a possibility nevertheless not be actually possible, and a proposition affirming the occurrence of such an event be necessarily false? Because God is the delimiter of possibilities, so that some states of affairs are conceivable, or epistemically possible, but not really metaphysically possible. In this connection Morris writes

For the Anselmian holds that God exemplifies necessarily the properties of omnipotence, omniscience, and goodness. Because of this, God has the unique ontological role of being a delimiter of possibility. To put it simply, some maximal groupings of propositions which, if *per impossible*, God did not exist would constitute possible worlds, do not count as genuinely possible worlds due to the constraints placed on possibility by the nature of the creator. Certain worlds can be described with full consistency in first order logic but are such that, for example, their moral qualities preclude their even possibly being actualized or allowed by an Anselmian God.³⁷

That love and such freedom are the ultimate product of morality thus understood liberates morality from a mere emphasis on rules and regulations. An understanding of morality emancipated from slavish dependence on laws and guidelines makes sense of

the inevitable grey areas that can invariably be found in dilemma ethics. In the realm of rules and duties and such, relativities and exceptions to the rule exist; but that is more tolerable in a system ruled not by an impersonal Kantian law to which human beings need to be unswervingly committed, but rather a personal God. Not an arbitrary God, exacerbating the Euthyphro Dilemma, but one who always acts in love and keeps his promises, not out of compulsion, but out of His unchanging nature of love.

The point, again, is not that God isn't free to do otherwise, but that He's free not to. Preoccupation with whether God is free to do what is evil is a function of what we can call the Minimalist Strategy: talk of morality just in terms of rules and rights and duties, a strategy that is sometimes essential, often important, but never ultimate.³⁸ Morality as construed by theistic ethics points beyond what is penultimate and minimalist to that which our acute if inchoate longing apprehends. It points to that place of morality on the other side of rights and duties, where there shall be no occasion for any prohibition, envisioned by Mavrodes, quoted earlier, where "if one were to speak either of his rights or his duties, his remark might be met with puzzled laughter as his hearers struggled to recall an ancient world in which those terms referred to something important."³⁹

Morality is not the deepest thing...it is provisional and transitory...due to serve its use and then to pass away in favor of something richer and deeper.⁴⁰

REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS

Such idealizations are well and good, but perhaps recall for us the last challenge to theistic ethics that will be briefly treated here: Isn't religious adherence just disguised egoism to get into heaven and avoid hell? As Alasdair MacIntyre writes,

If I am liable to be sent to hell for not doing what God commands, I am thereby provided with a corrupting, because totally self-interested, motive for pursuing the good. When self-interest is made as central as this, other motives are likely to dwindle in importance and a religious morality becomes self-defeating, at least insofar as it was originally designed to condemn pure self-interest.⁴¹

This type of objection, Jerry Walls notes, has the most force when the sufferings of hell are seen more as an externally imposed punishment, bearing no necessary relation to the nature of the moral action involved. But the objection loses some of its momentum when the anguish of hell is seen as a function of a life of evil. (To some extent, a similar point may apply to the joy of heaven being a function of choosing good, though the grace of God that enables heaven goes far beyond any merely natural consequences.) This point too is vulnerable to a Kantian-styled objection that criticizes moral motivation to avoid evil simply to avoid the anguish that is typically a natural consequence of such actions and attitudes in a moral world. To the Kantian must be conceded some ground at this point; heaven and hell do, at some level, appeal to self-interest.⁴²

But not all self-interest is selfish, and proper self-interest is a legitimate part of genuine moral motivation.⁴³ This is particularly the case when the self-interested motivation takes for its normative form the *renunciation* of self-absorption and indulgence. Further, an

action that is in one's self-interest may have been sufficiently motivated by something other than self-interest to qualify as something for which to be praised.⁴⁴ And even Kant himself insisted that practical rationality demands the postulate of a God who will ensure, ultimately, that the virtuous are the happy. Mavrodes writes that "what we have in Kant is the recognition that there cannot be, in any 'reasonable' way, a moral demand upon me, unless reality itself is committed to morality in some deep way."⁴⁵ Theistic ethics, it has been argued, is the best explanation of how reality itself is thus committed, thus providing a liberation from a Stoic commitment to morality without the psychologically vital confidence that reality itself is ultimately concerned about the best interests of moral persons.

Lest this defensive maneuver designed to salvage the connection between God and morality against Kant's objection lose sight of an important point, it should be remembered that what the theological stance is being criticized for here is the "vice" of solving a heretofore intractable moral dilemma. That dilemma resides in attempting to reconcile morality as concurrently requiring *sacrifice* of self-interest and *protection* of self-interest. What has been presented are some steps in the direction of accounting for a meaningful, coherent, and consistent way to retain both of these moral intuitions in synergistic balance, by distinguishing between short-term and long-term interest and pointing to the nature of the ethical acts performed in a moral world.

Heaven and hell, thus understood within a matrix of orthodox religious beliefs—according to which salvation is not earned but received through faith in Christ's sacrifice, involving both orthodoxy and orthopraxy—can at least potentially offer substantive motivation to live morally, and perhaps even endure sacrifice of personal interest or even persecution. Since it is often agreed that the proper contents of ethics, generally speaking, are not what is up for grabs so much as any sufficiently motivating factors to do what is right, the doctrines of heaven and hell may well provide some hard and needed motivation to live the kind of moral life that makes best sense when understood within a larger context than this life alone.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, then, theistic ethics, following some of the suggestions in this paper, retains the potential of being shown to account for moral facts better than secular ethics and to provide a strong account of moral motivation. Such an ethic need not, and properly understood does not, entail a simplistic correlation between doctrinal belief or religious affiliation and moral practice, nor does it of necessity contain elements that are essentially infantile. To the contrary, it affirms that all human beings, having been created in God's *imago dei*, are capable of intuitively grasping and rationally understanding the moral order which, given its salient features, has for its best explanation a theistic premise, providing the best available account of love understood in more than a superficial way. Love thus understood as more than mere emotion indeed can be commanded and thereby facilitate the process of moral maturity by the reciprocal relationship that obtains between emotion and action, according to a notion of freedom which also makes possible God's willful inability to issue immoral commands.⁴⁶

NOTES

1. Here is one rudimentary critique of Kant's argument against the importation of theology into the science of metaphysics. Strawson points out that Kant was as motivated to exclude negative theological claims as positive ones from his cognitive classification. Denying God's existence, on this view, is as much beyond our ken as affirming that God *does* exist. That being the case, clearly the philosopher Berkeley's affirmation of his central tenet of the sustaining sovereignty of God qualifies as a theological claim, and thus resides outside our cognitive capabilities according to Kant's exclusion of propositions of speculative metaphysics from the realm of legitimate metaphysical inquiry. But then it follows that the denial of such a proposition, or a proposition that has the denial of Berkeley's theological claim as its entailment, would equally qualify as a theological—an atheological—proposition bearing the same relation to Kant's cognitive map as Berkeley's affirmation does. So assuming that the gloss on what constitutes a substance is Kantian that defines it as that which is capable of existence apart from anyone's perception of it, then Kant is contradicting himself. For he would be affirming the cognitive import of a proposition that clearly entails the negation of Berkeley's favored theological tenet. It would seem, then, that either Kant contradicts himself in this respect or this gloss on Kantian substances is mistaken.
2. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), pp. 1-18.
3. Stanley Jaki, "Christology and the Birth of Science," *Asbury Theological Journal*, vol. 45, no. 2, p. 68.
4. J. P. Moreland and Kai Nielsen, *Does God Exist? The Debate Between Theists and Atheists* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1993), p. 119.
5. Cited in William J. Abraham, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1985), p. 136.
6. Richard Taylor, *Good and Evil: A New Direction* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1984), pp. 247-49.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 248.
8. See Kai Nielsen, *Ethics Without God* (New York: Pemberton Books, 1973).
9. Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 454.
10. Abraham, *op. cit.*, p. 132.
11. Matt. 23:23-28.
12. Geisler, Norman L. and J. P. Moreland, "Ethical Theories and Ethical Decision-Making," in Francis J. Beckwith, *Do the Right Thing: A Philosophical Dialogue on the Moral and Social Issues of Our Time* (Boston: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 1996), p. 39.
13. *Classic Philosophical Questions*, James Gould, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), p. 180.
14. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), p. 292.
15. Gregory Kavka, "A Reconciliation Project," in *Ethical Theory: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, Louis Pojman, ed. (New York: Wadsworth, 1995), p. 559.
16. It is generally agreed among ethicists that rule-utilitarianism and deontology probably have a much easier time accounting for supererogatory actions than act-utilitarianism.
17. Paul Taylor calls this the "ultimate question."
18. See G. E. Moore's classic *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge, 1903), the book that really initiated the major discussion of metaethics this century.
19. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study of Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 56.
20. J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 115. Mackie further argues no moral truths exist on the grounds that they involve an "ought," meaning we have sufficient (or categorical) reason to do something irrespective of our desires. But then he says we're obligated to do nothing other than what we're motivated to do. Therefore, there is no ought and no moral truth.

21. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existential Ethics," in Gould, op. cit., pp. 178-79.
22. For a concise sample of Nietzsche's thought, see "The Relativity of Morality" in Borchert et al., op. cit., pp. 322-39.
23. W. T. Stace, "Ethics Are Not Relative," in Gould, op. cit., p. 114.
24. Cited by Mavrodes in Pojman, op. cit., p. 587.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., p. 586.
27. Thomas V. Morris, *Making Sense of It All: Pascal and the Meaning of Life* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1992), p. 24.
28. See Jerry L. Walls, "Heaven, Hell, and Moral Foundations," unpublished.
29. Morris, op. cit., p. 25.
30. Eleonore Stump, "The Mirror of Evil," in *God and the Philosophers*, op. cit., p. 246.
31. Pojman, op. cit., p. 588.
32. Jerry Walls, "On Keeping the Faith," in *God and the Philosophers*, op. cit., p. 110.
33. Robert Adams, borrowing terminology from Paul Tillich, distinguishes a Christian ethic's *theonomy* from either *heteronomy* or *autonomy*. For an insightful, short discussion of this, the reader is encouraged to examine "Autonomy and Theological Ethics," in *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 123-27.
34. Morris, *Making Sense of It All*, op. cit., p. 125.
35. See *The Religious Affections* (Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, reprint 1984), p. 29.
36. The Euthyphro Dilemma is also exacerbated by certain strongly voluntarist versions of the Ockham-divine command theory, which move into noncognitivism. Generally what is assumed here instead is more of a personalist view, according to which God's unchanging nature has been expressed in the created order, the essence of which can be intuitively grasped and rationally understood. Another important distinction that helps handle the Dilemma is that between control and causal dependence. The latter relation bearing between God and morality does not entail the former.
37. Thomas V. Morris, *Anselmian Explorations: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Notre Dame Press, 1987), p. 184. Beyond this, we see that God is the source of those standards to which we appeal when characterizing God as maximally moral, contrary to Nielsen's charge that an affirmation of the proposition "God is good" as synthetic necessarily appeals to standards external to God. Let me also use this note as an opportunity to point out that recent work in the philosophy of language, such as that of Kripke's and Putnam's, has distinguished between necessary truths and analyticity.
- For an alternative view against Morris, see T. Jackson, "Is God Just?," *Faith and Philosophy* (July 1995). As long as one grants that were the possibility of God issuing an unkind command to be realized, Jackson argues, one might grant that such a contingency is not just a *logical* possibility but a *practical* one as well. This would of course essentially entail God's self-destruction—ceasing to be himself—and thus the end of ethics. The suggestion is that it is the ultimate expression of the unity of God's goodness and power that God could do this, but freely does not do so.
38. It is interestingly relevant that certain recent feminist moral philosophers have also offered a critique of morality construed just in terms of rights and duties.
39. Mavrodes, in Pojman, op. cit., p. 588.
40. Ibid.
41. Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 113.
42. Jerry L. Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation* (Notre Dame Press, 1992), p. 155.
43. Ibid.
44. Walls, "Moral Foundations," op. cit.
45. Mavrodes, in Pojman, op. cit., p. 587.
46. Finally, it should be noted that a weakly voluntaristic theistic account, or what Morris

might call "theistic activism," such as what has been presented here in broad strokes, if successful, by integrating and synthesizing insights from both moral objectivists and subjectivists, would be similar to a successful rapprochement between Platonism and theism in philosophical theology that would provide "a view which both retains the commitment of realism concerning objective existence and status of abstract entities and modal truths, while at the same time capturing the conviction of anti-realists and conventionalists that such items must be in some sense mind-dependent." See Morris, *Anselmian Explorations*, op. cit., p. 178.

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