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Mark C. Murphy

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DIVINE COMMAND, DIVINE WILL, AND MORAL OBLIGATION

Mark C. Murphy

In this article I consider the respective merits of three interpretations of divine command theory. On DCT1, S's being morally obligated to ϕ depends on God's command that S ϕ ; on DCT2, that moral obligation depends on God's willing that S be morally obligated to ϕ ; on DCT3, that moral obligation depends on God's willing that S ϕ . I argue that the positive reasons that have been brought forward in favor of DCT1 have implications theists would find disturbing and that the positive reasons brought forward in favor of DCT2 support only a weak formulation of DCT2 that is indistinguishable from other theistic moral theories. DCT3 is, however, a distinctive theory that theists have strong reasons to affirm.

Philip Quinn has usefully distinguished between two sorts of task that the advocate of a divine command theory of ethics (hereafter DCT) might engage in: that of defending DCT against the standard (and not-so-standard) objections that have been leveled against it, and that of providing "good positive reasons" for affirming that theory.¹ There is a third task that merits attention, though, and that does not fit neatly into either category: that of specification of what it is that DCT asserts. What does DCT affirm concerning the connection between God and morality? What precisely are the relata, and what precisely is the nature of the relationship? This task of determining what specific formulation DCT should receive is, of course, not unrelated to the other two. Rescuing DCT from objections may involve the task of specifying that theory more completely or reformulating its fundamental theses; and the particular formulation that DCT receives is likely to be shaped by the positive reasons there are for acceptance of that view.

Part of the discussion concerning what formulation DCT should receive has focused on the nature of the relationship between God and morality: whether the connection between certain states of affairs involving God's will or God's commands and certain states of affairs involving moral requirements should be construed as a relationship of identity, or causation, or perhaps supervenience. As far as is possible, I shall not deal with the issue of the relationship between these states of affairs. Rather, I want to focus on the issue of what states of affairs involving God should be taken to be fundamental to DCT.² Consider, for example, the following

three distinct theses concerning moral obligation that a defender of DCT might affirm:

(DCT1) The state of affairs of S's being morally obligated to ϕ depends on the state of affairs of God's commanding S to ϕ

(DCT2) The state of affairs of S's being morally obligated to ϕ depends on the state of affairs of God's willing that S be morally obligated to ϕ

(DCT3) The state of affairs of S's being morally obligated to ϕ depends on the state of affairs of God's willing that S ϕ ³

Call DCT1 a *command formulation* of DCT; call DCT2 and DCT3 *will formulations* of DCT. Now, DCT1, DCT2, and DCT3 are not very fine-grained formulations of DCT's theory of moral obligation.⁴ They are, for example, silent on the issue of what the dependence relation consists in, whether it is identity, or supervenience, or a causal relationship of some sort. Their silence on this issue is intentional, though, for I want to focus on the relation rather than the relation.⁵ Should the defender of DCT affirm a command or a will formulation of DCT? If a will formulation is affirmed, what is the act of willing that is relevant?

DCT1

DCT1 is considered the standard formulation of DCT both by those sympathetic to and by those critical of divine command theories of ethics. Robert Adams, whose work was crucial to the rebirth of this type of ethical theory, clearly endorses the command formulation of DCT over will formulations.⁶ In spite of the impeccability of its credentials as the traditional formulation of DCT, though, it is worthwhile to ask whether good reasons can be found for preferring this formulation of DCT.

It seems to me that the best argument in favor of DCT1 over DCT2 and DCT3 turns on a purported analogy between the way that voluntary human activity generates obligations and the way that voluntary divine activity generates obligations.⁷ When humans impose obligations either on themselves or on others, these obligations are the result of the performance of certain speech-acts. Consider two examples. First, promises: I may will to give you a dollar, but I am not obligated to give you the dollar unless I make a promise to do so. Second, orders: a sergeant may will that a private scrub the latrine, but the private is under no obligation to scrub the latrine until the sergeant orders him or her to do so. It is important to note that it is not just that the act of will is not sufficient for the existence of the obligation in these cases; it is not even necessary, and the promise and the order can produce obligations even if the will is opposed to what is promised or ordered. I might lack the will to give you a dollar, and might even have a will that is opposed to it, yet my promise to give you a dollar

nonetheless generates an obligation to hand it over. The sergeant might lack the will that the private scrub the latrine, and might even have a will that is opposed to it (perhaps the sergeant cares not for matters of hygiene, or wants the private to disobey so that he or she can be brought up on charges of insubordination), yet the order to scrub the latrine still generates an obligation to do the job.

Humans impose obligations on themselves and others by way of speech-acts. Mere willing is not sufficient, and is not even necessary. If God's obligation-producing activity is analogous to that of humans, then we might take DCT1 to be the preferable formulation of DCT, for it makes moral obligation depend on God's commands, which are divine speech-acts. It seems, though, that accepting this analogy would have disturbing implications for divine command theorists regarding God's capacity to impose obligations.

To make clear why this is so, I will need to say some things about how ordinary human speech-acts generate obligations. I take it that it is a commonly held view that while a purely empirical set of conditions can be laid down for what counts as the making of a promise or the giving of an order (that certain words are uttered, that the utterer of the words possesses certain beliefs and intentions, and the like), both the status of these empirically-specifiable acts as promises or orders and the status of these acts as engendering obligations depend on the obtaining of institutional facts.⁸ The rules that constitute the familiar practice of promising, that is, both determine when a valid promise has been made and imply that a promise is an undertaking of an obligation; and the rules that define the relationships between military superiors and inferiors specify what counts as a non-defective order and make it the case that when a non-defective order has been issued the person to whom it has been issued is bound to comply with it. If there were not these constitutive rules, not only would it not be the case that promises and orders impose obligations, it would not be the case that there are promises and orders at all.

If human speech-acts generate obligations in this way, then there is reason to doubt the analogy between God's obligation-imposing activity and human obligation-imposing activity. It seems that if the fact of analogy is to give support for DCT1, then God's speech-acts must impose obligations in the same way that humans' speech-acts impose obligations. While I think that one kind of worry that attends this proposal can be shown to be less weighty than it might initially appear, another shows that this purported analogy would have consequences that are intolerable for most defenders of DCT.

One worry that could immediately be pressed against this conclusion is that even if God's commands generate obligations in the way that human speech-acts do, the obligations are nothing like the *moral* obligations that the defender of DCT is concerned to uncover. While Searle, for example, defends the view that one can derive from the fact of a promise the existence of an obligation to perform, he freely admits that he does not show that the obligation in question is moral, and he even suggests that there are reasons to believe that the promissory obligation is not a moral obligation.⁹ Since Searle's derivation is not specific to promises but could be applied to

all obligations resulting from speech-acts, the same point could be made about obligations generated by orders or commands. Rawls, upon discussing the constitutive conventions that govern the practice of promise-making, notes that those rules are on a par with the rules of games, and do not become morally binding except by way of a true moral principle that entails that adherence to those rules is morally required.¹⁰ Thus, we could not rest by explaining moral obligation in terms of God's commands, but would have to invoke an independent moral principle which implies that adherence to obligations resulting from divine commands is morally binding. Perhaps even more directly to the point is an argument made by John Simmons against the view that the moral obligation to obey the law can be explained in terms of positional duties or institutional requirements. Contrary to the views of those who hold that anyone who uses the term "law" correctly or knows what citizenship is recognizes that citizens have an obligation to obey the law, Simmons argues that this putative obligation, if there is such a thing, is of no moral weight; positional duties are not moral duties, and institutional requirements are not moral requirements.¹¹ Similarly, one could argue that even if God's speech-acts do generate obligations like promises and orders do, these are not moral obligations, and so even if the analogy between human and divine speech-acts holds, this analogy provides no reason to affirm the view that DCT1 is the preferable formulation of DCT.

Searle, Rawls, and Simmons agree that the obligations that arise as a result of institutional facts are not moral obligations at all. This might be thought to be a decisive objection to the defense of DCT1: for if no speech-acts generate moral obligations, then God's speech-acts do not generate moral obligations. I think, though, that this objection is not decisive. Simmons' argumentative strategy derives its success from the fact that without begging any questions he can rely on a neutral and unproblematic account of moral obligation with which he can effectively contrast certain institutional requirements. But we are precluded from employing a strategy of this sort by the foundational nature of the enquiry that we are engaged in. We are not concerned, as Simmons is, with asking whether particular institutional requirements impose moral obligations. We are concerned, rather, with asking whether moral obligation could itself be one kind of institutional requirement, that is, obligation that results from speech-acts that God performs. We cannot assume a contrast without begging the question.

It might help to imagine the following form of life, and how in this form of life the obligations generated by God's commands have the foundational place that is often associated with moral requirements. Suppose that there is a human community that is thoroughly theocentric. One way that this theocentrism is manifested is that within this community there is an institution, similar in some respects to our institution of promising, called the institution of "divine commanding." Divine commanding is itself an act that can be empirically-specified: it occurs paradigmatically when God utters the words "I command that . . ." and thereupon predicates some future action to some person, and God possesses certain beliefs, intentions, etc. By using this form of speaking, God intends to perform an act quite

different than that of merely reporting a wish or want, and in virtue of the constitutive rules of the institution anyone who asserts that *S* has been divinely commanded to ϕ is committed to the view that *S* is obligated to ϕ . These "divine command obligations" are ultimate in the following sense: all other obligations that persons within that community see themselves as being bound by are in some sense regulated by divine command obligations. So, it is the case that even if one recognizes that he or she is under a promissory obligation by making a promise, the normative force of this obligation is referred to a divine command obligation, perhaps an obligation that one adhere to his or her promissory obligations. In this community divine command obligations are ultimate; there are no obligations of a kind more fundamental than they to which divine command obligations could be contrasted to their detriment. The point is not that this is an attractive view of morality. Rather, the point is that with regard to such a society it does not seem a decisive objection to assert that no matter what the institutional requirements are, it is clear that they are not moral requirements. Within such a form of life, the obligations generated by God's speech-acts seem to fill the role of moral requirements.

The worry about making the case for God's obligation-engendering activity depend on an analogy with human obligation-imposing activity is not that it requires an absurd view of morality, but rather that (as the story I had to tell makes clear) it makes God's capacity to obligate dependent on the existence of certain highly specific forms of community that are conventional and for the most part do not exist at all. The worry is that on such a view God's obligation-producing power is objectionably contingent. God could not impose obligations on the persons that do not inhabit this form of community, and that means that most persons would be insusceptible to having obligations imposed on them by God.

My view is that acceptance of the analogy between human and divine obligation-engendering activity as support for DCT1 would commit one to a view of God's power to impose obligations which the defender of DCT would find objectionably contingent. One might respond, though, by questioning my claim that certain institutional rules would need to be in place for God to be able to impose obligations. "Forget the institutional rules," the objector might say. "Why should we not simply hold that it is a moral principle that those to whom God has issued a command are bound to obey that command?" One could say this, I suppose; but note that this proposal does not enjoy the analogical support that the earlier defense of DCT1 enjoyed. The analogy between the human and the divine imposition of obligations, were it successful, would militate in favor of DCT1 over DCT2 and DCT3. But if one merely asserts that there is a moral principle that one ought to obey God's commands, it is open to ask why one holds that view rather than the view that (perhaps) there is a moral principle that one ought to obey God's will. The analogy supports the command formulation of DCT over the will formulations. If one discards the institutional rules picture, though, one must discard the analogy, the rationale for preferring DCT1 to DCT2 and DCT3.

I think, then, that the analogical argument for DCT1 is not successful.¹² But there is an argument for DCT1 that does not depend on any appeal to

analogy between human and divine obligation-imposing activity. The content of God's will is, to put it mildly, very difficult to know without God's making it known by way of His commands. But it might be thought that what we are morally obligated to do must be knowable, so that unless God's will is made known by His issuing commands, one cannot be under any moral obligations.¹³ Support for this view might be drawn from the "ought implies can" principle. It might be thought that since acting on moral requirements is not possible unless one is able to know of their existence, there is reason to prefer a formulation of DCT that connects moral obligations to God's knowable commands rather than God's unknowable will.

There are at least two things that can be said in response to this argument. First, it should be noted that the formulation of the "ought implies can" principle that is relied on in this argument is itself questionable. In order for the argument to be successful in establishing that command is even a necessary condition of obligation, the principle must be interpreted so that being bound by an obligation to ϕ implies that one can ϕ under the description "fulfilling an obligation." It is only by interpreting the principle to have this implication that one can deduce that one must be aware of the status of an action as obligatory if there is to be an obligation to perform it; only by giving this sort of interpretation of "ought implies can" can the knowability requirement be defended as an *a priori* condition that any account of moral obligation must satisfy. But it is not obvious to me, at any rate, that it could not be the case that one ought to ϕ yet one is in a position such that one cannot know that one ought to ϕ . Rather, this strikes me as simply a rather innocuous form of realism about moral requirements. It should be noted, however, that to say that one is under a moral requirement that one cannot know about in present circumstances is not to say that one is culpable if one does not follow that moral requirement. While there is on my view little to be gained by denying that there can be obligations that we cannot, in present circumstances, know about, there is much to be said for the view that one cannot be considered blameworthy (or praiseworthy) for violating (or adhering to) moral requirements that he or she was in no position to know about.

Secondly, even if we grant that the truth of "ought implies can" shows that there is a sense in which moral obligation has to depend on divine command within a DCT view, dependence in this sense is not what is at stake between advocates of DCT1 and advocates of DCT2 and DCT3. It will be useful to adopt here a distinction employed by Howard Warrender between *grounds* of obligation and the *validating conditions* of obligation.¹⁴ This distinction between grounds and validating conditions is not, I think, one that can be spelled out in purely logical terms. The distinction is, rather, that between a cause, or source, and the circumstances in which a cause can operate or a source can issue its product.¹⁵ Now, even if the truth of the "ought implies can" thesis implies that moral obligation in DCT must depend on divine command, all that would follow is that the expression of God's will is at least a validating condition of moral obligation. But it seems to me that the dispute between defenders of command formulations and will formulations of DCT is not about the validating conditions of moral obligation, but rather its grounds. (A defender of a will formula-

tion could, it seems, affirm that command is a validating condition of moral obligation without straying at all from his or her thesis.) The positive argument for DCT1 that relies on "ought implies can" is therefore not strong enough to provide reasons to prefer that thesis to DCT2 and DCT3.

The arguments that favor a command formulation of DCT over a will formulation do not withstand scrutiny. Before we turn to an examination of the specific will formulations DCT2 and DCT3, we should consider whether will formulations generically considered have anything to recommend them over the command formulation. We are aided in answering this question by the fact that both Quinn and Edward Wierenga, who along with Adams are largely responsible for the revival of DCT, have noted in passing that on their views it is not divine command that is of fundamental importance for DCT but rather divine will.

Wierenga offers as a justification for preferring will formulations over command formulations the ability that the former have to solve certain puzzles, such as that posed by the case of Abraham and Isaac. He writes that by affirming a will formulation of DCT, the defender of DCT need not "take God's command that Abraham kill Isaac as indicating God's desire that some particular act of Abraham's killing Isaac be performed. Rather, God issued that command to reveal what He really wanted, or to induce Abraham to do what he really wanted, which was that Abraham, out of a desire to obey God, prepare to sacrifice Isaac."¹⁶ Even if one does not endorse Wierenga's particular analysis of the case of Abraham and Isaac, one might think that will formulations have advantages over command formulations with regard to the implications these formulations have in cases in which what God commands and what God wills pull apart. DCT1 implies that if God's commands conflict with God's will, then it is God's commands that dictate morality; and DCT1 implies that if God wills a human action yet fails to command it, that action is not morally required. If we think that it is possible for God to issue a command which He wills us not to adhere to, and that in such cases we would be morally obligated to follow God's will rather than to adhere to the command, we would have reason to affirm a will formulation over a command formulation. (Is it possible for God to test us by commanding something that He wills that we not do?¹⁷) We might also wonder whether there might be moral requirements that God has not told us about yet; DCT2 and DCT3 do not imply the impossibility of this state of affairs, but DCT1 does. (God might will, for example, that we perform a certain action without being commanded to do so. DCT1 implies that it could not be a violation of a moral obligation not to act in accordance with this will; DCT2 and DCT3 imply that it could.)

Quinn, on the other hand, does not appeal to puzzle-solving capacities to justify the preference for will formulations of DCT over command formulations. He writes that he prefers to formulate DCT in terms of divine will rather than divine command because "it is at the deepest level God's will, and not his commands, which *merely express his will*, that determines the deontological status of actions."¹⁸ What Quinn's remark captures is that God's commands might not seem to be of importance except insofar as those commands express what God's will is; God's commands are mere

means to express His will. Now, one might say: there seems to be more of importance about commands than the expression of will. But if my criticisms of the analogical argument are correct, it will be difficult to show how God's commands could be more than expressions of His will, except in very limited and special circumstances.

The rationales provided by Wierenga and Quinn for acceptance of will formulations of DCT over the command formulation are not, of course, decisive. To find better reasons for accepting a will formulation, I think that we shall have to look to the particular formulations DCT2 and DCT3, and see what grounds for acceptance they present. Before we turn to those accounts, though, we should note that there is some price to be paid for accepting a will view over the command view. Quinn takes part of the distinctiveness of DCT to be its affirmation that God's commands do not simply inform us of the existence of certain obligations, but impose the obligations on us. But note that if we decide that it is the will of God and not His commands that does the work, then we must disagree with Quinn's assertion and hold that according to DCT God's commands are relevant to morality only in an informative capacity, because they express to us what the content of God's will is. If we decide on reflection that God necessarily does not command what He does not will, then we can make the same claim that many natural law views make, simply that what God says is an infallible guide to what is morally required. If, on the other hand, we hold that God might command what He does not will, then a particular one of God's commands might be among a number of factors that are considered in order to discern what God wills. This price is small, though, for the claim about God's commands can be transformed into a claim about God's will with apparently little sacrifice. One can claim that God's will is not merely reflective of moral requirements, but is constitutive or productive of them. And this does seem to capture what the defenders of DCT want for their view, a view which Quinn occasionally and more accurately calls "theological voluntarism."

DCT2

DCT2 and DCT3 are versions of theological voluntarism. Both of them assert that moral requirements depend on God's will.¹⁹ But they differ in a crucial respect. DCT2 asserts that the act of will that is relevant is God's will that some person be bound by a moral requirement to perform a certain action. DCT3 asserts that the act of will that is relevant is simply God's will that some person perform a certain action. I know of no plausible will formulation of DCT other than DCT2 and DCT3. If, then, defenders of DCT reject command formulations, they should accept either DCT2 or DCT3. But which of these is preferable?

I want to argue that there are good reasons for rejecting DCT2 as the preferred formulation of DCT. I will first show that DCT2 admits of a metaethical and a normative interpretation.²⁰ I will then argue that the positive reasons that have been brought forward in favor of DCT2 support only the metaethical and not the normative interpretation. I shall show, though, that the metaethical interpretation of DCT2 is not distinctive; it does not adequately distinguish the defender of DCT from defenders of

other ethical views. While DCT2 can be reformulated so that it is distinctive, this reformulation is *ad hoc*, unmotivated by any of the positive reasons brought forward for accepting it.

DCT2 asserts that S's being morally required to ϕ depends on God's willing that S be morally required to ϕ . But this can be given either a normative or a metaethical interpretation. On the normative interpretation of DCT2 — call it DCT2-N — the following normative state of affairs obtains: all humans are morally required to do what God wills that they be morally required to do. In virtue of this general moral requirement, particular actions that God wills that we be morally required to perform become actual moral requirements. The idea expressed by DCT2-N, that is, is that humans owe God obedience with regard to what God wills that humans be required to do. There is a moral requirement on all humans to obey God's will; the particular moral obligations that humans have are all specifications of this general moral requirement, determinations of what must be done in concrete circumstances if one is to render this obedience. On the other hand, the metaethical interpretation of DCT2 — call it DCT2-M — does not appeal to a general moral requirement that is particularized by the content of God's will. Rather, the claim is that God creates moral requirements *ex nihilo*, that is, out of normative nothingness.

It seems to me that metaethical and normative versions of DCT2 are easily confounded. The likely source of this confusion is that both of them imply that if God wills that humans be morally required to ϕ , then humans are morally required to ϕ .²¹ But the metaethical and normative versions of DCT2 differ both in the sort of explanations they provide for the existence of particular moral obligations and in their implications about what moral obligations there are. DCT2-N explains particular moral requirements in terms of another normative state of affairs, that is, the general moral obligation to obey God. DCT2-M explains the existence of particular moral requirements simply in terms of God's power to actualize normative states of affairs; no normative states of affairs obtain prior to God's willing. This difference in explanation also produces a difference in normative implication. Since DCT2-N explains how God generates moral obligations in terms of the normative state of affairs that one is morally required to obey God, it follows trivially from DCT2-N that humans are under a moral requirement to obey God. DCT2-M does not have this implication, however; one can affirm DCT2-M yet deny DCT2-N. It is consistent to hold that all moral requirements are produced by God out of normative nothingness as DCT2-M claims, but that those moral requirements are those of (e.g.) utilitarianism rather than normative divine command theory.

DCT2-M and DCT2-N are distinct theses; neither entails the other.²² I shall argue that the positive reasons that have been brought forward in favor of DCT2 militate in favor of DCT2-M, but not DCT2-N. Thus, it is the DCT2-M formulation that should be accepted, if DCT2 ought to be accepted at all. (This is one of those cases in which the specific formulation that a thesis receives depends on the positive reasons brought forward for accepting that thesis.)

The reasons that have been brought forward in favor of DCT2 emphasize certain divine attributes which would allegedly be compromised if

DCT2 were not the case; such attributes include, for example, God's being both omnipotent and impeccable, God's both having absolute liberty and being impeccable, and God's possessing absolute sovereignty over creation. While I will later remark briefly on the first two combinations of attributes,²³ I will focus on the third. For the most detailed recent argument in favor of DCT2, that presented by Quinn, is that an appreciation of the doctrine of divine sovereignty lends support to DCT2.

The doctrine that God is sovereign over creation is "that nothing distinct from God is independent of God."²⁴ The sense of dependence is metaphysical: metaphysical dependence is an asymmetrical relation in which one state of affairs contributes to the obtaining of another state of affairs. The doctrine of divine sovereignty, then, asserts that states of affairs that are distinct²⁵ from God's existing are metaphysically dependent on God's willing that they obtain. This interpretation of the doctrine Quinn takes to be a moderate one. On a weaker view, it is only contingent states of affairs that are metaphysically dependent on God's will; on a stronger view, all states of affairs, even those which involve or entail God's existence, are metaphysically dependent on God's willing them. While Quinn disclaims knowledge of any conclusive arguments for the moderate interpretation, and professes merely to be following the "generally sound maxim that good things are apt to be found somewhere in the middle between extremes,"²⁶ it nevertheless seems clear why he inclines toward it: it allows for a fairly robust theological activism²⁷ while avoiding the strangeness of the view that something that is logically necessary for God's willing (that is, God's existing) could nevertheless be metaphysically dependent on it.²⁸

Acceptance of this moderate interpretation of the doctrine of divine sovereignty provides support, though, for DCT2. Most states of affairs involving morality are obviously wholly distinct from God's existing. Lying's being morally forbidden and charity's being morally required are obviously distinct from God's existing, and so if God is sovereign over creation in this moderate sense then the obtaining of those normative states of affairs is dependent on God's willing that they obtain. It is clear, however, that this appeal to divine sovereignty over creation supports only DCT2-M, not DCT2-N. The doctrine of divine sovereignty does not itself support the view that any normative states of affairs obtain, and it does not show that the moral requirements that we are under are the result of a prior moral requirement to obey God. Rather, the appeal to sovereignty shows only that God's will must enter into any complete explanation of why a normative state of affairs obtains.

It might be argued, though, that the doctrine of divine sovereignty does not establish DCT2-M, for there are some normative states of affairs whose obtaining cannot be shown to depend on God's will by the sort of argument that Quinn advances. Interestingly, one of these normative states of affairs is that expressed by DCT2-N. Quinn's moderate interpretation of divine sovereignty shows that moral requirements depend on God's will if they are wholly distinct from God's existing. But Quinn denies that the state of affairs described in DCT2-N is wholly distinct from the state of affairs of God's existing. He writes:

it might seem that [the thesis that all obtaining states of affairs wholly distinct from God's existing depend on God's will] is powerful enough to get us to the conclusion that all obtaining deontological states of affairs are metaphysically dependent on being willed by God. But this is not so, for the simple reason that not all obtaining deontological states of affairs are wholly distinct from God existing. Consider the state of affairs of obeying God being obligatory. According to theism, it surely obtains. Yet it seems clearly not to be wholly distinct from the state of affairs of God existing, because it apparently both involves and entails God existing.²⁹

Quinn underestimates the force of the moderate interpretation of divine sovereignty. Even the moderate interpretation, on my view, implies that the truth of theses like DCT2-N are metaphysically dependent on God's will. The reason is that, contrary to appearances, the state of affairs expressed by DCT2-N is wholly distinct from God's existing.

Consider the following analogous case. Suppose that the state of affairs of its being morally obligatory to keep promises obtains. This state of affairs is, I think, wholly distinct from the existence of promises: one can conceive of its being morally obligatory to keep promises yet no one has made any; and one can accept that promise-keeping is obligatory while not accepting that there are any promises out there to keep. What this shows is that the moral requirement to keep promises is best thought of as not implying the existence of promises. It seems to me that the same point applies *mutatis mutandis* to the case of the moral requirement to obey God. One can (*pace* Anselm) conceive of God's non-existence while conceiving that it is morally obligatory to obey God, and one can accept the view that obedience to God is morally required while denying that God exists. What this would show, as in the case of promises, is that the moral requirement to obey God is best thought of as not implying God's existence.³⁰ But if this moral requirement does not imply God's existence, then the state of affairs of its being morally obligatory to obey God is wholly distinct from that of God's existing.³¹ And if this is so, then the moderate doctrine of divine sovereignty does not leave it as an open question whether the truth of DCT2-N is independent of God's will. Rather, DCT2-N, whether a contingent or a necessary truth, is metaphysically dependent on God's will.³²

Theists who accept this moderate account of divine sovereignty, it seems, are committed to the acceptance of DCT2-M. Before turning to an examination of the difficulties with DCT2-M as a formulation of DCT, I want to note briefly that other divine attributes that have been brought forward to support DCT2 militate in favor of DCT2-M rather than DCT2-N. It might be held that since God is both omnipotent and impeccable, DCT2 must be the case. For if God cannot act in a way that is morally wrong, then God's power would be limited by other normative states of affairs were DCT2 not the case. One might make a similar argument with regard to divine liberty and impeccability: if moral requirements exist prior to God's willing them, requirements that an impeccable God could not violate, God's liberty is compromised.³³ I shall neither endorse nor reject these arguments for DCT.³⁴ What is clear from these argument sketches, though,

is that it is not DCT2-N that is supported by these arguments but rather DCT2-M. DCT2-M denies the existence of any normative states of affairs that could exist prior to God's willing them; hence, prior normative states of affairs could neither constrain God's power to act (thus compromising His omnipotence) nor constrain God's freedom to act (thus compromising His liberty). The arguments from omnipotence, liberty, and impeccability support only a metaethical, not a normative, version of DCT2.

Quinn's argument from divine sovereignty does support DCT2-M; indeed, I think that his moderate interpretation of that doctrine provides for an even more thorough defense of that thesis than Quinn suggests. Further, I will grant *arguendo* that the argument sketches that take as their premises divine omnipotence, liberty, and impeccability can be filled out so that they imply DCT2-M. The failure of DCT2-M is not the absence of good arguments in its support. Rather, its failure is specifically as a formulation of DCT: it is simply not distinctive; theists of all ethical stripes can accept it. It is too uncontroversial with respect to moral matters to be the preferred formulation of DCT.³⁵

One way to approach the issue of DCT2-M's lack of distinctiveness is to note that the argument from divine sovereignty that implies DCT2-M is not domain-specific. This argument does not show that morality *in particular* depends on divine fiat; rather, it shows that all states of affairs (apart from God's existing, and what entails God's existing) depend on divine fiat.³⁶ What this means, of course, is that if one defends DCT2-M on the basis of such an argument, one is committed not only to a divine command theory of morality, but also to divine command theories of chemistry, biology, physics, mathematics, economics, psychology, and accounting. But this should make the defender of DCT wonder if DCT2-M really is a strong enough doctrine. For if DCT2-M itself implies nothing more than that moral truths depend on God's will only to the extent that, and in the same way as, truths of physics depend on God's will, it is hard to see, at least from a theistic perspective, what the fuss is about divine command theories of ethics.

That the doctrine of divine sovereignty implies that truths of morality might be dependent on God's will only to the extent that truths of physics are thus dependent suggests, however, that defenders of natural law theory, Kantianism, utilitarianism, and intuitionism should not be at all threatened by DCT2-M. The natural law theorist can make all of his or her normative claims, and can provide an account of how the normative states of affairs that obtain depend on facts about human nature, while conceding the whole of the case for DCT2-M. All that he or she has to assert, in addition to the claims that he or she makes about the connections between human nature and natural law, is that the truth of all of these claims depends on God's willing; perhaps on God's willing that there be beings with a certain nature, on God's willing the necessary state of affairs that those beings with this nature have certain reasons for action, and so forth. Kantians and classical utilitarians might make similar arguments, the former emphasizing God's willing that there be autonomous rational beings and the latter emphasizing God's willing that there be beings for whom (e.g.) pleasure is the good. Intuitionists might simply say that there are nec-

essary truths about morality, just like there are necessary truths about mathematics; but, like all necessary truths concerning states of affairs wholly distinct from God's existing, their truth depends on God's willing them.

DCT2-M, while non-trivial and perhaps even true, makes a claim vis-à-vis morality that is simply too weak to serve as a formulation of DCT.³⁷ Is there a way to modify DCT2-M to make it a clearly distinctive doctrine? One way to modify DCT2-M to ensure its distinctiveness would be to add that the relationship between the act of divine will and the moral obligation is a particularly direct one: that is, the state of affairs of S's being morally required to ϕ depends directly on God's willing that S be morally required to ϕ . What I have in mind here is that the dependence of the moral status of any act on God's will is unmediated and complete: there are no states of affairs with any explanatory power that mediate between God's will that an act be obligatory and the act's being obligatory, and there are no states of affairs other than God's willing that an act be obligatory that contributes to the act's being obligatory. Reformulating DCT2-M in terms of direct dependence rather than dependence *simpliciter* would go quite a way toward making DCT distinctive. While my imagined natural law theorist, Kantian, and utilitarian were perfectly willing to allow that on their views morality does depend on God's will, their accounts require that there be states of affairs with explanatory power that mediate between God's willing that a certain normative state of affairs obtain and the obtaining of that state of affairs. On (e.g.) the natural law view, these mediating states of affairs are those having to do with the existence of creatures with a particular nature, the relationship of that nature to reasons for action, and so forth. We might say, though, that what makes DCT a distinctive doctrine is that it denies the existence of any such mediating state of affairs. The only explanation possible for the obtaining of a normative state of affairs like a moral requirement is that God wills that that state of affairs obtain.³⁸

The addition of the directness condition does seem to be a plausible way to make DCT2-M a distinctive moral thesis, about which moral theorists (even those sympathetic to the moderate interpretation of divine sovereignty) could disagree. The problem with DCT2-M in this modified version is that its appeal to directness seems *ad hoc*, unmotivated by the considerations that led us to adopt DCT2-M in the first place. Why would one who wholeheartedly embraces the doctrine of divine sovereignty be tempted to affirm DCT2-M in the direct dependence formulation in addition to DCT2-M in its unmodified version? In answering this question, it is worthwhile to consider again the fact that the argument from divine sovereignty does not militate only in favor of a divine command theory of morality but also in favor of a divine command theory of physics. While the defender of divine sovereignty should affirm that the obtaining of the state of affairs dealt with in physics must ultimately depend on the divine will, is the defender of that view committed to the claim that all explanations of physical states of affairs must be directly and immediately referred to the divine will? Surely not; God's will that a particular state of affairs obtain may be carried out by means of the obtaining of other states of affairs, states of affairs that have of themselves some explanatory power. But, at least with regard to the considerations raised in the argument from

divine sovereignty, physical states of affairs are no different from normative states of affairs. If the doctrine of divine sovereignty gives us no reason to hold a direct dependence view with regard to physics, neither does it give us reason to hold a direct dependence view with regard to ethics.³⁹

My view, then, is that while the argument from divine sovereignty does imply DCT2-M, DCT2-M is not a distinctive moral theory; and while DCT2-M can be modified so that it is distinctive, this distinctive formulation lacks support from the argument for divine sovereignty. We thus lack reasons to prefer the DCT2-M formulation of DCT.

DCT3

What we have seen so far is that while some reasons can be given for preferring will formulations of DCT to the command formulation, DCT2 is not itself a distinctive doctrine. We may now turn to DCT3, which holds that *S*'s being morally required to ϕ depends on God's willing that *S* ϕ . While this view has some obvious attractions — not the least of which is that the justification "I ϕ -ed because I thought that it was God's will" is common currency among theists — I shall postpone for a moment discussion of its less obvious positive features. What I want to focus on is the sense in which it could be true that one's being morally required to ϕ depends on God's willing that one ϕ . The difficulty that lurks in specifying such a sense is this. If one specifies a sense of willing that is too strong, it would follow that no one could possibly violate a moral requirement;⁴⁰ if one specifies a sense of willing that is too weak, it does not seem appropriate to connect that sense to moral obligation; and it is not easy to specify a sense of willing that falls between these unacceptable extremes.

The strong sense of "God wills that *X*" is that in which God intends that *X*. But this sense of will is too strong to be connected to moral requirements, for it can be shown that if God intends that *X*, then *X* obtains. This follows from God's being omniscient and God's being rational.⁴¹ If God is omniscient, then for every state of affairs *R* and every time *t*, God knows that *R* obtains at *t* or God knows that *R* does not obtain at *t*. Now suppose that God intends that *R* obtain at *t*. If, in addition to having this intention, God knows that *R* does not obtain at *t*, then God is irrational; for it is irrational to intend some state of affairs that one knows will not obtain. But God is not irrational. So it must be the case that if God intends that *R* obtain at *t*, then it is not true that God knows that *R* does not obtain at *t*; rather, if God intends that *R* obtain at *t*, then God knows that *R* obtains at *t*. If God knows that *R* obtains at *t*, then *R* obtains at *t*. So, if God intends that *R* obtain at *t*, then *R* obtains at *t*; what God intends, God gets.

But this result would show that the sense of will that is employed in DCT3 cannot be that of intention. For if the state of affairs of *S*'s being morally obligated to ϕ depends on God's intending that *S* ϕ , and if whatever God intends, God gets, then it follows that there has never been an occasion on which a moral obligation was violated. But this is absurd. For if there are any convictions that are universally held among those who believe in moral requirements, it is that they are sometimes violated.

We need, then, a sense of willing weaker than that of intending. One

possibility is to hold that in DCT3 God's willing should be construed as no more than God's wishing that S ϕ , or having some sort of pro-attitude toward S's ϕ -ing. God might have a pro-attitude toward some state of affairs yet not intend it, so that God's having such an attitude toward a state of affairs does not guarantee its obtaining. Now, some might find this proposal objectionable on the grounds that it seems possible that God have a pro-attitude both toward S's ϕ -ing and toward S's refraining from ϕ -ing,⁴² for this possibility would imply the possibility of conflicting moral obligations. Whether one finds this a tolerable result will depend on one's views on moral dilemmas in general, and I will not press the issue here. But it seems to me that if we consider the different ways that actions might be liked by God, God's both liking an action and liking the refraining from that action is prone to be a ubiquitous phenomenon. But if conflicting moral obligations are ubiquitous, it becomes unclear why they should be thought of as *obligations*, and not just (perhaps) moral *considerations*, or moral *reasons*, or moral *goods*.⁴³

This worry — that God's wishes or wants seem better assimilated to moral reasons, moral considerations, or moral goods than to moral obligation — can be appreciated even while denying the appropriateness of the remarks on the ubiquity of conflicting wishes. To wish for some state of affairs is in part just to think it good in some way; it is not to be set on it, aiming at it, planning on it. Does it not seem that God's wishes alone lack the strength or finality that we associate with moral obligation? The point can be made in a slightly different way. If one associates moral obligations with God's wishes, what could the weaker notion be in terms of which we can characterize moral goods? Does it not seem that God's wishes should be reserved for the explication of moral goodness,⁴⁴ while a stronger notion should be put into place to account for moral obligation?

Both the intention reading and the mere wish reading of DCT3 have positive features. The intention reading of DCT3 seems to provide a strong enough notion of willing to connect to moral obligation; the mere wish reading of DCT3 would allow for the possibility that moral obligations are violated. It seems that we should aim to specify a sense of God's willing that passes between these extremes, that is, that will be strong enough for obligation but not strong enough to preclude violation.

Our attempt to pass between these extremes can be aided, I think, by an examination of Aquinas' own efforts to deal with the question: is it true that, necessarily, God's will is always fulfilled? The context of Aquinas' discussion is not moral philosophy, but rather the seeming incompatibility between God's willing that all humans be saved and the possibility that some humans will not be saved. While he asserts that in some sense it must be true that what God wills, God gets — and he defends this claim with an argument concerning God's status as universal cause — he also recognizes that there must be some sense in which God's will is not always fulfilled. God wills that all be saved, says Paul;⁴⁵ yet not all are saved. So Aquinas finds himself with a task rather similar to that which faces us: specifying a sense of will strong enough genuinely to be God's will and not strong enough that God's willing guarantees that the object of God's willing will obtain.

While Aquinas provides three explanations for how it could be the case that God wills that all be saved yet not all are saved, only the third is relevant to the solution of the difficulty that DCT3 faces.⁴⁶ In the third explanation Aquinas, drawing on Damascene, makes a distinction between God's antecedent will and God's consequent will. It is worth quoting his discussion of this distinction at length:

This distinction [between God's antecedent and consequent will] must not be taken as applying to the divine will itself, in which there is nothing antecedent or consequent, but to the things willed.

To understand this we must consider that everything, insofar as it is good, is willed by God. A thing taken in its primary sense, and absolutely considered, may be good or evil, and yet when some additional circumstances are taken into account, by a consequent consideration may be changed into the contrary. That a man should live is good; and that a man should be killed is evil, absolutely considered. But if in a particular case we add that a man is a murderer or dangerous to society, to kill him is a good; that he live is an evil. Hence it may be said of a just judge, that antecedently he wills all men to live; but consequently wills the murderer to be hanged.⁴⁷

What Aquinas calls consequent willing is what God in fact wills, for "the will is directed to things as they are in themselves, and in themselves they exist under particular qualifications." Antecedent willing is, on the other hand, a relative abstraction, for we do not "will simply, what we will antecedently."⁴⁸ While it is possible, then, that what God antecedently wills does not come to pass, it is impossible that what God wills consequently does not come to pass. Thus, Aquinas holds that antecedently God wills that all humans be saved, but He does not will this consequently.

Aquinas' distinction can be used to solve the difficulty that faces the defender of DCT3. I argued that the intention interpretation of God's willing is too strong, because what God intends, obtains. This seemed unfortunate, because that interpretation seemed strong enough to connect to moral obligation. But we can say that all that the argument showed was that God's consequent intentions are all fulfilled. There remains the possibility that moral obligations can be held to depend on God's antecedent intentions. These might be thought to have the requisite strength to be associated with moral requirements, and since not all of God's antecedent intentions need be fulfilled, this association would not have the unwelcome implication that necessarily no moral obligations are violated.⁴⁹

Now, if moral obligation is in DCT3 supposed to depend on God's antecedent intentions concerning human action, and the antecedent intentions on which morality depends can differ from God's consequent intentions (so that moral wrongdoing can occur), then there must be some circumstances which in some way account for the difference between God's antecedent and God's consequent intentions. (Recall the case of the just judge in Aquinas' example: antecedently, the judge intends that all humans live; consequently, the judge does not intend that all humans live. What accounts for this difference is that some humans are wrongdoers and

deserving of capital punishment.) But what circumstances could account for this difference? Deciphering God's seemingly inscrutable intentions might seem an impossibility here. But there is a set of circumstances to which it would be natural for us to appeal here, and these circumstances have to do with human choice. We might say, that is, that God intends antecedently that humans not murder each other; and so, on this interpretation of DCT3, humans are morally obligated not to murder each other. But some humans do murder each other. This is possible, because God's antecedently willing that $S \not\phi$ does not entail that it is the case that S will ϕ . Given the actual circumstances of human life — that humans do choose to murder each other — God does not consequently intend that humans do not murder each other. (Note well: I do *not* assert here that God consequently intends that humans murder each other, only that God does not consequently intend that humans do not murder each other. One might say, following the traditional insistence on the importance of there being a world in which free, effective choices can be made, that God consequently intends that humans make efficacious choices and that God merely *accepts* or *allows* that in some cases this efficacious choosing will result in humans' murdering each other.)

Before we turn to the question of whether this is a plausible formulation of DCT, it is worth noting that this interpretation of DCT3 does not suffer from the failings that beset DCT1 and DCT2. Unlike on DCT1, on DCT3 God's capacity to impose moral obligations is not objectionably contingent, depending on a very specific set of institutional facts. Rather, what is relevant in a divine command is that God is expressing His antecedent intentions regarding human action. And, unlike DCT2, DCT3 is clearly a distinctive and controversial moral doctrine. A variety of moral views, even moral views articulated within a theistic framework, would balk at the notion that morality depends in this way on God's intentions.

I mentioned at the beginning of this section that one of the merits of DCT3 is that it is simply common currency among theists that one's actions can be justified by appealing to the fact that God wills that one perform those actions. The antecedent intention interpretation of DCT3 shows how this sort of view could be sustained. But there seem to me to be several other points in favor of this formulation of DCT; and I will conclude this paper by discussing four such points. The first has to do with the range of moral reasoning techniques that are sanctioned by DCT3; the second has to do with DCT3's ability to provide a satisfying account of the distinction between *prima facie* and *ultima facie* (or "all things considered") moral obligations; the third has to do with the fact that DCT3 entails certain commonly held and quite fundamental deontic principles; and the fourth has to do with the attractive picture of the moral life that is suggested by the particular interpretation of DCT3 that I have defended.

One thing that makes DCT3 attractive as a formulation of DCT is that it sanctions a wide range of reasoning in the forming of moral judgments. Consider in this regard the contrast between DCT1 and DCT3. Suppose that the defender of DCT1 has access to all of the divine commands available to him or her. It seems that the kind of moral reasoning that the defender of DCT1 can use to determine how to act morally in particular

circumstances is limited to determining what actions are necessary to carry out those commands. But note that the defender of DCT3 might have, in addition to this sort of means-end reasoning, other kinds of moral thinking at his or her disposal. Since divine commands are, on this view, relevant merely as expressions of God's will, one can rely on tenets of rational willing to extrapolate God's will in other matters from His express commands. The primary example of such thinking that comes to mind here is analogical reasoning, which is widely used in judicial reasoning to come to legal judgments by extrapolating from explicit expressions of legislative will.

Affirmation of DCT3 also makes available an account of the source of the distinction between *prima facie* and *ultima facie* moral obligations. According to DCT3, moral obligation depends on antecedent intentions. Antecedent intentions are, however, relative abstractions; and since there are various levels of abstraction to which we can ascend in the ascription of such intentions, there will be a variety of levels of antecedent intentions. We may characterize one's *ultima facie* moral obligations — those moral obligations by which we are bound, all things considered — as depending on God's antecedent intentions concerning one's actions which take into account all circumstances of action apart from what one actually chooses to do. One's merely *prima facie* obligations, on the other hand, depend on those of God's antecedent intentions concerning one's actions that abstract even more completely from the particular circumstances in which one must choose what to do. For example: it could be the case that God possesses antecedent intentions both that Kant not tell lies and that Kant do what is necessary to protect innocent life. We may therefore say that Kant is under *prima facie* moral requirements to refrain from lying and to protect the innocent. Given a more specific description of Kant's choice situation, however — that there is an axe-murderer at the door inquiring as to the whereabouts of his potential victim — God's less abstract antecedent intention, which takes into account all relevant circumstances other than the agent's actual choice, might be that Kant lie in order to protect the axe-murderer's potential victim. If so, Kant's all-things-considered moral obligation is to tell the falsehood. The connection between moral obligation and antecedent intention, together with the variety of levels of abstraction at which antecedent intentions can be ascribed, suggests a natural way of explaining the distinction between *prima facie* and *ultima facie* moral obligations.

DCT3 is also attractive in its fruitfulness: it is capable of providing defenses of several commonly held deontic theses that DCT1 cannot. Consider the following three moral theses: (1) if one is morally obligated to ϕ , and ψ -ing is a necessary means to ϕ -ing, then one is morally obligated to ψ ; (2) if one is morally obligated to ϕ , then it is possible for one to ϕ ("ought implies can"); (3) if one is morally obligated to ϕ and is morally obligated to ψ , then one is morally obligated to ϕ and to ψ ("the agglomeration principle"⁵⁰). Interestingly, DCT3's insistence that God's intentions about how we are to act determine our moral obligations provide for a defense of all three of these claims. (1) It is a tenet of rational intending that if one intends the end, then one intends the means. So, if God intends that S ϕ , and S's ψ -ing is necessary if S is to ϕ , then God (being rational) intends that S ψ . DCT3 thus implies that if S is morally obligated to ϕ , and ψ -ing is a

necessary means to ϕ -ing, then S is morally obligated to ψ .⁵¹ (2) It is a tenet of rational intending that one does not intend what one believes to be impossible. If God believes that it is impossible for S to ϕ , then it is impossible for S to ϕ , and God (being rational) does not intend that S ϕ . DCT3 thus implies that if S is morally obligated to ϕ , then it is possible for S to ϕ . (3) It is a tenet of rational intending that one's separate intentions should be joined into an overarching plan, a larger intention, insofar as this is possible. It follows that if God intends that S ϕ and God intends that S ψ , then (being ideally rational) God intends that S both ϕ and ψ . DCT3 thus implies that if S is morally obligated to ϕ and S is morally obligated to ψ , then S is morally obligated both to ϕ and to ψ .⁵²

The fourth consideration in favor of DCT3 as a formulation of DCT is that it fits easily into what many divine command theorists might take to be an attractive view of the human role in God's creative activity. God, many theists believe, is provident: He has plans for creation, He orders things in a particular way, He governs the world. With regard to most aspects of God's plan, His intending can make it so. But we might think that this is not the case with regard to those aspects of God's plan that include free human actions: God's intending cannot simply make it the case that humans freely do what God wills. Rather, humans will have to choose freely to carry out the divine intentions. There is a sense, that is, in which the fulfillment of God's plan requires human cooperation.⁵³ Note, though, that this view of the human place in God's creative activity goes some way toward making morality, as described by DCT3, intelligible within a theistic worldview: God's commands make known to humans what they need to do in order to cooperate with God in His creative activity. This is, of course, no decisive argument. But from a theistic perspective it may be the strongest consideration in favor of DCT3 as the preferred formulation of DCT that it makes morality an intelligible part of an attractive picture of the relationship between free human agents and their provident Creator.⁵⁴

Georgetown University

NOTES

1. Philip Quinn, *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. vi-vii. Quinn seems to distinguish between these tasks and the task of determining what precise formulation DCT should take in "The Recent Revival of Divine Command Ethics," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 50 (Supplement) (Fall, 1990a), pp. 348-349.

2. Actually, this is only one issue concerning the relata. I have assumed that the relata will be states of affairs. But one might make the relata properties, as Adams and Wierenga do; see Robert Merrihew Adams, "Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7 (Spring, 1979), pp. 66-79, esp. p. 76, and Edward Wierenga, "A Defensible Divine Command Theory," *Nous* 17 (September, 1983), pp. 387-407, esp. p. 388.

3. All three of these formulations of DCT are framed in terms of what God commands or wills one individual to do. Thus they ignore the possibility that the specific obligations each of us has are the result of general moral obligations, those that apply to all agents, or to some proper subset of agents. This

shortcoming is easily remedied, though: one might reformulate DCT1 as the claim that the state of affairs of S's being morally obligated to ϕ depends on the state of affairs of God's commanding that all those agents falling under description D perform the act of ϕ -ing, and S falls under description D. This reformulation of DCT1 would coincide with the given formulation in cases in which God's command is to S only (thus description D would be "identical to S"). DCT2 and DCT3 could be reformulated in like manner. But since nothing in the sequel turns on the distinction between general and specific moral obligations, I will keep to the simpler formulations presented in the text.

4. DCT is sometimes more than a theory of moral obligation, but it is at least that, and I will concentrate in this paper merely on the connection between God and moral obligation. Cf. Robert Merrihew Adams, "Divine Commands and the Social Nature of Obligation," *Faith and Philosophy* 4 (1987), pp. 262-275, p. 262 and William Alston, "Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists," in *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy*, ed. Michael Beaty (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), pp. 303-326, p. 304.

5. I will not be able wholly to maintain silence on this issue; see the discussion of direct dependence with regard to the DCT2 formulation of DCT.

6. See Adams '79, p. 76-77. (It seems, though, that the only reasons that he presents for endorsing such a formulation have to do with avoidance of worries regarding will formulations that we will deal with in our discussion of DCT3.)

7. Janine Marie Idziak discusses what I would regard as historical precursors of such an argument in "In Search of 'Good Positive Reasons' for an Ethics of Divine Commands: A Catalogue of Arguments," *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (January, 1989), p. 55.

8. See John Searle's discussion of promises and other illocutionary acts in *Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 54-71, and his emphasis on institutional facts in the derivation of "ought" from "is" at pp. 184-186.

9. Searle '69, pp. 187-188.

10. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 344-346.

11. A. John Simmons, *Moral Principles and Political Obligations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 16-23, pp. 38-41.

12. Adams seems to present an argument similar to this analogical argument in Adams '87. He says that DCT is a "social theory of the nature of obligation" (p. 262), in which it is the relationships in which one stands to some other person or group of persons that is the framework within which certain actions are obligatory. On his view, these social requirements can arise only when a "demand is actually made" by one party of the relationship to another (p. 264). This seems to suggest that moral obligations, which arise from the relationship between God and human creatures, can only be imposed by God's actually issuing a command, and so DCT1 would be the preferred formulation of DCT. But it seems to me that Adams gives no grounds for accepting this claim: the argument that he gives for DCT1 is that social theories of obligation imply that any such obligation is the result of the something *actually* willed by one of the parties, not something that *would be* willed under certain circumstances. But this preference for actual will over hypothetical will can be satisfied just as easily by DCT2 or DCT3 as by DCT1.

13. Aquinas (who on my view is no defender of DCT) says something like this in *De Veritate* when he writes that knowledge is the means by which obligations are imposed, and on this basis concludes that unless all humans had a

natural knowledge of the first principles of the natural law it would not be the case that all humans were bound by those precepts. See *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate*, 17, 3.

14. Howard Warrender, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: His Theory of Obligation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), pp. 14-15.

15. A non-moral analogy might make this distinction clearer. Consider the event of a leaf's burning. The distinction between the causal role of the lit match being in contact with the leaf and the causal role of the leaf's not being wet corresponds to the difference between grounds of obligation (what makes an act obligatory) and validating conditions (the circumstances in which those grounds are able to make that act obligatory).

16. Wierenga '83, p. 390.

17. I do admit, though, that there is something troubling about the idea of God's commanding us to do something that He wills that we not do.

18. Philip Quinn, "An Argument for Divine Command Ethics," in *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy*, ed. Michael Beatty (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990b), p. 293 (emphasis added). One might claim that Quinn illicitly assumes that commands are equivalent to assertions about one's will: "Perform ϕ " would be, on this view, equivalent to "I will that you ϕ ." These are of course not equivalent: the former is not truth-valuable, but the latter is. But Quinn does not say that commands are assertions of will, but that they are *expressions* of it. A mark of the correctness of this claim is that a command is not sincere if one commands another to ϕ but does not will that the other ϕ . Cf. Searle '69, p. 60.

19. It might be thought strange that I would continue to affix the label "divine command theory" to the theses DCT2 and DCT3, since they place God's will rather than God's commands as the source of moral obligation. But it seems to me that "divine command theory" is a label used loosely to describe any theory of morality that holds that acts of God are at the foundation of morality; even Quinn, who explicitly favors DCT2 over DCT1, continues to call the view he defends a divine command theory.

20. The term "metaethical" is sometimes used, particularly in the literature on DCT, to refer only to theories of the meanings of moral terms or the characterization of moral properties. I use it more broadly than that. As I use the terms "normative" and "metaethical" with regard to ethical theories, a normative theory includes evaluative statements, and a metaethical theory is merely an ethical theory that is not normative.

21. It does not follow from the fact that all acts falling under description D are morally required that there is a moral requirement to perform acts falling under description D. It does not even follow that if *necessarily* all acts falling under description D are morally required then there is a moral requirement to perform acts falling under description D. With regard to the former case, the fact that each act under description D is morally required might be accidental; with regard to the latter case, the set of acts falling under description D might be necessarily coextensive with the set of acts falling under description E, and there might be a moral requirement to perform acts falling under description E. DCT2-M implies that all acts fitting the description "acting in accordance with what God has willed that humans be required to do" are morally required, but that does not mean that it implies that there is a moral requirement to obey God.

22. A slight complication arises with regard to DCT2-N. Suppose that to ϕ is "to do what God has willed that one be required to do"; in that case, DCT2-N implies that the state of affairs of S's being morally obligated to do what God wills that one be required to do depends on the state of affairs of God's willing

that S be morally required to do what God wills that one be required to do. It thus appears that if God had not willed that normative state of affairs, then it would not have obtained; and this seems to imply that DCT2-N is a moral requirement that God willed into existence out of normative nothingness. But it seems to me that defenders of DCT2-N can avoid this result by restricting its scope in a suitable way. Wierenga, who defends a version of DCT2-N, claims that "the truth of divine command theory is independent of God. According to the theory I am presenting, what God determines is not that the divine command theory is true, but rather what our particular obligations are. . . . The general obligation to do what God commands is not, according to our theory, imposed by God" (Wierenga '83, p. 392). His strategy is to distinguish between act-types and act-tokens, and to hold that God is responsible only for the moral status of act-tokens; since "doing what God wills that one be required to do" is the name of an act-type, God is not, on Wierenga's view, to be considered the source of the moral status of that act-type. If I were to defend DCT2-N, I would resist Wierenga's solution: to reject the possibility that God can assign a moral status to an act-type as such seems an unnecessarily extreme tack for the defender of DCT2-N to take. Rather, I would simply hold that DCT2-N is a second-order moral principle in the way that Kant's Categorical Imperative is a second-order moral principle: it assigns the status of morally permissible or impermissible to different first-order act-types in virtue of their conformity or lack of conformity to the act-description set out in that second-order principle. Thus, on Kant's view, the first-order act-type "lying" is impermissible because it is not an instance of the second-order act-type "performing a universalizable act"; and for the defender of DCT2-N, the first-order act-type "professing one's faith" is obligatory because it is an instance of the second-order act-type "doing what God has willed that one be required to do."

23. Idziak discusses the historical sources for arguments from omnipotence, liberty, and impeccability in Idziak '89, pp. 51-53. See also her "Divine Command Morality: A Guide to the Literature" in *Divine Command Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Idziak (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), pp. 8-9.

24. Quinn '90b, p. 293-294.

25. Quinn defines distinctness of states of affairs to mean that each neither involves nor entails the other. The definitions of "involves" and "entails" that Quinn employs are drawn from Roderick Chisholm, *The First Person: An Essay on Reference and Intentionality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), p. 124: "The state of affairs p involves the state of affairs q = Df. p is necessarily such that, whoever conceives it, conceives q" and "The state of affairs p entails the state of affairs q = Df. p is necessarily such that (i) if it obtains then q obtains and (ii) whoever accepts it accepts q."

26. Quinn '90b, p. 295.

27. Quinn '90b, p. 295.

28. Quinn '90b, p. 299. For an account of how this sort of metaphysical dependence might be less strange than it first appears, see Thomas V. Morris and Christopher Menzel, "Absolute Creation," in Morris, *Anselmian Explorations* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), pp. 174-176.

29. Quinn '90b, p. 298.

30. It is worth noting that it seems possible that the theist and the atheist agree that it is morally obligatory to obey God, differing only on whether there is such a being.

31. Perhaps a better analogy would be "It is obligatory for soldiers to obey

their superior officers." This statement of obligation does not imply that there are soldiers.

32. One could object: it may be true that the state of affairs described by DCT2-N, interpreted as the claim that obedience to God (should God exist) is obligatory, is wholly distinct from God's existing. But on another interpretation of DCT2-N, where that thesis is interpreted as the claim that obedience to God (who does in fact exist) is obligatory, it is false that the deontological state of affairs picked out by that thesis is wholly distinct from God's existing. I suppose this might be true. But we can say that even if this state of affairs is not wholly distinct from God's existing, whatever is *deontological* about it surely is.

33. One might think that, given God's impeccability, His omnipotence and/or liberty could be protected only were it the case that all normative states of affairs are contingent. It is not clear, however, that one is forced to this result. One could hold that some such states of affairs are necessary, but their necessity is from the divine nature, so that God's power and/or liberty is not constrained by something distinct from God. Whether one accepts this line of reasoning will of course depend on one's interpretations of divine omnipotence and divine liberty.

34. Though it should be noted that the argument from divine liberty seems only to show that moral principles that apply to God's actions must depend on the divine will.

35. Note: I say "with regard to moral matters." DCT2-M is of course controversial in itself.

36. The same line of reasoning can be spelled out with regard to the arguments from omnipotence, liberty, and impeccability.

37. Another way to put this is to say that if this is the only version of DCT that is defensible, then DCT should not be considered a contestant among moral theories, but rather simply a claim about morality generated by certain theological doctrines.

38. Note that this way of trying to make DCT distinctive does not distinguish the intuitionist that takes the doctrine of divine sovereignty seriously from the defender of DCT2-M. This might not be an objection, though; perhaps once we are able to distinguish DCT from a number of other moral views to which theists have been sympathetic, like natural law theory, Kantianism, and utilitarianism, that the best version of DCT turns out to be a theistic variant of one particular moral theory is not such bad news.

39. Some — a *very* few — might hold that a proper understanding of divine sovereignty does commit one to a direct dependence view in physics and ethics alike. To hold such a direct dependence view with regard to the natural order is to affirm *occasionalism*, the doctrine that "God is the only cause of [natural] phenomena. In other words, [occasionalists] have denied that there is any such thing as genuine secondary (i.e., creaturely) causation in nature" (Alfred J. Freddoso, "Medieval Aristotelianism and the Case against Secondary Causation in Nature," in Thomas Morris, ed., *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism* [Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988], pp. 74-118, p. 76). As Freddoso points out, some theistic philosophers have been attracted to this view because for them it is the only account of the relationship between God and nature that does justice to God's complete sovereignty over creation (Freddoso '88, p. 74-77). Very few philosophers find occasionalism at all attractive, however; indeed, even Quinn himself explicitly rejects occasionalism as the best account of God's relationship to the natural order, arguing that his own moderate "conservationist" view "can avoid being tarred with the ugly brush of occasionalism" (Quinn, "Divine Conservation, Secondary Causes, and Occasionalism," in *Divine and Human Action*, pp. 50-73, p. 73).

40. Adams alludes to this worry in Adams '79, p. 76.

41. It might be thought that a quicker and more intuitively appealing argument for the "what God intends, God gets" thesis can be made in terms of God's omnipotence: if God intends some state of affairs, then God's being all-powerful guarantees that this state of affairs will obtain. Even assuming that God intends nothing impossible (an assumption that would require mention of God's rationality if it were to be defended), this argument would fall short if it is true, as it has been argued by Alvin Plantinga, that there are some possible worlds that even an omnipotent God could not have actualized. To assume that God could actualize all possible worlds is to commit "Leibniz's Lapse"; see Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 184.

42. Quinn allows for this possibility in his thorough account of how axiological terms can be given a DCT interpretation; he refers to states of affairs such that God wishes that they obtain and that God wishes that they fail to obtain as "extraordinary." See Quinn '78, p. 69.

43. Note that if one thinks that there cannot be conflicting moral obligations, this might be a reason to want something like the intention interpretation of God's willing: for it is irrational to have intentions that are not mutually satisfiable, and God is not irrational; hence, God has no conflicting intentions. There could therefore not be conflicting moral obligations. As we will see, the interpretation of DCT3 that I defend below preserves this result.

44. As Quinn in fact does in Quinn '78, pp. 67-71.

45. 1 *Timothy* 2:3-4.

46. In the first explanation, Aquinas (following Augustine) suggests that all that is meant by the claim that God wills all to be saved is that there is no saved person that God did not will to be saved; in the second, he suggests that the claim might be construed as asserting that there are *some* humans of all conditions that God wills to be saved, not as asserting that God wills that *all* humans of all conditions be saved. See ST Ia 19, 6 ad 1.

47. Aquinas, ST Ia 19, 6 ad 1.

48. Aquinas, ST Ia 19, 6 ad 1.

49. It might be wondered why we would want to ascribe antecedent intentions to God, or to any other agent. It seems to me that the rationale for ascribing such intentions to an agent is both to explain that agent's consequent intentions and to ground the truth-values of counterfactual claims about what that agent would intend were the circumstances of action different.

50. Bernard Williams discusses (and names) the agglomeration principle in his "Ethical Consistency," in *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 180-182.

51. Doesn't DCT1 have this implication, since, as I pointed out, one can reason about the necessary means to fulfilling commands? The answer is no. Suppose that one has a moral obligation to ϕ , and by reasoning discovers that ψ -ing is a necessary means to ϕ -ing; nevertheless, he or she does not ψ . DCT1 implies only that the moral obligation to ϕ has been broken; not ψ -ing only guarantees that the obligation to ϕ will not be kept. Only by adding a moral premise to DCT1 — that if one is morally required to ϕ , then one is morally required to perform any act that is a necessary means to ϕ -ing — can one conclude that one is morally required to ψ in such a case. DCT3, on the other hand, does not require an additional moral premise to achieve this result: it relies only on a premise about God's rational intending.

52. These points are indebted to Christopher Gowans' intention-prescriptivist arguments for the agglomeration and "ought implies can" principles in *Innocence Lost: A Defense of Inescapable Wrongdoing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 65-85. Note that if DCT3 is true, then there cannot be moral

dilemmas: for moral dilemmas require inconsistent *ultima facie* moral obligations, the presence of which would entail that God has inconsistent intentions. But since God is not irrational, God does not have inconsistent intentions.

One might object that since antecedent intentions *can* be inconsistent without irrationality, one cannot employ the claim that God's rationality precludes inconsistent antecedent intentions in rejecting the possibility of moral dilemmas. One might say, for example, that God would clearly be rational to intend both that persons' legs not be amputated and that physicians amputate when necessary to save the patient's life; but since there are obviously cases in which these antecedent intentions are inconsistent — sometimes the only way for physicians to save life is to amputate — it cannot be true that rationality precludes having inconsistent antecedent intentions. But this sort of example need not provide a case of inconsistent intentions. Either these antecedent intentions are ascribed to God in abstraction from its being the case that sometimes physicians must amputate in order to save life, or they are not. If they are, then there is no inconsistency involved: for, abstracting from the sometime necessity for amputation, these intentions are co-realizable. If they are not, then there is an inconsistency involved: God intends that both of these states of affairs obtain, but these states of affairs cannot both obtain in a world where it is sometimes necessary for physicians to amputate in order to save their patients' lives. God would be irrational to possess both of these intentions in light of this circumstance. Thus, this sort of case provides no reason to think that a rational God could possess inconsistent antecedent intentions. But cases of genuine moral dilemmas must, according to DCT3, involve inconsistent antecedent intentions. Since according to DCT3's interpretation of *ultima facie* obligations, all such obligations depend on God's antecedent intentions that abstract only from what the agent actually chooses to do, unavoidable moral wrongdoing could arise only from God's possessing inconsistent intentions, a state of affairs that is precluded by God's eminent rationality.

53. For discussions of human cooperation with God from the perspective of natural law theory, see John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 409, and Germain Grisez, Joseph Boyle, and John Finnis, "Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends," *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 32 (1987), pp. 143-145.

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