LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

GOD AND MORALITY:

AN ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE OF

THE SECULAR ETHIC OF KAI NIELSEN

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF RELIGION

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INTRODUCTION

John Locke is frequently castigated for the statement in his Letter Concerning Toleration which says ". . . those are not all to be tolerated who deny the being of a God. Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist. The taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all."[1] Kai Nielsen, in commenting on the above, speaks of our "cultural distance" from the Seventeenth Century and of contemporary "Neanderthal undercurrents" of people who still think this way.[2] It is doubtful, however, that many contemporary theists could be found who would accept Locke's statement without qualification. Perhaps we could forgive Locke for his inability to foresee how well the study and practice of ethics are doing today, and that often even without a passing reference to God and His commands. Of course, tolerance for atheists--their persons if not their views--may have somewhat improved among theistic thinkers today. However, there lingers something

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[1]John Locke, A Letter Concerning Toleration, (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1963) 93. Also quoted in Kai Nielsen, "Hobbesist and Humean Alternatives to a Religious Morality," International Journal of the Philosophy of Religion 14 (1983), 33.

[2]Ibid.

about Locke's statement that, given a little modification, many theists, including myself, would still find compelling.

If Locke is taken to mean that atheists, if they were consistent, would deny the *rationality* (and thus the *justifiability*) of morality in a godless world, then I would concur with him on this. Theists tend to maintain that there is a necessary link between the existence of God and the existence of moral value; that God is in some way the necessary foundation for ethics in the world He created. Undoubtedly Locke would at least have meant this, but his statement of course seems to go beyond this to predict that atheism must, in practice, necessarily lead to moral and social anarchy.[3] However, there does not seem to be any logical impropriety, at least on the surface, in the disbelief in God as the foundation for morality, and the choice--for whatever reason--to commit oneself to a moral code. He perhaps did not foresee that ethics, which is necessary to an ordered society, could be retained on grounds other than theism and for self-interested reasons. An atheist may still think that he needs ethics, or at least for others to be ethical, even if he rejects metaphysical foundations for his commitment.

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[3]Locke advocated that, in addition to non-conformist Christians, Muslims, Pagans and Jews should also be tolerated provided they are law abiding: ". . .neither Pagan nor Mahometan nor Jew ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the commonwealth because of his religion. . . .And the commonwealth, which embraces indifferently all men that are honest, peaceable, and industrious, requires it not." Locke's intolerance of atheists was based on his perception that the rejection of religion involved the rejection of the foundation of moral conduct, "the bonds of human society," thus an atheist could not be trusted.

The core of Locke's statement involves the notion that morality makes no *sense* without God, and also the notion that morality--morality that is morality--is dependent upon God. George Mavrodes explains that a number of theistic thinkers

> have claimed that in some important way morality is dependent upon religion--dependent, that is, in such a way that if religion were to fail, morality would fail also. And they have held that the dependence was more than psychological, that is, if religion were to fail, it would be *proper* (perhaps logically or perhaps in some other way) for morality to fail also. One way of expressing this theme is by Dostoyevsky's "If there is no God, then everything is permitted," a sentiment that in this century has been prominently echoed by Sartre.[4]

It is my contention that truly[5] moral behavior requires, not only that morality is logically dependent upon God, but that the moral agent be actively dependent upon God in order to perform morally good actions;[6] that morality is in some sense *causally* dependent upon God. What I am concerned with in this thesis is, first, that morality is absurd in a godless world, and second, that truly moral behavior is practically and existentially impossible without God.

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[4]George I. Mavrodes, "Religion and the Queerness of Morality" in Rationality, Religious Belief and Moral Commitment, eds. Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1986), 213.

[5]"Truly moral" here assumes a moral realist epistemology that expects that objectively true moral behaviour can be known. Part of my task is therefore to show that a realist or objectivist view of morality is demonstrably true *visa vis* subjectivism.

[6]Again, this assumes that moral goodness, or virtues, can be objectively instanced in the character and behavior of the moral agent.

The prevalence of evil in the world requires, of *existential* necessity, that morality be promoted and practised. However, it is a source of serious confusion that there is widespread disagreement concerning the content and justification of morality, so that deciding between the many disparate and conflicting ethical systems is thus made difficult. This confusion, I contend, is a result of the wholesale abandonment of Christian or theistic foundations of ethics and morality, which are in turn dependent upon a Judeo-Christian world view.

Most of the world's problems could conceivably be resolved if the moral behavior of persons were changed such that people everywhere freely lived moral lives.[7] Not that I see such a universal change as at all probable in the present order of things, except to say that the desire for a better world with equity, justice and peace, as many philosophers including Kai Nielsen would want, is futile without better people to produce it. This thesis, then, compares and contrasts Nielsen's secular ethic with a Christian theistic ethic as a means of achieving this end, and also--and more importantly--of deciding which world view more plausibly substantiates the rationality and wisdom of moral commitment in the world. An atheist may well hold to "the moral point of view" but, if he is to be consistent with his world view, what "hold" does morality have on the atheist?

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[7]This claim assumes that moral evil (evil committed by or resulting from the actions of persons) is quantitatively vastly greater than "natural" evil (or evil that results from natural calamities).

CHAPTER ONE

IS IT RATIONAL TO BE MORAL?

Kai Nielsen has written several articles on the question "Why should I be moral?" and I believe that, given his assumptions, he has made a strong case for the position that there are no good *reasons* as such for an individual to choose to live a moral life.[1] He treats the question "Why should I be moral?" as legitimate or valid when "should" is taken to be asking for *non-moral reasons* for an individual to choose to adopt the "moral point of view" as logically (rather than evaluatively) prior to other competing courses of life. He argues that it is not necessarily irrational for a reflective individual to be immoral or to perform selective immoral acts that are in his own interest when he can get away with it, i.e., suffer minimal, if any, adverse consequences to his interests.

Nielsen's ("partially definitive") definition of morality and "the moral point of view" is stated as "a commitment to *humaneness* (to lessen suffering) and a commitment

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[1]See Kai Nielsen, "Why Should I Be Moral?" in Readings in Ethical Theory, 2nd ed., eds. Wilfred Sellars and John Hospers (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1970), 747-768; Kai Nielsen, "Why Should I be Moral?: Revisited," American Philosophical Quarterly 21 (Jan. 1984), 81-91; and compare John Hospers, "Why Be Moral?" in Wilfred Sellars and John Hospers, Readings in Ethical Theory, 1970), 730-746.

to *humanity* (to treat human beings as having intrinsic worth).[2] For him, morality is a point of view to which one chooses to become committed, but if one chooses prudently against such a commitment, there need be no rational error in so doing.

Nielsen, as a committed anti-theist, argues this from a strongly secularistic and naturalistic viewpoint, and I would say that, given this assumption, his reasoning appears for the most part sound. A world view so fiercely anti-theistic and naturalistic excludes any room for non-material entities or properties such as objective moral values that exist independent of the human mind. This does not mean that Nielsen is any less passionate about morality, or that this passion inhabits some inferior corner of his philosophy of life, rather he appears fully committed to what he calls "the moral point of view." Yet he cannot view morality as having any real depth in his world, and ably argues that for morality and the "moral point of view" there can be no rational foundation.

Is Nielsen's view of morality at home in the actual world or are there some incongruities about it all? I wish to explore here, then, the fittingness of Nielsen's morality to the world, compared with that of the theist, especially as regards the rationality of moral commitment. Hobbes says that in a world without morality life would be "nasty, brutish and short." If such notions of value commitment that Nielsen espouses are without

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[2]Nielsen, "Revisited," 82 (italics his). The Christian need not object to such a definition as far as it goes, for every Christian believes he ought to be committed to humaneness and humanity, however, the Christian believes such a commitment is rationally justifiable only within a theistic world view.

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adequate foundation, then the disparity intensifies between mankind's desperate need for morality on one hand, and the irrationality or absurdity of morality on the other. A Christian theist would want to take his definition of "the moral point of view" concerning "humaneness and humanity" and strengthen it considerably, and attribute to it the overarching hegemony appropriate to its content.

Individual Egoism

Nielsen takes the question "Why should I be moral?" seriously. It is, he says, a legitimate request from an individual who is asking for a "non-question begging reason" to choose to adopt the moral point of view as overriding all other alternatives. He asks,

> can I, everything considered, give a reason sufficiently strong--a non-moral reason clearly--for my always giving an overriding weight to moral considerations, when they conflict with other considerations, such that I could be shown to be acting irrationally, or at least less rationally than I otherwise would be acting, if I did not give such pride of place to moral considerations?[3]

Thus, Nielsen is saying that the question is not senseless if the word "should" is construed in a non-moral sense. It is to ask in effect, "Is it rational for me to be moral?" or, "Is it

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[3]Ibid.

irrational for me to be amoral?" But as we shall see, the implication also is "Is it rational for me to adopt the moral point of view?"

Morality involves, as part of its definition, a restriction on or a limiting of the pursuit of one's considered self-interest. Accordingly, Nielsen cites an objection that to ask "Why be moral?" is to ask in a context where to act morally is against one's self-interest, and so the question requires, in effect, "a self-interested reason for doing what is not in his self-interest and that plainly is nonsense."[4] He counters this objection by pointing out that there are reasons other than that of self-interest for acting immorally, such as aesthetic, economic or political reasons. It could be argued, however, that these reasons are reducible to self-interested reasons, and that if an immoral act is performed without deliberate reason, a background of self-interested reasons (or what is believed to be in one's self-interest) could be found. For why would one commit an immoral act for purely "aesthetic, economic or political reasons" if some motivation of self-interest were not in view (albeit mistakenly?).[5]

A further objection is that the question "Why be moral?" is senseless because "saying that an act is right just means that one should do it." Nielsen replies by saying that the questioner is asking, not whether one is morally obliged to do what is right,

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[4]Ibid.

[5]Even in martyrdom in a poltico-religious terrorist act a self-interested desire for honor would likely underlie the immoral act whether the agent believes the act to be moral or not.

but whether one should (in a non-moral sense of should) adopt a moral point of view at all. So Nielsen is saying that to ask for a non-moral reason to be moral is not at all senseless or irrational.

But to ask for a non-moral reason to be moral may itself be motivated by a desire to avoid the reaching demands of moral obligation. Which, being the case, it is a morally assessable activity and therefore under the hegemony of moral evaluation. If moral obligation is confined to "the moral point of view" as a point of view merely competing with any other (non-moral) point of view, then one can logically move to a meta-level and ask the question "why be moral?" If, however, the hegemony of moral obligations pertain to the questioner prior to his point of view or commitments, he is indeed making a category mistake. There can be no valid "non-moral" reason not to be moral because moral reasons are inherently prior to non-moral reasons and moral obligations have jurisdiction over every moral agent. So a non-moral "should" that asks for reasons outside of moral reasons is overridden by the hegemony of a moral "should," since moral reasons are, by their very nature, reasons that are of overriding importance that one should or should not do an action. This being the case, the call for a non-moral reason to be moral is insufficient since no non-moral reason can create the property of obligation necessary to moral action.

Collective Morality

Thus far we have been considering the question as asked concerning the individual egoist, but it takes on a different meaning if asked in the collective sense: "Why should *we* be moral?" It seems reasonable to assume that the collective interests are better served when a society's members behave consistently with its moral laws and codes. If we do not perform our moral duties and maintain our institutions of justice and welfare, etc., our societies would likely become unbearably corrupt and dangerous,[6] and one can hardly maintain that such a condition is the product of rational thinking. But as Nielsen points out, reasons for collective morality are not necessarily applicable to individual morality. He says that we should:

> keep in mind the distinction between an *agent-neutral viewpoint* and an *agent-relative viewpoint*. . . . The immoralist free-rider on morality . . . is in effect asking 'Why should I take an agent-neutral viewpoint rather than an agent-relative viewpoint?'. . . . No non-question begging reason has been given why he must override that viewpoint to remain a rational individual rationally acting in the world.[7]

Moral action, after all, is the action of individual moral agents, and even the enforcement of moralities upon societies must depend upon agreement among the few moral agents who

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[6]That is "unbearably corrupt and dangerous" for the powerless victims of those who wield power and are unjust, lawless, corrupt and violent. One does not have to look too hard to find instances of societies where there is immoral oppression, violence and corruption.

[7]Ibid. Cf., Nielsen, "Hobbesist," 43.

have that power.[1] Whether the motives of individual politicians are genuinely moral, simulate morality or are just simply self-interested matters greatly as to their effects. The shift of viewpoint from "agent-relative" to "agent-neutral" is ultimately the choice of the individual moral agent, whatever his societal status or responsibilities, and the putative question "Why should *I* be moral?" remains as relevant as ever.

George Mavrodes critiques Kurt Baier's attempt to argue that being moral is in the interest of the individual and that "Why should I be moral?" can be derived from "Why should we be moral?"[2] From Baier's ". . . the interest of everyone alike that everyone should set aside his interest,"[3] Mavrodes derives the premise:

(A) It is in everyone's best interest (including mine, presumably) for everyone (including me) to be moral.

And from (A):

(B) It is in my best interest for everyone (including me) to be moral.

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[1]See Kai Nielsen, "When are Immoralities Crimes?" Philosophia (Israel) 1, 3-4 (July 1971), 133-142, and the sequel, idem, "The Enforcement of Morality and Future Generations" Philosophia (Israel) 3, 4 (Oct. 1973), 443-448 for his concepts concerning when morality is to be enforced. In the former (page 133), he claims as justification for enforcement: "1) there is a rational consensus concerning its immorality and 2) it either causes harm or it violates the moral principle that people must be treated as persons, and 3) its prohibition is enforceable law and enforceable without greater harm resulting than would result from its non-enforcement."

[2]Mavrodes, "Queerness," 221, 222. The following is dependent upon his argument.

[3]Kurt Baier, The Moral Point of View (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958) 314, quoted in Mavrodes, "Queerness," 221.

And from (B):

(C) It is in my best interest for me to be moral.

To (A), Mavrodes says that if it is interpreted collectively, i.e., in the interests of the group as a whole, which is plausible enough, then (B) does *not* follow from it: "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), on the other hand, is interpreted distributively, he says that it is hard to imagine how it can be true:

> Hobbes may have been right in supposing that life in the state of nature would be short, etc. But some lives are short anyway. In fact, some lives are short just because the demands of morality are observed. Such a life is not bound to have been shorter in the state of nature. Nor is it bound to have been less happy, less pleasurable, and so forth.

Furthermore, Mavrodes says that even if (A) and (B) were granted, (C) as it stands cannot be validly derived from (B). What he says does follow from (B) is:

(C') It is in my best interest for me to be moral *if everyone else is moral.*[11]

If everyone else is moral toward me, it would follow that they have some concern for my best interests. However, even in this situation it still does not follow that it is in my best interests to be moral. Morality as such is primarily concerned with the interests or needs of *others* rather than those of one's self. But even in an ideal (C') community, the self-sacrificial demands of morality threaten the security of self-interested concerns. To the

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[11]Mavrodes, "Queerness," 221-222.

above then we may add that the state of affairs is perhaps rather:

> (D) It is in my best interest for everyone else (collectively or distributively) to be moral.

This at least permits the individual to obtain the benefits of the morality of others without sacrificing his own interests. Of course he could simulate morality in order to escape the censure of his benefactors and gain their confidence and respect, but this would only be to further his own interests in the end.

It does appear then that there is good reason to believe that a rational individual egoist who pursues his self-interest prudently (including the simulation of moral behavior when it is seen to advance his own ends) is more "wise" or "rational" (in a naturalistic universe of course) than the moralist who sacrifices his own interests for the good of others. As Nielsen says, "*Must* a prudent intelligent immoralist make himself unhappy or harm even his own long-term self-interest by continuing to be such an immoralist?"[12] It can never be in the long-term interests of any individual if others generally act immorally, but if moral duties are fulfilled and "moral institutions" are supported in a society, the conditions in favor of the welfare and interest of its individuals increase, and this is particularly so for the free-riding immoralist who sacrifices as little of his self-interest as prudence might allow. According to Nielsen,

> Even what Hume called a "sensible knave," or what we would now call a thoroughly rational but unprincipled bastard, will be for the strengthening

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[12]Nielsen, "Revisited," 85 (emphasis mine).

> of such moral institutions. Such institutions, he will recognize, are for our mutual benefit. But a sensible knave, "in *particular incidents*, may think that an act of iniquity or infidelity will make a considerable addition to his fortune, without causing any considerable breach in the social union."[4]

In summary, we may agree with Nielsen that in a naturalistic world commitment to "the moral point of view," which entails a commitment to humaneness and humanity, can have no rational foundations. Thus, on this account, if one should choose to be a "free-riding immoralist," he would not thereby necessarily commit any rational error in doing so.

Is It Rational to Be Moral?

According to Nielsen, the ultimate goal for an individual in this life (and also, in the afterlife for theists) is the maximization of happiness--to have as much of this life's pleasures as can be reasonably expected--then happiness must be an important good to be striven for and preserved.[5] Nielsen recognises that moralists from Aristotle and

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[4]Kai Nielsen, "Hobbesist," 42, 43, and David Hume, Enquiry Into Morals, Section II, Pt. III. See also Nielsen, "The Rational Knave: On the Link Between Morality and Rationality," Ideal Studies 18 (Jan. 1988), 10-19.

[5]See Kai Nielsen, Ethics Without God (London: Pemberton Books, 1973), 24: "Any realistic morality--secular or religious--links in some close way with what men on reflection actually desire and with that illusive thing we call happiness." He goes on to say (alluding to Pascal) that the religious moralist ". . .will meet the secularist on his own grounds and argue that the secular moralist's great mistake *is in failing to see that in God alone can man find lasting happiness-the goal of all moral striving* (italics his)."

Plato on have believed that happiness is the product of man achieving the fulfillment of his purpose or *telos* as man qua man and he rightly says that the nature of man and the world will determine what it is that one should seek in order to attain happiness.[6] For the secular materialist, however, man does not have such a determinate nature or purpose to fulfill so what is achieved in this life is all that can be expected. Accordingly, Nielsen sees that what ever "fair share" of pleasures one can achieve in this life that give "lasting sources of satisfaction" is sufficient to make life worthwhile. He lists such things as freedom from pain and want, security and emotional peace, human love and companionship, creative employment, etc., which are all things that theist and secularist alike will consider worthy of striving for.[7] These are values that bring happiness, and morality has to do with their preservation and fair distribution to those who are deprived of such.[8]

But morality is often not very conducive to happiness, and John Hospers argues forcefully that, not only is morality not a sufficient condition for happiness (though it may be a necessary condition), but that the moral thing to do often works directly *against* one's happiness. He points out that "often the highly moral but extremely neurotic person has a far worse time of it, as far as happiness goes, than the far less moral person

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[6]Ibid., 25. See also my discussion of this on page 71

[7]Ibid., 51-53.

[8]Ibid., 53,59.

who is thick-skinned and has more successful inner defenses."[18] It is rather difficult to build a case for the dependence of happiness on morality as "the axe falls upon the innocent as much as upon the guilty." David lamented, "For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. . . . This is what the wicked are like--always carefree, they increase in wealth."[19] Hospers says that the saying that "crime doesn't pay" is more often wrong than right:

> . . . sometimes [crime] pays very handsomely indeed; the cinema to the contrary notwithstanding, only a small proportion of the crimes committed are ever detected. Nor do those who commit crimes always suffer pangs of conscience or fears of detection; they often suffer far less than neurotics and psychotics who fill our mental hospitals and who never committed any crimes at all but are innocent victims of situations thrust upon them. . . .[20]

"The pangs of conscience" seem to bother the morally sensitive person rather than the immoral. It certainly appears that the more hardened a person is in crime, the less the dictates of conscience are evident. Thus the perpetrators of history's gross immoralities, as say Stalin, Hitler, Idi Amin, Pol Pot, the Marxist dictators and their supporters, all strongly and remorselessly "justify" their actions by their ideological beliefs. They have created their own values and their consciences are coerced to comply.

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[18]Hospers, Readings, 734.

[19]Ecclesiastes 7:15 and Psalm 73:3,4,12. All Bible references are to the New International Version, International Bible Society, 1984.

[20]Hospers, Readings, 736.

What evidence is there that suggests that justice and fairness is, or has ever been, the general or prevailing state of affairs in human history? Are most people who adopt "the moral point of view" and are beneficent toward the needy, etc., really happy, fulfilled and honored, while the unscrupulous, immoral and wicked are unhappy, unprosperous and without honor? Hospers rightly says that "Nothing seems plainer to one who reflects upon the state of the world and the people in it than that there is no due proportion between human merit and human happiness."[21]

Now if there is no compelling reason outside "the moral point of view" to justify adopting (practising) morality as overriding all other options, and if the requirements of happiness, pleasurable well-being, and self-interest for the individual are generally exclusive of morality, and if a moral person is likely to be poor, short-lived, lacking in prestige and power, and unrewarded for his efforts, then that moral person is, on this account, a fool. A wise and prudent person must be one that orders his life according to the long-term or ultimate realities of his existence, and thus if his interests are forfeited for those of others without any hope of eventual or ultimate return, such activity seems to deserve scorn rather than praise. The approbation and honor in Western society today is for pleasure-seekers and producers (those who make people "happy" by entertainment) rather than for the virtuous and altruistically benevolent.

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[21]Ibid.

Is this state of affairs a credible picture of how things are with morality in the world? Is morality so shallow that it has such a light hold on our existence and our world? Perhaps there are reasons to question this perception of the way the world is with regard to morality.

Morality in a Secular World

There has been an underlying naturalistic assumption that has not surfaced thus far in this discussion. It is the belief that this material universe as we know it is all that there is and the concomitant belief that there is nothing that is higher than the universe to which persons are responsible or subject. Mavrodes characterizes this assumption as of a "Russellian world" in which,

> (1) Such phenomena as minds, mental activities, consciousness, and so forth are the products of entities and causes that give no indication of being mental themselves. . . .
>
> (2) Human life is bounded by physical death and each individual comes to a permanent end at his physical death. . . .
>
> (3) Not only each individual but also the human race as a species is doomed to extinction "beneath the debris of a universe in ruins."[22]

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[22]Mavrodes, "Queerness," 215-216.

The above, it appears, is fully compatible with what we may call a Nielsenian world stripped of any "metaphysical muck" as he says.[23] Nielsen, whose world view is very similar to Russell's, considers that morality is alive and well in a world without God. Nielsen says that,

> some reasonable grounds for believing that in a world without God nothing could be good or bad or right or wrong. If there is no reason to believe that torturing little children would cease to be bad in a Godless world, we have no reason to believe that, in any important sense, morality is dependent on religion. But God or no God . . . it is still wrong to inflict pain on helpless infants when inflicting pain on them is without any rational point.[24]

For some reason, Nielsen believes that torturing infants for fun is morally wrong, but there is no rational, non-emotive justification in his writings which might be a convincing argument for his belief that such a claim of moral wrongness is worthy of assent. That he expresses a strong sentiment that carries with it a great weight of agreement by those secularists who also adopt "the moral point of view" cannot itself contribute to any rational justificatory force of his moral claims. There is certainly nothing in his cosmology that

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[23]Compare J.P. Moreland and Kai Nielsen, Does God Exist? The Great Debate (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 280.

[24]Nielsen, "Hobbesist," 34. One may indeed ask the question, "What if there were 'rational point' to 'inflicting pain' on them?" Is there some possible justification for torturing infants? What does Nielsen have in mind by this qualification? The abortion debate is very pertinent here. If the unborn child, or fetus, is evaluatively equivalent to infants and the abortion method of dismembering the fetus is equivalent to torture, the arguments that justify this activity certainly are not made on religious grounds.

would lend support to the rationality of holding his moral beliefs and sentiments. For Nielsen, reflective persons must "simply *decide* what sort of person we shall strive to become."[9]

According to his view on the rationality of morality, there may be no error or mistake in torturing infants for fun if one can get away with it because ultimately morality depends upon commitment and sentiment and not reason. He does offer something of a Hobbesist "rational egoist" rationale for a respect of persons[10] but this does not extend beyond pragmatic and prudential reasons. He argues along Humean lines that "We have no good grounds for thinking an immoralist *must* be an irrationalist or even less rational than the reflective person of principle."[11] It is not difficult to extend his argument to include that there is no rational (non egoist) justification to committing oneself to the "moral point of view" at all. Russell is perhaps more explicit in this matter:

> . . . the great world . . . is neither good nor bad, and is not concerned to make us happy or unhappy. In the philosophy of value . . . there is no outside standard to show that our valuation is wrong. We are ourselves the ultimate and irrefutable arbiters of value. . . . It is we who create value and our desires which confer value.[12]

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[9]Kai Nielsen "Ethics Without Religion" in Moral Problems in Contemporary Society (ed. Paul Kurtz, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1969) 30, and compare his Ethics Without God, 57, 62.

[10]Ibid., 60, 61.

[11]Nielsen, Hobbesist, 42.

[12]Bertrand Russell, Why I Am Not a Christian (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 43, 44. Russell pursued his life goals and expressed his beliefs with relentless moral

If we take Russell's account of value and apply it to the issue of infant torture for fun that Nielsen mentions, there appears something incredibly odd. What I mean is that here we are, tiny specks of sophisticated protoplasm on an insignificant planet in a vast universe (I'm sure Russell would have expressed this more graphically), and "undoubtedly we are a part of nature, which has produced our desires, our hopes and fears, in accordance with laws which the physicist is beginning to discover"[29]--and the welfare of babies really matters? Both Nielsen and Russell show great concern about the gross immoralities in the world (whatever their political differences about solutions to such)--and I for one would not want to minimise such concern--but how odd it is that it should matter in their naturalistic world.[30] Both say that there is no outside standard to show that our valuation is wrong and both would say that it is wrong to torture infants for fun.

Can a consistently secular view of the origin of the universe and life on earth demonstrate the rationality of the claim that *any* value that a person may have can in any meaningful sense *matter*? If the universe is hard, cold and unforgiving, logically why should not we be? If mankind is the product of blind physical forces, whence is

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passion. That the value of his life goals and beliefs were but inventions of his desires seems incredibly odd when the realm of their activity--the real world--can have no relation to them.

[29]Ibid., 43.

[30]Nielsen, Ethics, 54. See also note 55 on page 33.

morality? Values cannot be there simply because we need them any more than God can be there simply because we need Him to be. It is not a senseless question to ask that if the universe, the world and all that is in it including every sentient being, came into being merely through a series of "happy accidents," would it matter (personal sentiments aside) if it all should be destroyed prematurely by a series of unhappy "accidents" (perhaps by nuclear warfare)?

We may become emotionally disturbed by the evils--the gross immoralities--of the world but logically *why* should we be if such evils do not personally affect our own well-being? How is it, and why is it, that we become morally affected and incensed by them as if such sentiments are externally required of us and as if their assertion is intended in some way to concur with the facts. That we are so affected and recognise the rightness and wrongness of actions, and that we feel the weight of external moral requirements seem to require more than the fact of our sentience or of our intelligence. They seem to require that our moral faculties are objectively linked in some way to the way the world is. This, however, seems rather odd in a naturalistic world and quite redundant to the natural processes of survival and supremacy.

The Wisdom of Morality

With regard to what is a "wise person," I said before that a wise person must be one that orders his life according to the long-term or ultimate realities of his existence. It seems counter-intuitive, however, to characterize a person as such without due regard to a moral evaluation of character or behavior. Can we rightly regard the "rational knave," or however else he may be designated, as truly wise or even prudent? Many well educated people of science faithfully served Hitler and gassed and maimed millions--they may even have been brilliant but were they wise?[31] Conversely, consider the person who expends her life in the altruistic benevolent service of the needy at great personal expense and sacrifice (maybe she missed out on marriage, family, possessions and friends), and then she dies in obscurity in a foreign land. Is she truly a fool? In a Russellian or Nielsenian world she must be (and in the actual world she may be treated as such by so many), for there would be no ultimate reward for such self-sacrificial benevolent altruism. How can it be considered good for her to relinquish her own chances of "the good life" in order to increase the access to it for others? She reduces her own status, it seems, to that of a worthless slave; a mere "means to an end."

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[31]Surely those are misguided who advocate education as the panacea of the world's ills, given what evil men have done with their knowledge. Similarly, Russell and Nielsen seem to advocate also that economic deprivation is among the world's greatest ills, so then, if the world's people were educated and fed, immoralities (including religion) would wither away!

But somehow this cannot be right, and reflective moral thinkers, like Nielsen, might be reluctant to say it is, even though their secular world-view demands that it must be so. A wise person must be one who has an intelligent grasp of the world as it is and lives consistently with it, but if morality is genuinely a part of the "furniture" of the universe (and not merely the illusory creation of human valuations), this wisdom must involve more than a prudent self-concern. Wisdom must concern what matters in the world, if anything does matter, but Nielsen and Russell--for all their moral passion[32]--have yet to offer a valid reason that anything *can* matter, at least in any way that is objectively accessible.

When Nielsen says that "A man who says, 'If God is dead, nothing matters,' is a spoilt child who has never looked at his fellow-man with compassion,"[33] I believe he has missed the point of the claim. Not only can a theist who, say, lives a mature, disciplined and compassionate life consistently make that claim, but also the claim that the non-theist is irrational to say that, if God is dead, what men consider to matter--

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[32]See Russell, Not a Christian, 44-49 (Sec. II. "The Good Life"), "In a perfect world, every sentient being would be to every other the object of the fullest love, compounded of delight, benevolence, and understanding inextricably blended," and Nielsen, "Revisited," 90,91: "The picture I have painted for you is not a pleasant one. Reflection on it depresses me. I detest, as much as any of you, such lack of moral integrity as one finds in immoralism. Indeed, reflecting on this picture and taking it to heart fortifies my own resolve to engage in social struggle, to do my utmost to do my bit to bring about a world in which a genuine moral community will become possible."

[33]Nielsen, Ethics, 53; and, idem "Ethics Without Religion," 22.

however passionately--really does matter in any meaningful way. The theist is thereby saying that a Godless world is a valueless world and the "intrinsic value" of man is an unfounded myth. To look at "his fellow-man with compassion," may not be desirable and could therefore be unreasonable.[34] I am, of course, thankful that skeptics like Nielsen and Russell do believe in compassion and benevolence, however unfitting to their cosmology, but for them to say that these moral values in fact *matter* and there be valid reasons that they do is naturalistically insupportable.

Perhaps my point here can be explicated by a comparison with our opening question, "Why should I be moral?" I agreed with Nielsen that, in a naturalistic world, there are no non-moral non-question-begging reasons to be moral or adopt the "moral point of view." Here we may, with the same logic, ask, "Why should I consider that moral values matter?" We agree that morality involves a limitation on self-interested pursuits for the well-being of others, but why should (non-moral should) I value the welfare of others if there is nothing in it for me? Is there a non-moral reason that I should value other persons (show mercy, forgiveness, compassion or any interest at all) when it competes with the value I have of myself and what I rationally and reflectively want?

Is it then truly wise and rational to be genuinely moral? Only if there is more to life than the secularist and naturalist will allow.

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[34]It, of course, remains that the theist must show that intrinsic human value requires theism, and that morality is logically and ontologically dependent upon God. This is what I endeavor in the following chapters.

The Strangeness of Morality

In a naturalistic world then, morality is strange or "queer," odd and even perhaps absurd, since its obligations and overriding demands "do not seem to conduce to the *good* of the person on whom it is laid."[35] Though the obligations of morality may even demand the very life of a person (that others may be saved, etc.), in a naturalistic world death is the final end of that life and its value (if it has value) ceases to exist, except perhaps in the memory of the survivors. Mavrodes says that

> . . . this demand--radical enough in the human life on which it is laid--is *superficial* in a Russellian world. Something that reaches close to the heart of my own life, perhaps even demanding the sacrifice of that life, is not deep at all in the world in which (on a Russellian view) that life is lived. And that, too, seems absurd.[36]
>
> Values and obligations cannot be deep in such a world. They have a grip only upon surface phenomena, probably only upon man.[37]

The whole idea of morality must at least include the concept "what matters" and of what is of overriding importance and cannot be merely the result of subjective emotion of how humans feel about the worth of persons and things--even if there were widespread reflective agreement it still would be a fiction.[38] Besides, if this were the case,

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[35]Mavrodes, "Queerness," 225.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Ibid., 224.

[38]This, from a Christian realist's point of view, is the rub with the coherentist "wide reflective equilibrium." See my discussion on pages 43 and 111.

human valuations seem most likely to favor self-interest to the exclusion of morality. Rather it seems that "what matters" cannot be trivialized by dependence upon fickle human emotions (even if subjected to "rational consensus"), but instead must be in some way deeply rooted in the way things are--in reality. To torture infants for fun may be passionately held to be morally evil by both theist and non-theist alike, but the non-theist cannot justify his claim that this is so by reference to anything outside himself.[39]

Nielsen says that only the theist needs to explain (justify) suffering, but the secularist only needs to struggle against it and this struggle can provide for him a meaningful existence.[40] But this assumes that suffering (and the struggle against it) matters in some deep way, but Nielsen has no rational defense against the immoralist who does not care or who even is passionately sadistic. Just as Nielsen argues that the (secular) moralist has no rational defense against immoralism, so he should accept that there is no rational secular argument to the effect that morality matters and that persons have intrinsic value and ought to be valued as such:

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[39]Nielsen, "Hobbesist," 33, 34: ". . . even in a Godless world kindness would still be a good thing and the torturing of little children could still be vile." "Godless" here, I take to refer to a secular naturalistic world. A theist does not have to grant that such a world exists or is even possible. If Nielsen means that without *belief* in God one can still know these values, then first, the theist can reply that such is possible because God created in mankind the capacity to make such moral judgments, and second, that such values are absurd and without justification within a naturalistic framework.

[40]Nielsen, Ethics, 54. I do not think that his claim is defensible that to explain is to justify evil.

> The immoralist . . . is asking for a proof, for a ground, which will show him why he must be impartial, have an attitude of disinterested caring or concern and why he must treat all people as ends and never as means only. It is not evident that such a proof is available. There seems at least to be no proof or good reason for believing that . . . the immoralist (classist or otherwise) must have made some deductive or inductive mistakes or must have ignored, or not taken adequately into account, some empirical facts such that he must have fallen into error, so that it will be the case that immoralism must rest on a mistake.[41]

Mavrodes rightly remarks that the actual world is somewhat different from the Russellian world. Morality and the value of persons do in fact matter, though not in a way that can be inferred from natural facts about the world but rather in a way that transcends those facts and yet is nevertheless just as real.

> Well, I take it to be an important feature of the actual world that human beings exist in it and that in it their actions fall, at least sometimes, within the sphere of morality--that is, they have moral obligations to act (or refrain from acting) in certain ways. And if they do not act in those ways, then they are properly subject to a special and peculiar sort of adverse judgment (unless it happens that there are special circumstances that serve to excuse their failure to fulfill the obligations). People who do not fulfill their obligations are not merely stupid or weak or unlucky; they are morally reprehensible.[42]

The point of Mavrodes' article is that morality is undeniably integral to the actual world, and that sense can only be made of it if the actual world is taken to be theistic. If then the world is theistic, there is reason that the secular immoralist has erred and is mistaken about the rationality of his actions. In a theistic world immoralism is not in one's ultimate

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[41]Nielsen, "Revisited," 90.

[42]Mavrodes, "Queerness," 216.

interests and moral rectitude is wise and ultimately rewarding. So then, if there are "reasonable grounds for believing that in a world without God nothing could be good or bad or right or wrong," then theism may thereby be established. That morality needs God, makes sense only in relation to God, and actually depends upon God is the subject of the following chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

A CASE FOR THEISTIC ETHICS

The question "Why be moral?" could be rephrased, "What rational justification can be given for sacrificing my interests for the interests and welfare of other persons?" According to Nielsen, morality depends on a person's commitment and disposition. What kind of person one is and what values one is raised to hold determine one's moral behavior.[1] Nielsen is committed to some very strong moral (and political) values, but I believe that the issue of the justification of these values is critical to the credibility of his position. For if a value cannot be adequately justified, is it not then reasonable for us to call to question its validity and thus its moral authority?

Consider again this statement and the values Nielsen expressed:

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[1]See Nielsen, "Hobbesist," 35. If Nielsen is simply making a general observation that a person's moral commitment and disposition tend to reflect his background and upbringing, then we can hardly dissent. But if he is using this as a cause and effect argument to account for a particular moral commitment, then he is in danger of committing the genetic fallacy. It is certainly not unreasonable to assert that a person can adopt a particular moral point of view for reasons quite apart from the influences that introduced him to them. In addition, it is not uncommon for people to adopt a moral point of view decidedly different to or opposing to that of their upbringing because they have reflectively decided to do so, or a world view shift has made it necessary.

> . . . even in a Godless world kindness would still be a good thing and the torturing of little children could still be vile.
>
> If the stance of the religious apologist is to be made out, he must give us some *reasonable grounds* for believing that in a world without God nothing could be good or bad or right or wrong. If there is no reason to believe that torturing little children would cease to be bad in a Godless world, we have no reason to believe that, in any important sense, morality is dependent on religion.[2]

The value here that "little children" ought to be protected and that it is wrong to torture them, *appears* to assume that human persons, especially the young and innocent, objectively possess in some way a certain superior value in relation to other things. Actually it is rather that Nielsen believes that such torture is bad on purely emotive grounds and that the apparent objectivity is little more than the fact there exists some common moral code among morally "reflective" persons? Following Hume, the moral badness of torturing little children has its locus in the sentiment of moral agents and its objectivity in its relation to (or conformity to) the general moral rules and customs of one's society. Judgments of moral goodness or badness, rightness or wrongness, do not cognitively describe an objective property in the act of child torture. Thus if moral values are internal to the moral agent, and their justification and objectivity delimited by the uses

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[2]Nielsen, "Hobbesist," 33, 34 (emphasis mine). The theist, of course, could argue that the world could not exist without God, but here is not the place to argue metaphysics. For the present argument we will grant the possibility of a "world without God." See also my comment on page 27, n.46.

and rules of moral language, there can be no need for religion or God to give morality a foundation external to these.[3]

So when Nielsen says "If there is no reason to believe that torturing little children would cease to be bad in a Godless world," he does not affirm that there is any objective property of badness in the act of child torture or that the statement "child torture is bad" is descriptive of a moral fact that can be either true or false. So in fact what he is not saying is that child torture can be cognitively bad in a world without God. The "religious apologist's . . . reasonable grounds" must show then that Nielsen's emotivism is inadequate or false and that theism is necessary to justify the existence of objective moral properties. Objective or cognitive non-natural moral properties can have no place in a Nielsenian Godless world.

Now we may ask here that if "children" were replaced by other objects or creatures, would the above reasoning hold and why? Is it that Nielsen is justified in speaking as he does *because* of strong feelings in favor of children and his kindly disposition and that he has simply *decided* to prefer children as objects of higher value, or that he shares these sentiments with other "reflective" persons? He says that morality depends on a person's commitment and disposition but how can he rationally convince others to *adopt* such commitment or attain such a disposition when there can be no rational

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[3]Rather, according to Nielsen, religion and belief in God are dependent on one's own moral capacities (see further discussion in Chapter 3).

basis to appeal to? There are many who have not shared this value (I could not say that they were not "reflective"), and have sought to justify such torture--what rational grounds does Nielsen have for condemning such people? Why are persons judged of greater value than other objects of value and what is the justification for this (since there are many, particularly of Eastern religious beliefs, who value man and beast alike,[4] and it is not uncommon for people to value their possessions, etc., above other persons)?

Nielsen laments,

> But there is plainly an excessive amount of human suffering--the suffering of children in hospitals, the suffering of people devoured by cancer and the suffering of millions of Jews under the Nazis--for which there is simply no justification.[5]

What is it when Nielsen or Russell visit children's hospitals, contemplate holocausts, and the many evils of the world that causes them to evoke such emotive responses when that is all they are?[6] Their highly emotive disapprobation of evils against mankind and by mankind seem strangely odd and incongruous in their universe of indifference to man, and

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[4]Compare also the current momentum of "animal rights" activism and the consequent blurring of traditional value distinctions. Animals, do possess rights, or rather we are under certain moral obligations towards animals, but my purpose here is to question the preference for man relative to other objects of valuation.

[5]Nielsen, Ethics, 54.

[6]Nielsen appears to allude to Russell's comments in Not A Christian, 22. In a similar vein Russell concerned himself much about a possible nuclear holocaust but, inconsistently it seems, not about the inevitable heat-death of the solar system and brevity of life on earth (ibid., 43, 44).

in a universe where such emotive responses cannot correspond to an objective property of evil.

Russell made strong moral pronouncements on many issues, particularly in the condemnation of Christianity. He both denounced what he saw as "fear, conceit and hatred" in religion[7] and proclaimed the goodness of (what is essentially a Christian view of) love for one's neighbor,[8] and yet he boasted that:

> . . . in the philosophy of value . . . there is no outside standard to show that our valuation is wrong. We are ourselves the ultimate and irrefutable arbiters of value. . . . In the world of values, Nature in itself is neutral, neither good or bad, deserving of neither admiration nor censure. It is we who create value and our desires which confer value.[9]

It is extremely difficult to conceive how it is possible that man can be both "the ultimate and irrefutable arbiters of value" *and* at the same time the object of highest value and obligation. If human persons *ought* to be the object of highest value and obligation, and if we as moral agents have an *obligation* to treat each other with "humaneness" and to have regard for the suffering of humanity, then we ourselves cannot be "the ultimate and irrefutable arbiters of value," especially of our own value. Indeed, that I and other persons have value and have moral obligations toward each other and judge certain actions as good or evil is far from dependent upon any commitment or

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[7]Ibid., 34.

[8]Ibid., 44-47.

[9]Ibid., 44.

arbitrary desire that I have. My judgment and commitment may well be passionately affirmed but such is objectively imposed upon me from without. This imposition may also be influenced in varying degrees by the preconditioning of my passions and desires or the persuasions of others but they are not the substance of it. Rather, the objective nature of the action or state of affairs as being good or evil, right or wrong is that which imposes obligation and demands commitment of a moral agent.

Persons and Value

That persons possess inherent value and dignity, or ought to be highly valued as ends in themselves is a central and platitudinous premise of most moralities, and propositions such as, "torturing babies for fun is morally reprehensible," and "kindness (under most circumstances) is good," would be held by many, in some sense, to be objectively true, or basic. Nielsen appears to hold to the objectivity, in some sense, of such premises:

> Moreover morality has developed in such a way that reflective moral agents . . . have also come to an acknowledgement (in theory at least) of the necessity of affirming the inherent dignity and the intrinsic worth of all human beings.
>
> But this acceptance . . . of what could be called a commitment to *humaneness* (to lessen suffering) and a commitment to *humanity* (treat

> human beings as having an intrinsic worth) has become with us pervasive and partially definitive of what it is to take the moral point of view.[10]

He does not require such an affirmation to be true or to correspond with the way the world is, but rather that it is "necessary" in some way for "reflective moral agents" to affirm. In fact he denies that there can be any foundations for human rights and I think his argument against such are sound--given his secular premises.[11]

Now, if the truthfulness of the affirmation that all human beings have inherent dignity and intrinsic worth can be rationally questioned or seriously challenged then the corresponding commitments are likewise under a cloud. The rational justification for belief in the value of persons and corresponding obligations is reasonably called for *prior* to commitment if that commitment is to make sense. The above affirmation is either true or false and surely it is unreasonable to make a passionate commitment to a known falsehood. When Nielsen puts the question, ". . . why should I, if I don't feel like it, take this moral point of view with its commitment to humaneness and to humanity or indeed any moral point of view?"[12] he is essentially arguing that to treat persons inhumanely is not irrational, that is, immorality is not contrary to the demands of truth and reason. This,

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[10]Nielsen, "Revisited," 82.

[11]See Kai Nielsen, "Scepticism and Human Rights," Monist 52 (Oct. 1968), 573-594.

[12]Ibid.

though consistent with his secular world view, is surely an absurdity, as I argued in Chapter One.

However, my claim here is that there is no *secular* definition or assumption of human value which can validate the notion that human persons--in any non-trivial sense--*matter*. The belief that man is but a part of a mechanistic material universe precludes any concept of a transcendent ground for his value. However "rational" or "coherent" a secular ethical system such as Nielsen's may be, if the real value of human persons cannot be established, the ostensive authority inherent in moral obligation terms that assume such value becomes impotent and irrational.

Nielsen has said above that morality has developed such that reflective moral agents acknowledge "the necessity of affirming the inherent dignity and the intrinsic worth of all human beings." As well as the question of the truth of such an acknowledgement, both of these concepts fail to give the necessary background to the moral *authority* that says that one is obliged to treat other humans as such. That moral thinking has developed such that reflective moral agents have come to accept or acknowledge a value neither makes it good or right, nor does it constitute its moral authority. That a person is morally obliged to perform actions which may be contrary to, or inhibitive of, a perceived self-interest and desire appeals to an authority over the actions of a person; an authority the locus of which must be *external* to a person and his subjective activity. If we understand conscience as a moral faculty in a rational being by which

moral distinctions are recognized, it cannot be the locus of moral authority over a person because it is internal. Rather it is the faculty by which a person may become cognizant of an authority that is *external* to his person and thus regulatory of his actions.[13]

An ethic that assumes a value of persons ("Don't kill or torture babies," etc.), is problematic if that value is based on the feeling, the disposition of the "reflective" moral agents, or on pragmatic or naturalistic grounds, since it still has not justified the notion that persons matter in the real world, and, as I argued in Chapter One, the secular immoralist can reject that value and commitment with a seemingly rational impunity from within the bounds of a secular world view.

Austin Farrer has made a "persuasive argument" for theism from the requirements of morality.[14] He says that valuation is of two sorts:

> (1) We value human beings, and any other beings we can regard in the same way. . . . (2) Because we value human beings, we value what we

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[13]Falk's claim that such an authority is within will not do. See Falk, "Morals Without Faith," "Morals Without Faith" (Philosophy 19, 72 Apr. 1944) 5-9. The internal conflict of desire and conscience for Falk is a conflict from the same internal source. He says that ". . . the moral command is a *natural* one, and hence it must not simply be the expression of some other being's will, but the expression of something within our own will . . . by some voice within us that is *part of our self*," ibid., 6-7. This is indeed paradoxical. It is not difficult to conceive of the internal conflict but to say that the source and object of the authority are of the same entity is absurd. The effect is to trivialise the idea of moral authority.

[14]Austin Farrer, "A Starting Point for the Philosophical Examination of Theological Belief," chap. in Faith and Logic, ed., Basil Mitchell (London: Allen and Unwin, 1957) 9-30.

> take to be desirable features in human life, or things contributing to the realization of such features.[15]

The priority of "regard" for our fellow man over other objects of valuation, though "platitudinous," is critical to the discussion of ethics, as the ethical codes and practices that we affirm will reflect it. Farrer argues,

> But if we are going to *regard* anything we must be convinced not only that it is there, but that it really possesses in itself, and not merely in our sense of it, those characteristics in virtue of which we regard it. The test case is that in which we risk our lives out of regard for another; we certainly should not do so for the most exalted of notions, or for the most useful and enjoyable feature of our environment. The first step to regarding our neighbor as ourself is to see that he is as real as ourself, and that his reality has the same sort of actual structure and quality as our own.[16]

Moral obligation requires far more than a commitment to a "moral point of view," it requires a commitment that may require a self-sacrifice such that our very lives may be required to be forfeited. A commitment to "humaneness and humanity" that risks one's own humanity for the well-being of another's humanity.

Farrer goes further. What, then, should be our regard, or the extent of our regard, for our fellow man?

> The regard we owe [our fellow man] is unqualified, because it is owed to God through him. And yet he is no mere channel through which regard is

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[15]Ibid., 16. Farrer prefers the term "regard" as more appropriate when applying value to persons: ". . . we will call the first sort of valuation which we distinguished above 'regard', reserving 'valuation' itself for the second sort. We will say that persons are regarded, while everything else is valued in relation to them," ibid., 18.

[16]Ibid., 22.

> paid to God, for God is regarded by regard for what He regards, and what He regards is the man. The worth of the man is determined by his place in God's purposes; and it is not a worth which in any way hides or palliates his imperfections.[17]

Is the value intrinsic to persons, then, relative to the evaluative assessments of people and society, or is there a transcendent, objective basis outside of the human situation that is foundational for the moral authority within it? Persons cannot possess an objective value in virtue of the fact that others value them, nor because of any emotive assessment of worth, nor can a person's value be ascertained from any practice of such valuing in society (dominant or popular attitudes, sociological data, etc.).[18] Farrer says, "In making our 'decision' we are not expressing our royal pleasure as joint sovereigns of a moral universe. The action is not due because we decide it shall be. What we decide, or come to a common mind about, is that it is due."[19]

The only evaluative assessment of persons that can be designated "true" and that distinguishes persons as of superior worth (to other sentient beings and objects of evaluation) must be an assessment that is grounded in an objective standard and a standard that is outside the world, otherwise immoral acts toward persons cannot rationally be

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[17]Ibid., 20.

[18]Our moral duties toward other persons cannot arise out of our subjective judgments but rather our subjective judgments are affected by the duties that are laid upon us from the outside.

[19]Ibid., 28.

designated "wrong." If someone or something is worthless (valueless) in fact, no moral obligations ("treat him as a person," etc.) can in fact exist toward the object being assessed. If the value of persons is subjectively grounded, and if moral beliefs concerning the value of persons are ultimately based on feelings, ethics as a viable and valid discipline is very tenuous indeed. Even the action of valuing itself is also the object of moral evaluation or judgment (included in what morality limits or censures) and cannot be the basis of morality without circularity.

Value and Reality

What I am arguing is that in order for ethics to make sense and possess the authority implicit in moral requirements, the quest for foundations of morality outside the normative ethical enterprise is reasonably demanded. The motive to emancipate ethics from metaphysical foundations is indeed very strong and may be closely linked to the revolt against religious authority and the discrediting, over the last two centuries, of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures and ethic. W.D. Falk has well noted this and sought to construct an ethic derived from "natural law."[20] However, this enterprise of ethical

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[20]Falk, "Morals Without Faith," 4: ". . . the more sober-minded observed . . . that the law of God is only known through man's fallible interpretation and through texts which may have been corrupted in their transmission. Was there any code that could be regarded as authentic, or was for lack of certainty one way of behaving as good as another?" We may note here that implicit in his statement is the assumption that if the Scriptures were

naturalism has been rejected by many philosophers, including Nielsen and Frankena, as a failed attempt to derive an "ought" from an "is."[21] We should note, on the other hand, that such an enterprise is at least trying to undergird ethics with some sort of foundations in reality, but even if it were successful, the moral authority it claims may still be regarded as trivial.

Kai Nielsen's ethical system combines a form of Humean subjectivism with consequentialism.[22] Following Hume, he claims a strong disjuncture between judgments concerning natural matters of fact and judgements of moral approbation and disapprobation. He parts with what he calls "Neanderthal" emotivists in claiming that moral statements can be designated "true or false" within a particular moral system.[23] His appeal to "wide reflective equilibrium" marks him as adhering to a coherence view of ethical

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reliable, i.e., the infallible revelation of God, their validity as the foundation of morals may be established. The claim of unreliability and inauthenticity of the biblical texts cannot be seriously entertained today. See for instance, F.F. Bruce, The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable (5th rev. ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960). An excellent defense for the reliability of the New Testament by a respected New Testament Scholar.

[21]See Kai Nielsen, "On Deriving an Ought from an Is: a Retrospective Look," Review of Metaphysics 32 (Mar. 1979), 487-514, and W.K. Frankena, "The Naturalistic Fallacy," Mind 48, 192 (Oct. 1939), 464-477, and compare Max Black's argument against "Hume's Guillotine" in his article, "The Gap Between Is and Should," Philosophical Review 73 (Apr. 1974), 165-181.

[22]See Kai Nielsen, "Hume and the Emotive Theory." Philosophical Studies (Ireland) 19 (1970), 202-213.

[23]Ibid., 206f.

justification which provides no entailment between non-moral facts about the nature of human persons and their actions and evaluative assessments of human worth and human behavior.[24] This limits moral reasoning to the bounds of evaluative statements of moral discourse, as N. Daniels has said,

> The task of developing a more complete theory of the person must involve considerations that derive from within moral theory. . . . Rather than there being some prior, deep and determinate fact of the matter about the nature of persons, it is the task of moral theory to help determine the most acceptable shape or 'nature' that we should attempt to have persons realize.[25]

Mark Timmons says that what Daniels is claiming is that, "because there are no deep, 'metaphysically fixed,' nonmoral facts about persons rich enough to select among competing moral systems, we must look to moral theory for the development of such theories."[26] It is the futility of this endeavor that I have been addressing, as a coherence theory of ethical justification can not satisfy the reasonable demand that the value of human persons should have some rational relevance and roots in the actual world. So then Nielsen, like Daniels, is forced to limit the boundaries of his moral reasoning to

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[24]See Kai Nielsen, "The 'Good Reasons Approach' and 'Ontological Justifications' of Morality," Philosophical Quarterly 9, 35 (Apr. 1959), 126.

[25]N. Daniels, "Moral Theory and the Plasticity of Persons," Monist 62 (1979), 273, quoted in Mark Timmons, "Foundationalism and the Structure of Ethical Justification," Ethics 97 (Apr. 1987), 608.

[26]Ibid.

that of moral discourse and theory, and exclude any consideration that would ground the dignity of a person in some metaphysical framework.

Nielsen believes, as an ethical coherentist, that to ask questions like "Why ought I do what is right" (apart from the category error) is to ask a "limiting question" (or "bogus question") that cannot be literally answered. I believe that it is rather Nielsen's commitment to a secular world view that sets the justificatory limits of his moral reasoning.[27] When Nielsen says, "I have argued (following Toulmin) that the 'scope of ethical reasoning is limited as well as defined by the framework of activities in which it plays its part,'"[28] there appears a certain begging of the question in the claim. The boundaries of the framework of moral activity and of what is good for a person are set in utilitarian or consequentialist terms, and then it is claimed that an ontologist's or religionist's request for further justification outside of this framework is an unanswerable "limiting question."

This question-begging reasoning includes his pragmatic definition of the primary function of moral discourse as being to "guide conduct and alter behavior so as

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[27]In Toulmin's analogy between the nature of reasoning in science and ethics he argues that it makes no sense to ask for a justification of science itself and that science and ethics are unique modes of reasoning (See Ibid., 118). There may be point to this reasoning, but is it legitimate to extend it as far as a justification of scientism? To deny the validity of similar questions such as, "Is naturalism true?" or "Is evolution true?" as some might, is surely an untenable bias in favor of their proponent's assumptions.

[28]Ibid., 120.

to achieve the harmonious satisfaction of as many independent desires and wants as possible."[29] Nielsen's secular world view demands that man is "alone," and thus what is good for man can only be determined by man who is the product of blind evolutionary forces, or more specifically, by an appeal to a person's "independent desires and wants" that are a product of the kind of being man has become. A theistic world view disputes this claim and demands that what is good for man and what are in his best interests can only be objectively determined from the outside and may well be contrary to the individual person's "desires and wants."[30] Thus Nielsen's concept of "the good life" (a life in which the maximum number of individual wants and desires can be accommodated), which is integral to his morality, is critically linked to his secular world view.

My argument simply stated is that without foundations for the assumed value of human persons outside of the case (whether that case be described in terms of secular ethical naturalism or of Nielsen's non-naturalism), any ethical system which assumes that value--however well it may fit within the system--is without roots in the real world and is therefore without credibility. Thus when Nielsen says that, "even in a Godless world kindness would still be a good thing and the torturing of little children could

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[29]Ibid.

[30]It is interesting to note here that "independent desires and wants," as being what Nielsen considers good for mankind and thus the object of ethical protection and promotion, are also the very things that moral rules are required to censure and that the sacrificial limitation of such is also considered morally good.

still be vile," he is merely expressing his feelings and commitment, and denies that these values matter in any sense other than within the subjective evaluations of the persons who hold them or are affected by them. So then, there is nothing inherent in the act of child torture that is vile, but the vileness is only in the subjective evaluations of the moral agent.

Nielsen's subjectivism may be likened to a game or sport within which the set of rules with its rewards and sanctions are internally coherent and valid. Each action performed within the game is thereby evaluated and accepted or rejected as such within the framework and limits set by the rules or the code. The justification of these actions comes to an end when their rational coherence to the rules is verified. The very idea of importing rules or actions from other codes (without adaption at least) would be incongruous (like Rugby scrums in soccer, or baseball pitches in cricket). To ask a soccer player "Why don't you pick up the ball and run?" or a cricketer "Why isn't your bat round?" is to ask a "bogus" or "limiting" question that does not fit the paradigm.

If morality or "the moral point of view" is like a game with its internal set of rules and actions, then to ask "why be moral?" or ask for justification of basic moral principles (such as the principle of least possible suffering that Nielsen espouses) is to ask a bogus or limiting question. But to press the analogy further, though we should not confuse the rules of one code of sport with another, it is valid to ask someone to justify which sport they prefer and why? One may prefer, say, cricket to baseball for a variety of reasons, but the fact is that games by their very nature are just games that have been

arbitrarily constructed and possess no inherent importance. There is nothing in or about a particular game *per se* that logically requires one to choose it over another. One chooses to become committed to a game for reasons external to the requirements of its rules. Nielsen's morality appears to have little more than the status of a game to which one "just decides" to become committed. All the reasons for moral action come from within the framework of moral discourse and there is no external (non-moral) reason to appeal to to justify or persuade moral commitment apart from whatever it is that people reflectively desire.[31] This characterization of morality, or "the moral point of view," appears then to have the status of a myth that is used pragmatically to assist man in his practical decisions of life.

Further, although the rules of a game are internally coherent and related in a logical manner, they are never-the-less ultimately arbitrary. Though moral principles in Nielsen's morality are said to be corrigible and thus may be true or false,[32] they are such only in their coherence to "the moral point of view" and not in any descriptive sense.

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[31]Nielsen asks, ". . .what better test can there be of intrinsic goodness or desirability of something than the fact that it is desired by people on reflection." ". . .If, on one hand, it turns out that people want different and even conflicting things under such conditions, then we should in all candour admit that they are in an equally justified position to claim that these things are intrinsically good and that--where their judgements conflict--there is and can be no Archimedian point in virtue of which we can claim one person's judgement is correct and the other's is wrong." Kai Nielsen, "On Ascertaining What is Intrinsically Good," Journal of Value Inquiry 10 (Sum. 1976): 139.

[32]Nielsen, "Hume," 206f.

Thus any moral principle is vulnerable to the ever changing sea of moral acceptability, including that of "least possible suffering" which is where he considers justification to come to an end.[33] So when Nielsen makes the challenge that,

> If the stance of the religious apologist is to be made out, he must give us some *reasonable grounds* for believing that in a world without God nothing could be good or bad or right or wrong. If there is no reason to believe that torturing little children would cease to be bad in a Godless world, we have no reason to believe that, in any important sense, morality is dependent on religion. . . .[34]

he is forced to concede that there can be nothing inherent in the act of child torture that makes it necessarily bad; it could conceivably, according to his system, become good, if attitudes toward inherent human dignity are eroded. He cannot show that little children have any more real value than other other objects in the world of human evaluative assessment. Indeed, in the West today, attitudes toward the unborn, children, and the aged have recently undergone radical revision, while attitudes toward other sentient creatures have changed to the degree that their value may rival that of humans.[35]

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[33]Nielsen, "Ontological," 124f. That the subjective desires and values that people have are vulnerable to radical revision is consistent with the Darwinian concept of man's nature, which determines the kind of desires he has and is directed by blind indeterminate forces.

[34]Nielsen, "Hobbesist," 33, 34 (emphasis mine).

[35]James Rachels in Created from Animals (Oxford: Oxford University, 1990) 173f, constructs a Darwinian case for what he calls "moral individualism" in which moral obligations toward all sentient beings must be determined on a case by case basis. He believes that Darwinism is incompatible with theism and the image of God thesis on which traditional morality has based its concept of human dignity. Thus, along with Darwin, he holds that the distinction between a human person and other sentient beings is one of

In a Godless world, then (if such were possible), people might feel bad about the torture of little children and it might be proclaimed "morally good" to prevent it, but such emotive activities cannot have any significance in their relation to the real world. They can only be trivial to it since they cannot correspond to an objective entities of good or evil, right or wrong action. Choosing the good, or to be guided in one's actions by the principles of morality rather than some competing course of action, is hardly different in principle to preferring cricket to baseball. It depends entirely upon one's commitment and decision that may, or may not, be influenced by one's upbringing, culture or social conditions.

Underlying Nielsen's challenge is the notion that there are adequate secular subjectivist grounds for morality. When he says, "If there is no reason to believe that torturing little children would cease to be bad in a Godless world, we have no reason to believe that, in any important sense, morality is dependent on religion," he assumes that without objective values subjective activities would go on just the same. That (as Hare has claimed[36]) man being the kind of being he is would go on just the same in his subjective

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degree and not of *kind* and that, under certain circumstances, the well-being of an animal may take moral priority to that of a human. He argues that a consistent post-Darwinian world view must treat all sentient creatures according to their relevant differences. In this way, humans are not to be given special consideration as possessing inherent dignity but rather to be regarded individually according to their merits along with other species. Humans and animals are no longer in a different moral category.

[36]See R. M. Hare's chapter "Nothing Matters" in Applications of Moral Philosophy (London: Macmillan) 1972, and "The Subjectivity of Values" in J.L. Mackie, Ethics:

evaluations and moral rules in a world without objective values. The kind of thinking is like, "let's just keep the world as it is with people doing just the things they do--only let's assume that God is not a part of it." If we reject a theistic world view in favor of a secular "scientific" world view, there is no reason to believe that, on a thorough-going Darwinian view of human nature, moral sentiment would continue as it has done under traditional ethics. Must we assume that the subjective activity that is a part of moral judgments would continue just the same without an objective basis? Cannot the objectivist rightly claim that if there were no objective values there could be no consistent subjective evaluative activities and thus a moral system could not be practically maintained? The objectivist need not claim that morality does not involve strong emotive or subjective activity for such does not *necessarily* exclude an objective basis, only that genuine moral decisions and evaluations, that may or may not involve strong emotive activity, are necessarily cognitive of moral properties in actions, and further, that the subjective activity of the moral agent may (or may not) properly result from that cognition.

What does it mean, then, for a moral agent to judge that value is objectively present in an object or action of evaluative judgement? Nielsen tends to avoid the matter of objective justification by his Toulminian "limiting questions" tact and resorts, rather, to analysis of moral discourse, but Mackie rightly points out the inadequacy of this

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Inventing Right and Wrong (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), especially 21, 22.

approach.[37] Richard Swinburne says that "the objectivist maintains that it is as much a fact about an action that it is right or wrong as that it causes pain or takes a long time to perform."[38] He argues that moral properties supervene on natural ones, that an action's rightness or wrongness is supervenient on its possession of natural properties. So two acts of killing a person in similar circumstances would both possess the same moral properties of wrongness, and "in this sense all moral judgements are universalizable."[39]

It should not escape our notice, however, that there is a structure to our moral cognition and that there are logical reasons for the grading of actions in their degree of rightness or wrongness. When we compare the moral status of, say, littering the highway to torturing children, though we judge that both are morally wrong actions, one is obviously of overridingly greater importance that we refrain from doing rather than the other. A consequentialist, like Nielsen, would agree because in our society we judge that according to our moral principles the consequences of child torture are far more severe than littering. This concurs with his definition of the "moral point of view:"

> But this acceptance . . . of what could be called a commitment to *humaneness* (to lessen suffering) and a commitment to *humanity* (treat

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[37]See Nielsen, "Ontological," and compare Mackie, "Is Objectivity a Real Issue?" in Ethics, 20-25.

[38]Richard Swinburne, The Coherence of Theism (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 183-184.

[39]Ibid., 185. Cf., Nielsen, "Hume," 204f.

> human beings as having an intrinsic worth) has become with us a pervasive and partially definitive of what it is to take the moral point of view.[40]

But here an objectivist would say that the obligation of commitment arises from the judgement that human beings do in fact possess intrinsic worth and that the obligation to humaneness and the lessening of suffering arises from that worth. The grading of actions of rightness and wrongness and their consequences of goodness and badness is done against this background of intrinsic worth that human persons are judged or assumed to possess and how these consequences contribute to or detract from that intrinsic worth. The subjectivist, on the other hand, must concede that the proposition that "human beings have intrinsic worth" is *false*.[41]

Now if we can escape the mythical[42] status of moral truth claims and can legitimately affirm the truthfulness that all persons equally possess a certain objective property of value (i.e., that there are adequate foundations for such value), a false valuation of persons would then involve a kind of factual error--an epistemic error concerning an aspect of reality. Thus, the person who behaves immorally toward others acts irrationally or unreasonably because his living is not consistent, in some sense, with

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[40]Nielsen, "Revisited," 82.

[41]Compare J. L. Mackie: "The assertion that there are objective values . . . is, I hold, not meaningless but false." Ethics, 40.

[42]I use the term "myth" here in the sense of moral rules being fabricated, invented, or arbitrary. Nielsen's characterization of ultimate moral principles and rules, and their justification seem to fit well into this category.

the truths of reality. To value the essential worth of one's own person at the expense of other persons is to make an error of reason as well as an error of passion. To hate a person, for instance, involves, at least in part, the making of a factual error,[43] or a denial of the truth, as to their worth or value. If it makes sense to say that the proposition, "persons have value," is objectively true, then it would be irrational to disvalue persons. But if value is understood in purely subjective terms, then no rational error and no logical contradiction is possible in apparent conflicts of evaluation once the natural agreed upon.[44] So that two separate acts of child torture in similar circumstance being evaluated within diverse moral communities could be judged respectively "good" and "evil" and there be no overarching standard by which to discern their truth or falsity. For if we must grant that someone or something is in fact inherently valueless, then we also must say that no moral obligations can exist toward him or it. What rational naturalistic basis, then, is there for the valuing of persons, for instance, who are retarded, insane, incorrigibly malevolent, or other persons who are regularly disvalued by so many in society? Apart from some extrinsic foundation, there is *no intrinsic* naturalistic basis in

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[43]Or in Swinburne's terms, an error of moral fact rather than of natural fact. See Swinburne, Coherence, 183f.

[44]Excepting of course, in Nielsen's terms, within the bounds of moral discourse where there may be disagreement over the moral code. Mark Timmons says that, "Whether or not one can develop a conception of persons that is sufficiently rich in its implications to constrain a choice among competing moral systems . . . is the crucial issue that typically divides the foundationalists from their nonfoundationalist rivals," (Mark Timmons, "Foundationalism and Justification," 608).

human personhood (or anywhere else) for deciding how to treat people apart from how the natural facts or perceptions of them may affect one's emotions.[45]

Foundations of Value

It should be noted that I have not defined or identified values with non-moral or natural facts, but rather that non-moral facts and their moral properties or values stand together as part of the fabric of the world. Statements of value are not reducible to non-moral statements of fact about the world, but rather certain statements of natural facts entail certain statements that result from objective judgements of value because of this supervenient relation in the world. So the objective non-moral statement of fact, "X tortured infants," objectively entails the moral judgement of, "X committed atrocious acts against infants," because the moral judgement of wrongness is as much a judgement about the property of such torture as the judgement of the fact that the torture caused pain. Indeed no statements of value can possibly relate to this world without their concomitant statements or assumptions of fact, but, this being said, it still stands that a justification of objective values in the world must appeal to a ground that is not natural to the world and

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[45]Nielsen argues effectively that there are no intrinsically inalienable rights based on a naturalistic understanding of man. See his "Scepticism," 594: ". . . we should be perfectly aware . . . that we do not know or have grounds for believing that such rights ought to be both acknowledged and respected. . . . We do not know that there are any universal human rights."

beyond the framework of those activities in which they operate. (This is, as Ihave argued, particularly crucial concerning the status of the intrinsic worth of human persons.)

Perhaps it is in this sense that I would concur with Wittgenstein in so far as he says,

> The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: in it no value exists--and if it did exist, it would have no value.
>
> If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case. For all that happens and is the case is accidental.
>
> What makes it non-accidental cannot lie within the world, since if it did it would itself be accidental.
>
> It must lie outside the world.[46]

Max Black makes the comment that "this is irredeemable nonsense. . . . For how could it be shown that there is 'value' outside the world. What could at best be shown is that there is no value inside the world. . . . And of course nothing ['non-accidental,' necessary, uncreated] will be found in a contingent world"[47] But Wittgenstein's claim here is at least consistent with a non-naturalistic ontology of value: that "value that is value" is other than the facts of the case and must be grounded "outside the (natural) world."

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[46]Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, trans. by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), 6.41, p.145.

[47]Max Black, A Companion To Wittgenstein's "Tractatus" (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1964), 370.

Although Wittgenstein may well not have been arguing for theism,[48] his statements seem consistent with a theistic justification of value and the groundlessness of a secular humanistic framework for ethics and the emptiness of secular assumptions of human value. Nothing contingent that is in the world can provide its own foundation or reason for its own value if it has value, and if it has no such value, ethical statements that assume such must be false.

Nielsen's challenge to the religious apologist that "reasonable grounds" must be given "for believing that in a world without God nothing could be good or bad or right or wrong," seemingly builds upon the assumption that moral goodness, badness, rightness, wrongness, and the torturing of children matter in the way I have been arguing--that the value of persons that moralities build upon is "value that is value."[49] But Nielsen cannot and does not buy into this metaphysical concept, and it is my claim that for this reason *he* cannot give "reasonable grounds" for his commitment to *"humaneness"* and *"humanity,"* and that his claim that "human beings have intrinsic worth" cannot, on his terms, be substantiated. His claim that, "in a Godless world kindness would still be a good thing and the torturing of little children could still be vile," is beset by its triviality unless there are

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[48]See his definition of "God" in Wittgenstein, Notebooks, 2nd ed., (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979) 8.7.16.

[49]Of course, if such moral terms should have no reference to objective properties in the real world, the demand for "reasonable grounds" would be irrelevant whether one is theist or secularist.

the extrinsic foundations he is committed to denying. For him, to ground human worth objectively outside the world is "metaphysical muck."

Ethics, on this account, is certainly possible without God but only "matters" to those who deem it so. But this is more than trivial, it is absurd. Rooted in the very nature of moral judgments is the notion that there are certain things that do in fact *matter*, but this makes such judgments false *in their most fundamental aspect*. If all along the most overridingly important things in life that are seen to be prior to all else turn out to be utterly illusory, then in the deepest sense, humans are worthless fools chasing the wind. Hume's, "it is not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger,"[50] goes much too far in the distinction of morality and rationality, and, on the incentive he provided, the emotivists and skeptics have had a hey-day. Conversely, if moral skepticism is false, it is very profoundly wrong. Indeed, to claim, say, that it is not even irrational to consider it good that the whole world be enveloped in nuclear warfare (provided, of course, it does not adversely affect one's self) is more than counter-intuitive--it cannot *reasonably* be said to be consistent with the way the world is, but, it must be admitted, it *is* consistent with a "world without God."

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[50]Quoted in Falk, "Morals Without Faith," 11.

The Origin of Value

Nielsen says that "God cannot create value,"[51] but must value be a thing created in a materialistic sense? To say that value is objectively known and supervenes on natural facts and relations does not commit one to odd material entities. The argument from strangeness against objectivism is strongest from within a materialistic world view, but this is just what a theist would expect, since it is just such strangeness that best is resolved from within a theistic framework and thus the strangeness of objective non-natural moral properties points to theism.[52]

How then can objective moral values be at home within theism? Theism is able to provide a coherent account of the origin and basis of human value that transcends man's evaluative or emotional capacities--an objective value of persons that is entailed by the divine/human relationship in the divine creation of man in the image and likeness of God. The biblical view of the value of a human person concerns his value in the eyes of God, as God judges him to be, in accord with His purpose and the nature in which he was created. Man was created in the image of God with spiritual and moral qualities that, as a rational moral agent, is able to both reflect and recognize the rational and moral likeness

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[51]Nielsen, "Hobbesist," 34.

[52]J. L. Mackie says against Hare's claim of incoherence ". . . that it is not incoherent, and the oddity of theses features is just what is needed to make their existence count significantly in favor of theism." The Miracle of Theism: Arguments For and Against the Existence of God (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 116 and compare his Ethics, 20-25.

of God. It is as such a creature in this relationship that he is able to intrinsically and objectively possess value.

On the other hand, we experience value as being dependent upon persons who evaluate objects and actions in their relations to each other and to the world. So it appears that, if persons did not exist, not only could moral acts and their evaluation not occur, but neither, it seems, could objective values exist. What is the meaning of a value without a valuer? The existence of the objective value of human persons is then also contingent upon a transcendent Valuer, upon God who is the Valuer that subjectively values or loves man. Thus the truth of a proposition of value (e.g., "Human persons have intrinsic value"), can be verified, or justified, only in relation to the revelation of a divine origin and evaluation of His creatures.

Alvin Plantinga wrote concerning the dispute between epistemic realism and anti-realism that,

> It is thus not the case that a proposition is true because God believes it. On the other hand it is the case, I think, that a proposition *exists* because God thinks or conceives it. For propositions, as I see it, are best thought of [as] the thoughts of God. You might think that this compromises the necessary existence of propositions; but not so. For God is a necessary being who has essentially the property of thinking just the thoughts he does think.. .[53]

It is in the same vein that I am arguing for the objectivity of value, for it is inconceivable that objective values exist independent of a person and a mind that makes evaluative

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[53]Alvin Plantinga, "How To Be An Anti-Realist," Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association 56 (Sept. 1982) 70.

judgments of their properties. However, the necessary existence of values is guaranteed by God--a necessary being whose nature it is to value His creation. And, as Plantinga concludes that the anti-realist "intuition is best accommodated by the theistic claim that necessarily, propositions have two properties essentially; *being conceived by God* and *being true if and only if believed by God,*"[54] so it may be claimed that the subjectivist intuition concerning the dependence of value upon persons is best accommodated by the theistic claim that value has two properties essentially: *being evaluated by God* and *being valuable if and only if valued by God.*[55] Just as our minds are able to think in truth categories that are *intended* to fit the world, so they are also able to think evaluatively concerning moral relations that are intended to fit the world. This fittingness of thought and evaluation to reality is best explicable in terms of theism and the theistic origin of the world. The thoughts--true beliefs and values--of God that He has concerning His creation have become a part of "the furniture of the universe" and thus integrally connected to His

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[54]Ibid.

[55]This does not require voluntarism, since an essentialist can rightly claim that God values only in accord with His perfect goodness. See the next chapter for a discussion on essentialism versus voluntarism.

creation.[56] This then best accounts for both the distinction of facts from values and their inextricability in their relation to the world.

If God created in necessary accordance with His perfect nature and purposes, He could not create what was deficient in relation to those purposes or imperfect in relation to His nature.[57] Thus, if man is created in the image of God, a unique purpose and relationship with God is entailed. So, when a true proposition concerning human value is made, let's say, "Human persons have intrinsic value," the

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[56]Richard Price (in Price, A Review Of The Principle Questions In Morals, 3rd ed., 1787. Ed. D. Daiches Raphael (Oxford: Clarendon, 1948), set out ". . . to prove that morality is a branch of *necessary* truth, and that it has the same foundation with it," 85. Thus in speaking of the relation between ethics and epistemology, he says, ". . . This is the necessary GOODNESS of the divine nature--It demonstrates, that, in the divine intelligence, absolute rectitude is included; and that eternal, infinite power and reason are in essential conjunction with, and imply complete moral excellence, and particularly perfect and boundless *Benevolence*. It shews us, that whenever we transgress truth and right; we immediately affront that God who is truth and right; and that on the contrary, whenever we determine ourselves agreeably to them, we pay immediate homage to Him," 89. I find it interesting, in this regard, the claim by Richard Brandt that, "Some philosophers (R.M. Chisholm, for example) have thought that there is more than just a parallel between epistemology and ethics. They have thought that epistemic terms are properly defined by means of ethical terms," Paul Edwards, ed., The Encyclopedia of Philosophy (New York: Macmillan and the Free Press, 1967), s.v. "Epistemology and Ethics, Parallel Between." Chisholm says ("Firth and The Ethics of Belief," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 51, 1 [Mar. 1991]: 119),"Is epistemic justification a *subspecies* of ethical justification or is it merely an *analogue* of ethical justification? . . . my inclination was to say that it is a subspecies." Note that this appears to be the inverse of Price's claim.

[57]See page 94 for a defence of the concept of necessary divine perfection. If God is necessarily good, then it is not logically *possible* for Him to create what is in any way defective or inappropriate to His purposes or nature. Though God created freely and "creatively," it was still within the bounds of what was possible for Him.

proposition would be objectively true in that the value is grounded in the facts concerning man's relatedness to his Creator. Thus the objectivity of the value is not contingent upon any person-independent thing in the world nor is it a mere objectivity of processes, or the like, related to the emotive activities of man. Rather, the objective value that persons possess is ontologically dependent upon God. God, as the absolute and perfect Being who transcends the world, is the necessary objective reference and ultimate criterion for a supreme value of persons as ends in themselves.[58]

The essential nature of value in the world, then, is that, with regard to ontological dependence upon God, a perceived value is real if and only if it reflects the nature of God. With regard to epistemological dependence, a proposition of evaluative judgment is true if and only if it corresponds to God's evaluative judgments. It is not possible that God could value what has no value since all objects that have value have it because they were created by God according to His perfection, and because the truth of the value is entailed by God's act of evaluation. God is perfectly good and therefore all that is created by God is created good and God's evaluative judgments entail the truth of His propositions of value.

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[58]Thus the designation that a human person is of "inestimable worth" and an "end in himself." I am not at present comfortable with saying "infinite worth."

Religion and Morality

The issue of the dependence of morality upon God follows naturally from that of the dependence of human value upon God. For if, as I have claimed, theism is necessary to make sense of the objectivity of the value of human persons, it also naturally follows that such is also necessary to make sense of the moral obligations that a person has toward others, that is, the evaluative obligations inherent in the truth that persons inherently possess value.

However, much of Nielsen's argument for "ethics without God or religion" hinges on the autonomy of the moral agent and autonomous judgments concerning the goodness of God. For Nielsen, the believer's judgment that "God is good" or "the Perfect Good," which of course is fundamental to the believer's worship, requires that he have an "independent moral criterion" to make such a judgment. He says,

> Without such a prior understanding of goodness, we could not understand the sentence "God is good." This clearly shows that our understanding of morality and knowledge of goodness are independent of any knowledge that we may or may not have of the divine. Indeed, without a prior and logically independent understanding of good and without some non-religious criterion for judging something to be good, the religious person could have no knowledge of God, for he could not know whether that powerful being who . . . laid the foundations of the earth was in fact worthy of worship and perfectly good.[59]

Nielsen here is making a logical claim that a knowledge of what is good is prior to, and thus independent of, a knowledge of or belief in God. If, in order to have religious moral

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[59]Nielsen, Ethics, 10.

knowledge or knowledge that there is a God who is good, one must first know what goodness is, then moral knowledge can be had without religious knowledge. Thus, he says, religion is dependent upon morality and not *vice versa*.

Granted that human persons have the capacity both to make moral judgments and to be the agents of moral actions, and that apart from this capacity there could be no personal interaction with God, how then does morality's epistemic priority to religion make religion logically dependent on morality? In epistemic order, man's moral and rational capacities are prior to his knowledge of God, but this does not necessitate the logical priority of morality to religion unless it can be shown that such capacities are also causally independent of God. If God exists and created man in His image and likeness as a rational and moral being with the autonomous capacity to interact rationally and morally with Himself, is it not therefore rational to assume that man's autonomous capacity to assess the worthiness of God stems from the nature in which he was made?

We should consider also that Nielsen's epistemic concept of "a prior understanding of goodness," being subjectivist, requires a criterion for judging something to be good. On an objectivist understanding though, the moral agent may properly understand that his belief that "that powerful being who . . . laid the foundations of the earth was in fact worthy of worship and perfectly good," is basic. What is required is that the agent has the prior capacity for moral cognition and thus his coming to recognize that

God is good and the Source of his own moral powers may then be understood as the epistemic basis for his moral beliefs; that his morality is dependent on his belief in God.

Moral autonomy, or at least the faculties that make man a morally responsible being, are indispensable to the moral relationship that he was created to have with God. That is, for man to freely love and worship God, he must (at least) be endowed with a certain moral and rational autonomy and freedom to make moral choices. Basil Mitchell writes in this regard,

> A capacity for moral reasoning and for moral development is something that men must be presumed to have in virtue of being men and represents the only sort of autonomy that they require. Their possession of this capacity is not the least of those things that an adequate conception of human nature must account for.[60]

So, rather than man's moral autonomy being evidence for the independence of morality from religion and from belief in God, belief in the creaturehood and God-likeness of man is presupposed in his capacity to act morally or make morally responsible decisions. These speak of man "theo-morphically." Mitchell, *contra* Kant, also says,

> Autonomy requires that the standards used shall be, in some sense, the judge's own standards; not, however, in the sense that he must have invented them; only in the sense that he must have rationally accepted them. The logical force of Kant's dictum is simply that recognition of Christ's moral perfection is in itself a moral act, and this we cannot and need not deny.[61]

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[60]Basil Mitchell, Morality: Religious and Secular (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), 152.

[61]Ibid., 153.

It is false to claim that, necessarily, if a person can conceive of or judge anything independently (whether of moral evaluation or of other epistemic relations[62]), this proves that such judgments originate in man and are therefore prior to religion. Nielsen's insistence that morality and moral judgments are logically prior to belief in God and therefore are independent of (or perhaps the basis of) religion begs the question in favor of naturalism. Only if it is first assumed that man as a moral being was not created as such by God can it then be asserted that belief in God (which involves a moral judgment) is causally dependent upon morality. How could God create persons with the capacity to reflectively choose to believe and love Him unless they also be in possession of the moral freedom to so choose? Though epistemically our moral knowledge of God may arise in part as a result of our autonomous moral capacities, such capacities teleologically and ontologically are grounded in God and as such make morality dependent upon God.

David Basinger speaks of such capacities in terms of a "divine implantation" of an "innate moral sense":

> Judeo-Christian theology has traditionally maintained that man was created in the "image of God." Accordingly, it is not inconsistent for the theist to claim that each human (theist and non-theist alike) is created with an innate

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[62]For instance, man's prior noetic capacity to form beliefs about the truthfulness of propositions concerning reality does not necessitate that the truth or falsity of such propositions is causally determined by that noetic structure. If our minds are able to think in categories that correspond to reality, it is certainly presumptuous to thereby claim that true beliefs about the world are necessarily caused by the prior noetic activity. Rather, the fittingness of thought and value judgments to reality favors a teleological argument for theism.

> (although more or less sensitive) moral sense that is not only similar to that of each other human, but in principle "divine."[63]

His "divine implantation theory": (1) ". . . presupposes . . . that there exists as an extension of God's character a single, unchanging ethical code that has been and always will be applicable to all rational beings (including God Himself)," (2) "Only general moral principles are innate . . ." and (3) ". . . since human beings are rational, free moral agents they possess the power to conceive of alternative moral codes and for a number of reasons actually commit themselves to one."[64]

Moral and rational agency are distinct yet concomitant features of human personhood and as such require a measure of autonomy and semi-transcendent self-reflective capacities. These capacities imply a resultant responsibility of thought and action which is exclusive of a deterministic view of man. These essential features of morality and rationality, if seen as reflective of the "image of God" in man, rather than divorce religion and morality or necessitate that religion be logically dependent on morality, instead show that morality depends on theism in order to make sense.

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[63]David Basinger, "Kai Nielsen and the Nature of Theistic Ethics," Journal of the Evangelical Philosophical Society 24, 3 (Sept. 1981): 236.

[64]Ibid., 237.

Created in the Image of God

The concept of the "image of God" that I have proposed is that man was created with the capacity to reflect God's likeness as a free autonomous rational and moral person. The *capacity* for a person to act as a responsible moral agent is subsumed under the capacity to be free, rational and autonomous, but the practical *ability* of a free moral agent to perform morally good acts and make right judgments, which (at least partially) reflect the perfect moral goodness of God, demands an ontological dependence of morality upon God. This dependence is partly what is meant by faith in God and obedience or submission to the will of God. Moral evil, on the other hand, involves the misuse of the freedom of the agent in the failure to choose (in submissive dependence upon God) the good that God wills and commands, and to use one's autonomous capacities for oneself exclusive of God's authority and will. It is the Christian theist's contention that this ability for man to be moral is marred by his moral and spiritual condition of "sin" as the separation from (and consequent deprivation of) the glory of God's perfect goodness.

The uniqueness of man involves his rational and moral capacities, and for these (and perhaps other) characteristics, that are an essential part of the biblical concept of the "image of God," it is difficult to conceive that such could arise from naturalistic causes. At what stage in mankind's evolutionary development or progress from brute to human person did man begin to have moral obligations and responsibilities and how did

such come about? At what stage did homicide, for instance, an action that has extensive parallels in the animal kingdom, become murder?

Since morality does not favor one's own interests over others, how then can it promote one's own survival? Morality favors the survival of the weak and disadvantaged at the expense of the strong, so how then can moral obligations be remotely related to a naturalistic principle of the "survival of the fittest" or other supposed mechanisms of macro-evolution? The Nazis (whom Nielsen is committed to "destroy"[65]) seem to have a rational naturalistic basis for their racism and discrimination against the weak. Nihilistic and emotivist accounts of morality may in fact be more naturalistically consistent than other accounts, as Nietzsche saw[66], and if this is so, the secular trivialization of moral obligation, as I have earlier argued, is even more evident.

Rather, a person's capacity to discern real moral values and acknowledge the value of other persons is best accounted for within the framework of a theistic world view. J.P. Moreland says that if we consider the

> transcendental question of how it could come about that human beings have normative, rational, truth-gathering faculties in general, as well as how humans came to have these faculties regarding moral knowledge in particular, then we have the makings of a design argument for God.[67]

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[65]See Nielsen, Ethics, 53.

[66]See Kai Nielsen, "Nietzsche as a Moral Philosopher," Man and World 6 (May 1973), 182-205.

[67]Moreland and Nielsen, Does God Exist?, 133.

Man's capacity to perform moral duties toward others, and *especially those of love toward his neighbor and his Creator*,[68] point rather to his unique God-likeness and creature-hood. It is true that epistemically man's moral knowledge is prior to his religious knowledge in order for him to know that God is good, but the "transcendental question" concerning the origin of such moral faculties is naturalistically odd, but is well at home in a theistic universe. It is the fittingness of man's innate rational and moral cognitive powers to a world of objective facts and values that give powerful teleological testimony to their divine origin.

Proper Function and Purpose

If man is "created in the image of God," his rational and moral powers must function as intended by God in order for him to be functioning properly as man *qua* man. To speak of his noetic powers "functioning properly," given these premises, is to assume both that they are capable of apprehending truths that correspond to the real world, and that they are *intended* to do so. Indeed, it could well be argued that if such epistemic relations were not so, no such correspondence could be possible.[69]

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[68]Nietzsche despises this. See Nielsen, "Nietzsche," 191.

[69]I imply here that realism only makes sense against the backdrop of a theistic world view. Evolutionary naturalism does not need free autonomous, rational or moral cognitive powers that correspond to reality to promote or protect survival success of creatures, nor

Likewise, to speak of man's moral powers as "functioning properly" is to assume that they are *intended* to apprehend objective value relations in the real world, and, as moral agents, to subjectively and practically concur with those relations and corresponding obligations. This requires both a personal dependence upon God and a submission to the commands of God for the truth content of moral obligations. Improper use or dysfunction in moral and/or rational capability would therefore adversely affect the agent's judgments of what is true and good.

Can a person who is morally deficient make reliable judgments about what is morally good or right? If a person is defective in his cognitive capacity to make sound moral judgments, can he reliably know what is in either his or others best interests? Can a person who commits moral evil know a God who is perfect and the ultimate source of all goodness--let alone make reliable moral judgments concerning His laws that reflect and reveal this perfection? Morality is concerned with how people ought to behave--it is "normative." "Ought" implies proper function or purpose for man. If we ought to behave in a particular manner (given a particular moral duty), this implies a normative behavior for man, a behavior that persons are designed or purposed to perform. Thus, in this sense, moral evil is the corruption of the proper function and relations of people in the world and improper function of an agent's moral faculties. So, from a theistic perspective, man's

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is it at all apparent that it can provide them. See Richard Swinburne, the Evolution of the Soul (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) 174-199.

capacity for moral judgments is modelled--"designed and built"--after God's. When functioning properly, it accords with what is true of God's nature (and thus the truths of His revealed will), and the proper function of man in society and man in his religious obligations to God will be a reflection of His goodness. When dysfunctioning, the moral evil that results (in word, thought and deed) is an affront to the nature of God and His good purposes for mankind.

What naturally follows is the Christian theist's claim that man has been created for a purpose or purposes. It would, of course, be rather strange for God to create the world and create man in His own image without a purpose; indeed it is strange that man as a free, rational and autonomous being that generally regards himself as having value, even inalienable value, and yet have no purpose for his existence. But a secular universe can allow of no such teleology. Mankind is here by accident; there is nothing higher and "everything is as it is." Thus any purpose that is devised is devised by man and man alone.

Consistent with this, Nielsen denies that human life and existence has a purpose in the sense of a function or role, or a purpose *of* life. He claims that purposes *in* life that one creates for oneself as the carrying out of one's wishes and aims are adequate and meaningful. Concerning the first sense, he objects to the idea that humans have a purpose and regards such as demeaning to human dignity. He says that,

> If we accept a scientific world picture and reject a theistic world picture, we are indeed forced to say that in this first sense life is purposeless. . . . It is degrading for a man to be regarded as merely serving a purpose. If I turned to you and asked, 'What are you for?' it would be insulting to you. . . . I would be treating you merely as a means and not an end.[70]

However, to consider "purposes in life" as adequate to give life "meaning" will not do. Such purposes are devoid of meaning unless they are related to an overarching purpose of persons. Nielsen relates "meaning in life" to "purpose in life" in the sense that the purposes that one creates for oneself give "meaning" to life, but "meaning" so used is in a subjective sense: it *feels* as if life makes sense and is worthwhile, and one can therefore attain a degree of inner satisfaction and contentment. I contend that "meaning" thus used is an equivocation on the normal use of the word as that of having significance in the overall scheme of things. A subjective sense of "meaning" (as I argued concerning value) is essentially illusory unless it is the result of the possession of an actual significance and value in the world that has an absolute point of reference outside the world.

Further, if there is no "purpose *of* life," "purposes *in* life" become meaningless and vain (as the writer of Ecclesiastes well argued) and the accomplishments of life are of no real value (that is, outside of the subjective activity of the individual). Purpose and value are necessarily linked. If human life and existence can have no purpose (or its purpose is only what one makes it to be), then human value likewise. If things can

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[70]Nielsen, Ethics, 38-40.

have a purpose but not persons, whence is their value? What someone considers good or of value in itself becomes an object deemed worthy of treasure, preservation and possession. It has a purpose in the mind and plans of the person. If that object has no purpose it generally becomes discarded as of little worth. Surely, if human persons have no purpose for their existence, what is the point of moralities that seek to regard their worth? An invented value and invented purpose may be of some utility in the world but cannot carry with them any morally obligatory force. If purpose and meaning are values that I have to invent for my own life, what then have these to do with morality and the plight or needs of the lives of others and obligations concerning my regard for them? To subject the goal of ethics to the satisfaction of the "wants and desires" of people is to prejudice the normative outcome. To limit "purpose" for man to what people want ("purposes in life"), prejudices the whole normative ethical enterprise. On the other hand, the ultimate best interests of man are determined by what is his purpose as man qua man, and such a determination can only come from his Creator. Purpose requires a purposer as design requires a designer and value requires a valuer. The only way human persons can equally possess intrinsic worth and thus come under universal moral obligations in their relations with each other is for their value to be grounded "outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case."[71]

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[71]Wittgenstein, Tractatus, 145.

Nielsen complains that the idea that humans have a purpose is degrading. By "purpose" he means as an instrument or tool is made for some use:

> To say that a man has a purpose . . . is actually offensive for it involves treating man as a kind of tool or artifact. It is degrading for man to be regarded as merely serving a purpose. Many of us, at any rate, would be very disturbed and think our lives meaningless [*sic.*] if we *did* have a purpose in this . . . sense.[72]

However, Nielsen fails here to take into account the claim that it is an infinitely perfect, good and benevolent God who created us, loves us, desires our best welfare and knows us better than we know ourselves who has a purpose and plan for our lives. If His will for us is, as the Scripture states, "good, pleasing and perfect,"[73] to substitute our own will and purposes for His is rather to demean and degrade ourselves. Also, if He has made us in His own image for the purpose that we may be in certain respects like Himself, our dignity, value and freedom have then an objective basis and can be meaningfully asserted.

In the above context, man as a means for God's ends can hardly be degrading. Nielsen is pushing his analogy too far. Why should the comparison be made with artifacts, tools and gadgets? He just previously made the comparison in the same sense that plumbers, doctors and police have purposes, and yet such designations are not normally degrading. Nielsen, it should be noted, is speaking evaluatively of human persons; he wants to elevate man to above that of a "gadget, a domestic animal or perhaps

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[72]Nielsen, Ethics, 40.

[73]Romans 12:2.

a slave," but he has no objective grounds for doing so. What criteria can Nielsen offer by which to judge that the claim that man has a purpose is "degrading" to him? The very means by which man receives his value (as I argued earlier) can hardly beat the same time the means by which he is disvalued.

Perhaps rather what Nielsen considers degrading might be the idea that someone outside of himself should have the right to dictate to him what direction his life should take and what his obligations are toward others. His near deification of his own "freedom" and "happiness" (tempered by his sympathy toward those who are deprived of such) would detract significantly from such a submission. The Christian believer, by contrast, considers that submission (as a willing slave) to the will of a perfectly just and loving benevolent God, who desires for us to live freely with like moral characteristics as Himself, is both necessary to human dignity and our *moral* duty. Rather than being degrading to man, no higher status for life on earth could possibly be imagined, but the secular humanistic vision for the deification of man is both demeaning to him and a prostitution of his status as a creature made in the image of his Creator.

If teleological functions for man are excluded, "purposes in" life are meaningless as much as is any "purpose of" life. Nielsen says that "it is true that a life devoid of purpose [purposes in life] would, without a doubt, be a dreadful, senseless affair,"[74] but if those purposes are without the foundation or context of meaning and

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[74]Nielsen, Ethics, 39.

purpose in relation to the ultimate purpose of that life itself, then that life would still be senseless and without point however much deluded fun there be in the invention and fulfilment of purposes.

CHAPTER THREE

GOD AND GOODNESS

Critical to any defence of Christian morality is an argument for the dependence of morality upon God. Goodness, especially moral goodness, must necessarily be capable of theological definition, at least in some broad sense, if such a dependence is to be established. It is broadly held in Christian theism that genuine moral goodness is dependent upon God both as its source and its ultimate criterion. I have argued in Chapter Two a case for theistic ethics based on the inadequacies of moral subjectivism to account for the phenomenon of objective moral properties, especially that of human persons, and that the strangeness of objective moral properties in a secular view of the world indicates a theistic foundation. Here I move to show that such a foundation is coherent and necessary to ground an objective morality, and that a divine essentialist view of theistic ethics avoids the criticisms that Nielsen raises and best fits the traditional Judeo-Christian view of God.

A dominant feature of secular arguments against theistic morality, and secular moral arguments against theism, is an appeal to the dilemma presented in Plato's Euthyphro that appears to force a disjunction between morality and religion:

> . . . whether the pious or holy is beloved by the gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved by the gods. . . . if that which is holy were the same with that which is dear to the gods, and were loved because it is holy, then that which is dear to the gods would be loved as being dear to them; but if that which is dear to them were dear to them because loved by them, then that which is holy would be holy because loved by them. But now you see that the reverse is the case, and that the two things are quite different from one another. For one *(theophiles)* is of a kind to be loved because it is loved, and the other *(hosion)* is loved because it is of a kind to be loved. Thus you appear . . . to offer an attribute only, and not the essence--the attribute of being loved by all the gods. But you still do not explain to me the nature of holiness.[1]

David L. Lipe summarizes Plato's argument, as used in the modern context, as "either (1) commands X because it is right (or good), or (2) it is right (or good) because God commands it."[2]

Ethical Voluntarism

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[1]Plato, Euthyphro, 10, 11, from A Plato Reader, ed. Ronald B. Levinson (Houghton Mifflin: Boston, 1967).

[2]David L. Lipe, In Defence of a Divine Command Morality (Florence, Ala.: David L. Lipe, 1986), 61.

The "second horn" option (2) has been argued by voluntarists since (at least) Scotus and Ockham. The essential element of the argument is that God's commands are themselves constitutive of, and therefore the ultimate criterion of, what is right or good. R.M. Adams is a moderate ethical voluntarist who argues for a "modified divine command theory." He says that his "new divine command theory of the nature of ethical wrongness . . . is that ethical wrongness *is* (i.e., is identical with) the property of being contrary to the commands of a loving God. I regard this as a metaphysically necessary, but not an analytic or a priori truth."[3] He adds that "the loving character of the God who issues them seems to me therefore to be a metaethically relevant feature of divine commands."[4] It is the "loving character" of God which makes a significant modification over other divine command theories since he considers the possibility of God commanding wickedness as "unthinkable":

> The modified divine command theorist agrees that it is logically possible that God should command cruelty for its own sake; but he holds that it is unthinkable that God should do so. To have *faith* in God is not just to believe that He exists, but also to trust in His love for mankind.[5]

This modification may add comfort to some who stumble over the harsher varieties of theological voluntarism but it does little, if any, to allay the severity of moral

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[3]Robert Merihew Adams, The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology (Oxford: Oxford University, 1987), 139.

[4]Ibid., 140.

[5]Ibid., 102.

criticisms against Christian theism. In addition, even if his arguments are consistent and convincing, it is difficult to find such a conception of God in the Bible and it is difficult to conceive how that the eternal nature of God is not determinative of the character of the commands and acts that are the product of His will.

If we are left to determine perhaps by empirical means the goodness or badness of God with reference to His past record, many may be somewhat unsure of the data. Some say God is good to them, while others blame Him for all the world's ills, and so why should the latter "trust His love for mankind"? If one should genuinely have come to have solid evidence for God's truthfulness, love and other good behavior, what assurance is there that God will always be so or in fact has always been so? Job's trust in God might, on this account, have been a mere gamble or an irrational "faith" or a mistake, but the general tenor of the Book of Job supports the view that God *cannot* do evil and that Job's trust in God's goodness--though thoroughly challenged by his circumstances--was logically rather than empirically established.

David Lipe says that, "to say that God is benevolent is to say that he wills the good and to say that He is beneficent is to say that He does the good,"[6] but surely the Christian's normal usage of these terms implies something of the *nature* or *character* of God as being good, since otherwise God could not be spoken of as a moral agent in some way analogous to human moral agency. The Psalmist says, "You are good, and what you

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[6]Lipe, Divine Command, 144.

do is good; teach me your decrees."[7] It seems to me rather that the Bible commands us to do and will good acts, not as acts "considered abstractly,"[8] but acts that reflect the divine nature or glory of goodness; and not merely because they are commanded without reason, but because their performance is consistent with His goodness and good purposes.[9]

> Anyone who defines God's goodness in terms of His will or power, cannot avoid concluding that the term "goodness" can be eliminated from our description of God, because the same features of God can be equally adequately described in terms of will or power. Hence Richard Price argues: "If there were no moral distinctions, eternally and unalterably right and wrong, there would be nothing meant by His eternal and unalterable rectitude or holiness . . . what can be more preposterous, than to make the deity nothing but will; and exalt this on the ruins of all His attributes."[10]

Robert Oakes, in his "Review of Ethics Without God," agrees with Nielsen that "very little besides absurdity results from the view that God's will is constitutive of moral goodness, i.e., that what *makes* something the morally correct thing to do is that God wills it," and then follows with,

> However, it in no way follows from this that "X is good" is not *derivable* from "God wills X." God's will can be *criterial* of moral goodness without

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[7]Psalm 119:68.

[8]See Thomas Reid's argument on page 119.

[9]It is not my intent here to offer a full *biblical* rebuttal of Christian voluntarism, or a full *biblical* defence Christian essentialism, as these are outside the scope of this work.

[10]J.C. Thomas, "The Supernaturalistic Fallacy Revisited," Sophia (Aust.) 25 (July 1986), 22.

> being *constitutive* of it. More strongly, it seems clear that if God exists, His will *is* to be taken as criterial of moral goodness precisely because "a perfectly good being" is part of what is meant by "God."[11]

I therefore reject the second horn voluntaristic options in favor of an "essentialist" account of the nature and origin of morality that I believe "breaks" the first horn argument. This seems to me to be more consistent with the biblical data and more rationally defensible.

Ethical Essentialism

It should be observed that Plato's formula in the Euthyphro is hardly one that challenges a theist as it stands. That is, it was formulated in a polytheistic context in which the finite gods, to which Plato referred, could not have provided the grounds he demanded for an explanation of the essential nature of goodness. The presumed advantage of being a god, at least in regard to morality, might have been that a god would be above man, have control over his affairs and thus be able to issue commands, whether good or bad. But such powers cannot have any bearing upon the issue of the origin and essential nature of goodness. That such gods were conceived as being greater than man is not enough since they were still finite. Only an infinite Being can be the ultimate ground of

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[11]Robert A. Oakes, review of Ethics Without God, by Kai Nielsen, in Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 36 (Dec. 1975), 275.

goodness, and logically there can only be one such infinite being.[12] Indeed, as Plato argued, the gods disputed over what they deemed good just as people do:

> . . . one party regards as just the same things as the other thinks unjust, about these they dispute, and so there arise wars and fightings among them. . . . Then the same things are hated by the gods and loved by the gods, and are both hateful and dear to them?[13]

There appears, then, no essential difference between the authority of men and of the gods as a basis for fixing criteria for moral value judgments.

The formula, "God commands X because it is right (or good)," is not equivalent to that of Plato's; but the question as to the origin of value and God's relation to it remains yet to be answered. J.C. Thomas writes, "But if God wills what is good because it is good, then there must be some standard which is independent of God's will, in virtue of which what He wills is good. Thus God ceases to be an omnipotent Sovereign."[14] Likewise, Nielsen writes, "If God commands something *because* it is good,

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[12]Compare Nielsen's reference to Hitler and Stalin as examples of human misuse of excessive power, in Nielsen, Ethics, 4. Power and goodness have no necessary relation in finite beings (See page 80 below for further discussion). That there logically cannot be two infinite and necessary beings can be seen when we consider, for instance, that two such beings of separate essences cannot each possess and freely exercise all power with independent wills, be infinitely immense, or whose essences be separately definitive of perfect goodness.

[13]Plato, Euthyphro, 7, 8.

[14]Thomas, "Supernaturalistic Fallacy," 20.

then plainly its goodness stands in logical and moral independence of God."[15] But is the sovereign power of God necessarily threatened if something other than His will is determinative of that will's content? Must the standard that is independent and determinative of God's will be independent of God?

Nielsen makes the further claim that the "first horn" option implies that God and His commands are not logically required to ground ethics:

> If we say God commands it because it is good, this implies that something can be good independently of God. This is so because "God commands it *because* it is good" implies that God apprehends it to be good or takes it to be good or in some way knows it to be good and then tells us to do it. But if God does this, then it is at least *logically* possible for us to come to see or in some way know or come to appreciate that it is good without God's telling us to do it or informing us that it is good. . . . I am giving to understand that good is not a creation of God but rather that something is good is something which itself is apprehended by God or known by God.[16]

And Nielsen elsewhere affirms:

> God, let us for the moment assume, did create the world, but He could not--logically could not--create moral values. Existence is one thing; value another.[17]

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[15]Nielsen, "Hobbesist," 34.

[16]Kai Nielsen, "God and the Basis of Morality," The Journal of Religious Ethics 10, 2 (Fall 1982), 336.

[17]Nielsen, "Hobbesist," 34.

In essence, he argues, based on the first horn option, that goodness or value is not a thing created by God and thus it is independent of God, being something that God apprehends. Therefore, we also can apprehend goodness independent of God and religion.

Fortunately, Nielsen's argument from Plato's dilemma can be broken by the essentialist claim that goodness can be ultimately identified with the nature of God. Richard Price confronted this same issue when he said that, "Morality has been represented as necessary and immutable. . . . It may seem 'that this is setting up something distinct from God, which is independent of him, and equally eternal and necessary.'"[18] His answer was that,

> From the whole it is plain, that none have reason to be offended when *morality* is represented as eternal and immutable; for it appears that it is only saying that God Himself is eternal and immutable, and making His nature the high and sacred original of virtue, and the sole fountain of all that is true and good and perfect.[19]

It is the essential nature of God from which all other true value and virtue springs and owes its existence. God wills/commands/does what is good and right necessarily because He cannot--logically cannot--do what is contrary to His nature. God does and wills only what is good, and God loves all goodness (that is outside of Himself) because all goodness originated in Himself and is inherent in the product of all He does, including His creative activity.

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[18]Price, Principle Questions in Morals, 85.

[19]Ibid., 89.

Goodness is God-ness or God-likeness. "Goodness" is thus defined as that which is consistent with the nature and character of God, so that when man makes value judgments, such judgments can be measured against the criteria of divine goodness in the revelation of the commands and actions of God. And, as previously mentioned, the very ability of human persons to evaluate and make moral judgments (even of God) originates in God's creation of man in His image. "God alone is perfectly good" means that (1) God is in Himself--in His very nature--all that true goodness is, and thus God is Himself the ultimate criterion of goodness, and that (2) all other goods derive their value from Him.

God is Good

Nielsen raises linguistic problems here concerning the uses (including common uses) of the term "good," and that of its application to God--whether it is applied as analytic or substantiative. Concerning the first, Nielsen claims:

> But "God is good" is clearly not such a statement of identity, for that "God" does not have the same meaning as "good" can easily be seen from the following case: Jane says to Betsy, after Betsy helps an old lady across the street, "That was good of you." "That was good of you" most certainly does not mean "that was God of you." And when we say "conscientiousness is good" we do not mean to say "conscientiousness is God." To say, as a believer does, that God is good is not to say that God is God. This clearly indicates that the word God does not have the same

> meaning as the word good. When we are talking about God we are not talking simply about morality.[20]

Nielsen's claims here can be answered in terms of the distinctions (1) and (2) above. Concerning the first, when the believer says that "God is good," he may be using the phrase either analytically or substantiatively. If he is wishing to affirm that God has dealt kindly or providentially toward him, etc., the expression may be taken substantiatively. On the other hand, if he wishes to affirm a theological truth about the nature of God, then it may be taken as analytical in the sense that he is affirming that God as an infinite being is ontologically complete and without defect, as the phrase "God is the Perfect Good" is meant.[21] However, the believer does not base his analytical belief that God is good on the judgment of God's actions even though he may have come to his believe in God through them in some way, and by means of them to acknowledge the truth of His perfect goodness.

If all that is objectively good is *derived* from God, to say, "That was good of you" could be taken to mean (by a theist), "That was God-like of you," i.e., the person's action or attitude was derived from God in the sense that all goodness has its source in God and is consistent with the image of God in which man was made. Likewise, to say, "conscientiousness is good," could be taken by a theist to mean that conscientious

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[20]Nielsen, Ethics, 7, 8.

[21]See Thomas V. Morris, Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1991), 50.

behavior reflects the nature of God in which God will always act in accord with His perfection in relation to His creatures.

Elsewhere, Nielsen makes a similar statement to the above where he gives the example, "That was a good steak."[22] Here a theist might reply that the consumption of pleasant tasting food (assuming we are not vegetarians here) is satisfying and nutritious, and God providentially made us and the world around us in such a way that we can enjoy and benefit from such foods. Thus, "good" involves the fittingness of the environment to our welfare and pleasure in the general providence and benevolence of God, and so "good" may be similarly extended to cover our aesthetic experience.

To the secularist's or unbeliever's objection that this use of "good" is not his use or is not what is commonly meant, as one may, for instance, simply mean that "good" means "pleasurable" or "beneficial." To this, the theist may reply, that Christian morality is corrective or reforming of other moralities in that it makes claims to what is the true content of the good, and thus disputes the legitimacy or perspective of secular moral judgments and use of terms. Also, the theist may claim that man was created in the image of God as an autonomous moral being capable of making moral judgments and intuiting moral properties even without reference to God or religion. However, the Christian theist also claims that this capacity is defective, as man's nature is morally corrupted and alienated from the Source of all goodness and virtue. Thus, when a

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[22]Nielsen, "Basis of Morality," 339.

secularist makes a judgment that something is good or right--even if it substantially agrees with the Christian judgment--it is defective at least in so far as it fails to acknowledge the divine origin of the good.[23]

There is, however, substantial disagreement between Christian and other moralities to the point where many such differences are irreconcilable. For instance, Nielsen claims, ". . . we can well say 'conscientiousness, under most circumstances at least, is good even in a world without God.' Such an utterance is clearly intelligible to believer and non-believer alike,"[24] one could say that, "without God there is no way of justifying such a moral claim because other-regarding actions (that accrue little or no personal benefit) would not matter to me." Nielsen continues,

> It is a well-formed English sentence with a use in the language. Here we can use the word good without either asserting or assuming the reality of God. Such linguistic evidence clearly shows that good is a concept which

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[23]I am not implying here that Christians do not share the same defective moral nature as others (and thus make consistent true moral judgments). Rather, that Christians who submit to the authority of God and His revealed will (in the Scriptures), especially concerning godly and virtuous behavior, are in a better position to make moral judgments that are *true* and accurately discern the objective good. It seems to me that people who both know and do what is right and good, i.e., live morally virtuous lives, are in a better position to discern moral values and distinguish between right and wrong than those who practise vice and thereby distort the truth. This is clearly the teaching of Christ in John 3:19-21 where it is claimed that moral and spiritual "blindness" and self-deception has a direct relation to the love and practice of evil, and see also the teaching of Paul in Romans 1:18-32.

[24]Nielsen, Ethics, 9.

> can be understood quite independently of any reference to the deity, that morality without religion, without theism, is quite possible.[25]

Here, the theist can claim that the unbeliever may indeed refer to moral properties and make evaluative judgments that may be (at least in part) correct, but that he is wrong in failing to credit God with being the origin of all that is truly good or to acknowledge that His commands are criterial of the good and the right. Of course, Nielsen does not believe that such a sentence refers to an objective property of goodness any more than he believes religious sentences can reference the Deity. For if moral properties are objective, as I argued in the last chapter, then the existence of God is the most reasonable explanation for such a phenomenon.

Again, when Nielsen says that a believer may grant that, "'there is no God, but human happiness is nonetheless good' is indeed perfectly intelligible as a moral utterance,"[26] I would counter that such is intelligible only on a secular understanding of the status of moral utterances. If a believer understands that the goodness of happiness is an objective property that requires a divine origin, the above utterance would indeed be incoherent, but then if it is understood on subjectivist terms, an atheist would have no need to account for his judgement outside of his subjective experience. But then, a torturer of children may well be equally justified in calling his actions "good" because they give him

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[25]Ibid.

[26]Ibid., 11.

pleasure or promote his cause, and even an action that is generally called good and that promotes pleasure may be denied its moral status by the theist because it is done in rebellion against God who made us and prohibited such behavior.[27] In any case, as stated earlier, secular moral systems may be rational in as far as they are internally consistent, coherent and widely accepted, and even a theist may be in partial agreement, but they cannot escape the criticism of being superficial and trivial in a "world without God."

If a Christian believer and a secularist hold moral judgments in common, such as, "racial discrimination is wrong," and "it is right or good to show mercy to the poor and destitute," the believer can consistently concede that the secularist may have made a valid normative moral judgment (since all people were created in God's image having moral and truth discerning faculties), but the believer need not concede that the secularist can offer a valid *justification* of his judgments or can appeal to adequate criteria. Nielsen's claims that, ". . . even in a Godless world kindness would still be a good thing and the torturing of little children could still be vile," and "If there is no reason to believe that torturing little children would cease to be bad in a Godless world, we have no reason to believe that, in any important sense, morality is dependent on religion,"[28] could be taken by the theist simply as evidence that he has a valid apprehension of certain moral

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[27]It should be noted that Reid's argument applies here also as discussed later on page 119.

[28]Nielsen, "Hobbesist," 33, 34.

properties that exist in a theistic universe, but that also his insight is myopic in that he fails to see that kindness to little children is a moral value that obtains only in virtue of the fact that little children have, and can only have, the intrinsic value appropriate to such kindness in a theistic universe. In a theistic universe, God created people in His image such that He loves (values) them in some sense as His children,[29] and thus intended that they express that same love for one another. The theist may claim that in a secular world such regard for others is irrational and unjustifiable and that there is no rational justification to move from purely self-regarding to others-regarding or altruistic living.

In summary, in the disagreement--and sometimes agreement--between the secularist and theist on the status and the significance of "good" and normative ethical judgments, the theist is in a better position to justify his claims and account for the secularist's judgments by appealing to a perfectly good divine Creator who made man in some sense like Himself. Christian theism, then, legitimately employs the evaluative term "good" with reference to God, and can legitimately justify his corrective judgments of secular and common uses of "good," even if his moral knowledge is epistemically prior to his knowledge of God.

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[29]See Paul's use of "children" in Acts 17:28, 29.

God is the Perfect Good

Nielsen questions the logical status of the phrase, "God is the perfect good," and states that,

> It seems to me correct to maintain that "God is good," "puppies are young" and "triangles are three-sided" are all truths of language; the predicates partially define their subjects. That is to say . . . goodness is partially definitive of Godhood as youngness is partially definitive of puppyhood and as three-sidedness is partially definitive of triangularity.[30]

This appears to be a similar claim to Brown's:

> That God is good is a truth of language, and not an ethical contingency, since one of the usual *criteria* of Godhood is that the actions and commands of such a being are perfectly good. . . . "God is good" therefore is trivially true in the same way as "saints are good."[31]

As I would understand the comparisons that Nielsen makes, youngness is a property that is instanced in puppies and three-sidedness is a property instanced in a triangle. But it should be noted that such properties are necessary to these objects in which they inhere even though they may be instanced in other objects or are universals. In the statement, "Goodness is partially definitive of Godhood," "goodness" is necessary to that definition of "Godhood," and may be instanced in other objects also, but "God is the perfect good" speaks of a property that uniquely inheres in the divine nature and is not universal, even though other goods may be analogous to and derivative of it.

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[30]Nielsen, Ethics, 9.

[31]Patterson Brown, "Religious Morality," Mind 72 (Apr. 1963), 238.

Nielsen states that,

> "God is the perfect good," is somewhat closer to "a father is a male parent," but even here "God, and "the perfect good, are not identical in meaning. "God is the perfect good" in some important respects is like "a triangle is a trilateral." Though something is a triangle if and only if it is a trilateral, it does not follow that "triangle" and "trilateral" have the same meaning. Similarly, something is God if and only if that something is the perfect good, but it does not follow that "God" and "the perfect good" have the same meaning. When we speak of God we wish to say other things about him as well, though indeed what is true of God will also be true of the perfect good.[32]

Though I would agree with Nielsen's point here, he goes on to claim on the basis of this that instances of goodness in others shows that God cannot be "the, or a, fundamental criterion for goodness" because we can understand "good . . . quite independently of any reference to God." But there is a significant and unique qualitative aspect in goodness that is not present in the previous examples. The criterion of goodness must be a perfection and the theist can say that no example of moral perfection exists in the world. The property of youngness is easily distinguished in a living thing's life span, given clear cases, and criteria are not usually a problem. I have argued that a person's autonomous ability to recognize moral properties or distinctions is a part of the constitution inherent in all (see page 51), but this by no means implies that the criteria available to us are adequate to live

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[32]Nielsen, Ethics, 8, 9. A triangle is "a plane closed figure bounded by three line segments," (Websters) thus it is not correct for Nielsen to claim that "We can intelligibly say, 'I have a three-sided figure here that is most certainly not a triangle,'" unless he is merely speaking of the property of three-sidedness and not a triangle as such. A "spherical triangle," for instance, has three-sidedness but is certainly not a triangle or triangular in shape; it does not possess the *property* of triangularity.

by, and, given the widespread conflict of ethical claims and distortions of judgments, by which criteria are we to make our decisions? Judgments of non-moral properties such as youngness or triangularity do not *matter* in the same way as do moral ones. The results of a "wide reflective equilibrium" cannot offer criteria that make this distinctive difference.

Man's autonomous moral capabilities are indeed necessary to his religious life but this fact does not require the logical independence thesis that Nielsen claims. Man's moral judgment is *involved* in reasoning that "God is the Perfect Good" and the ontological source of all true goodness, including his own, and the commands and actions of God in the world provide the criteria by which he can make the moral decisions of his life.[33] Theistic morality makes the hegemony of morality complete: "God is the perfect good" both ascribes the descriptive property of goodness to God and acknowledges that He is the ultimate criterion by which all claims to goodness must be judged. A theist may well argue on this account that moral goodness is a necessary attribute of God and that an assessment of His character that fails to acknowledge this commits in doing so both a logical and moral error.

Nielsen has recently argued that,

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[33]The Christian theist is one who has made the judgment that God's goodness is demonstrated in His incarnation in Jesus Christ and His ultimate altruistic self-sacrifice for man's redemption and restoration to the glory for which God created him.

> In order to understand that something is the perfect good, you have to understand what is good, and in order to understand that something is worthy of worship, you have to have at least some elementary criteria or understanding of what worthiness is, and that is *not* itself derived from God. Or to put the point more accurately, . . . though it may be derived in a causal sense--since everything comes from God--it is not derived in a justificatory or logical sense from God or a belief in God. Our understanding of these concepts is quite logically prior to any religious response.[34]

Here Nielsen admits an ontological causation is possible for religious moral judgments but denies any derivation in a "justificatory or logical sense." If everything has an ontological dependence upon God and we can reason that everything owes its existence to God as the first cause of all that exists, then, consistent with Nielsen's claim, our belief concerning anything that it has its origin in God cannot be derived from God in a "justificatory or logical sense" since we must first be able to reason thus and have some elementary criteria of what causation is. So our understanding that truth has its origin in God cannot itself be derived from God because we must first be able to know what truth is and have some elementary criteria in order to distinguish truth from falsehood.

The best that Nielsen can do here, however, is to claim that our understanding of goodness, worthiness and truth is *epistemically prior* to the belief that God is the Perfect Good and the source of all truth; that we come to understand via our empirical experience what goodness and truth is prior to reflection on the Divine being. If it is granted that "it may be derived in a causal sense--since everything comes from

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[34]Moreland and Nielsen, Does God Exist?, 100.

God" and "everything" includes our moral and rational capacities, surely our use of these capacities to reason back to God does not preclude that our moral andrational beliefs about God can be dependent upon God in a logical or justificatory sense. Appropriately, Basinger states:

> But if man's nature is of divine origin, it is of course not true that we judge God by a moral standard that is separate from and more ultimate than the divine moral law. It is rather true, as Carnell has aptly noted, that "we test for God, to be sure, but God himself is the author of our expectations. . . . The character of God is the norm by which we test for the character of God."[35]

Further, if the theist reasons that moral values are objective non-natural properties and that a most basic value is that human persons have intrinsic worth and inherent dignity, and that theistic belief is logically necessary to account for such, this then makes morality logically dependent upon God. If, on the other hand, we grant Nielsen's subjectivist account that holds moral values have their origin in human subjective activities, moral beliefs in human dignity and divine goodness logically cannot be said to be dependent upon God. On this account, religious belief depends upon human subjective moral judgments.

Nielsen also appears to concede that if it can be demonstrated that God is the perfect good, then it follows that His commands are morally obligatory. He asserts that, "Unless we assume that God is morally perfect, unless we assume the perfect

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[35]Basinger, "Kai Nielsen," 236, quoting E.J. Carnell, Christian Commitment (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 132.

goodness of God, there can be no necessary 'relation between being commanded or willed by God and being obligatory or good'."[36] But then if we do claim that God is the perfect good, Nielsen counters, "Yet I shall argue that even if God . . . is the perfect good it does not follow that morality can be based on religion and that we can know what we ought to do simply by knowing what God wishes us to do,"[37] and this appears to be in contradiction with his former statement which implies that if God is "the perfect good," a necessary relation between obligation or goodness and God's commands follows. This necessary relation would at least involve the fact that whatever a perfectly good being commands would necessarily be good and obligatory; that if God is necessarily perfectly good, then of necessity, God cannot will, command or do anything that falls short of that perfection. However, his denial that morality can be based on religion and God's commands is based on his argument of the priority of moral judgment to religious belief, but as we have seen, this priority is at best an epistemic priority and his logical argument that morality cannot be based on a perfectly good God fails.

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[36]Nielsen, Ethics, 4.

[37]Ibid., 5. Nielsen has in mind here his argument that an independent moral criterion that a believer must have prior to belief in God.

God, Good and Evil

Nielsen claims that we do not know what "the perfect good" means and that "we do not know how to identify the referent of 'the perfect good.'"[38] The first claim concerns the coherence of the phrase, and the second concerns the problem of a non-material referent. Concerning the meaning of "the perfect good," we know how to use to "good" in a moral sense and how to apply it toactions, attitudes, states of affairs, etc. We also know how to use "perfect" as a theoretical standard of measurement or evaluation even if we do not have a referent. For instance, perfect squareness is a standard by which we judge instances of squareness even though we are unable in practice to access a material referent that meets the standard. This absence of actuality does not preclude its logical possibility.

Richard Swinburne argues that "In claiming that God is by nature morally perfectly good, the theist means that God is so constituted that He never does actions that are morally wrong."[39] "He does whatever it is of overriding importance that He should do; He does whatever it matters that He should do."[40] There is nothing incoherent in this account of perfect goodness and the absence of a material referent cannot count against His existence unless one already assumes that materialism is true.

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[38]Ibid., 21, n.10.

[39]Swinburne, Coherence, 179.

[40]Ibid., 180.

Perhaps we cannot reason all that such a term would entail, and, indeed, it cannot refer to anything of our present contingent existence, but by analogy we can understand that no evil or corruption could exist in a morally perfect being; a being who necessarily holds all His attributes infinitely and who necessarily acts according to those attributes. Evil, as the corruption of the good, cannot originate at the perfect source of goodness without real contradiction. The origin of evil must therefore be independent of His being, and the true judgment of good and evil in the world belongs to Him. Just as we can understand that omnipotence is exclusive of weakness and contingency, and that omniscience is inclusive of the knowledge of all true propositions and states of affairs, so we can understand that perfect goodness entails that God cannot make an error of moral judgment or action, and that He can possess no defect of character. The reality of moral evil cannot be judged independently of the assumption of the reality of moral goodness since evil is the corruption of the good, and corruption cannot be determined independently of the idea of the uncorrupted good.

If evil is understood as being a corruption of the good, then God, who necessarily possesses all His attributes infinitely, or maximally and perfectly, cannot be corrupted. Such a concept no more limits the sovereignty of God than to say that God's omnipotence is limited by what is logically possible for God to do. If God "*cannot* deny Himself,"[41] it follows that He cannot act contrary to His perfections. Thus, if God cannot

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[41]2 Timothy 2:13.

will or command evil, or cannot perform logically impossible acts, or cannot fail in wisdom and knowledge, such "limitations" hardly contradict His sovereignty or omnipotence but rather affirm His immutability and that He wills freely according to His eternal nature.

Nielsen, following Hepburn and others, claims that, "there is nothing logically improper about saying 'X is omnipotent and omniscient and morally wicked.' Surely in the world as we know it there is no logical connection between being powerful and knowledgeable and being good."[42] But can evil be logically predicated of God? The logical connection being made is not between power, knowledge and goodness "in the world as we know it," but between *omni*potence, *omni*science, and *perfect* goodness in a Being who necessarily possesses all His attributes perfectly and infinitely. A person expresses good or evil action by means of his power and knowledge, and evil thus expressed is necessarily conjoined with these attributes. We all know the saying that "absolute power corrupts absolutely," but this can only apply to a finite person who has the capacity for evil due to a corruption of his nature and not to a morally perfect being, by contrast with whose nature, all evil is defined. So to say that God can express moral

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[42]Nielsen, Ethics, 6. It should be noted that some Christian thinkers concede this also, such as Basinger: "But it is not impossible that an omnipotent, omniscient creator could be wicked," and "an omnipotent, omniscient creator need not be good" (Basinger, "Kai Nielsen," 235). So also, notably, theological voluntarists such as Adams: "The modified divine command theorist agrees that it is logically possible that God should command cruelty for its own sake; but he holds that it is unthinkable that God should do so" (Adams, The Virtue of Faith, 102).

wickedness with omnipotence is the same as saying that God has perfect power to express an imperfection in His being. God's absolute power and knowledge is *necessarily* expressed in terms of His perfect good will because all are part of His infinity.

Further, if God necessarily possesses all His attributes absolutely and immutably, then surely goodness cannot be exempted, and goodness possessed absolutely is perfect goodness and a corruption of His character is contradictory. God would not be God if He were not in every respect perfect. As Richard Swinburne says, "it is logically necessary that an omniscient and perfectly free deity 'be perfectly good, and that a perfectly good creator of the universe . . . be a source of moral obligation.'"[43]

Nash, quoting Samuel Clarke, says that God's omnipotence is restricted in that, "Infinite power cannot be said to extend to those things which imply *natural* imperfection in the being to whom such power is ascribed," and comments,

> Clarke then makes the move that lays the foundation for his answer to the question, Can God sin? Moral imperfection is a species of natural imperfection. Once it is agreed that an omnipotent God cannot do anything that implies any natural imperfection in his own being, it follows that God cannot do anything that entails moral imperfection. Because infinite knowledge, infinite power, and infinite goodness are perfectly conjoined in the being of God. Clarke argues, "free choice in a being of infinite knowledge, power and goodness can no more choose to act contrary to these perfections than knowledge can be ignorance, power be weakness, or goodness malice."[44]

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[43]Swinburne, Coherence, 222.

[44]Ronald H. Nash, The Concept of God (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 42.

Nash further argues that,

> God is capable of doing everything that is logically possible and consistent with His perfect will. As Jerome Gellman puts it, "If God is omnipotent, then He can bring about any state of affairs logically possible for an essentially perfect being to bring about." "To be powerless with respect to perversity [that is, powerless to avoid perversity] is to be *imperfect,* but to be unable to lie is a perfection." The power to sin is the power to fall short of perfection. Since this is the opposite of omnipotence, God's inability to sin is not inconsistent with omnipotence; rather, it is entailed by His omnipotence.[45]

And finally, Norman Geisler argues,

> First, the term "God" seems eminently inappropriate for such a being with such malicious intent. Second, how can the universe be ultimately evil? Does not evil presuppose good? By what standard, if there is no ultimate Good (or, God), could one declare the activity of this demonic creator to be *not*-good?[46]

Thus we may logically assert that an infinite, omnipotent, and omniscient deity cannot be or do anything that implies imperfection in His being. Thus God (1) can only do what is consistent with His perfect goodness and cannot be the source of evil, and (2) knows all true propositions and cannot believe or express falsehood.

If evil is a *corruption* of the image of God's nature in man whom He created, and of the world that He created according to His good will, then to predicate evil of God is logically contradictory. If the perfect goodness of God is the criterion by which

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[45]Ibid., 43.

[46]Norman L. Geisler, Philosophy of Religion (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 312. See also Richard Price on page 87.

we measure evil and recognize the good, then a moral judgment that predicates evil of God is false and may therefore be attributed to, (1) the corruption of human moral faculties, (2) the corruption of morally relevant data, and possibly, (3) faulty reasoning concerning that data.

In sum, goodness cannot cohere in God contingently or less than absolutely because such implies an imperfection, and God necessarily possesses all His attributes perfectly because He is infinite. It is logically impossible for God to do evil because evil is an imperfection and corruption, and if it is not possible for God to do evil then He is not free to do so. He cannot be other than what He is. God is definitive of what is good. He cannot will or command contrary to what is good because He is good.

God, Fact and Value

I have earlier upheld Nielsen's criticism of the ethical naturalists who want to define value in terms of natural properties, but then agreed with Swinburne that moral truths and cognitive values supervene on natural facts. It is the strangeness of this relation that requires some metaphysical explanation for the ontological basis of such values and my argument has been that a theistic world view alone can account for such and can give the justification that is requires for morality to make sense. By this I mean belief in the

God of theism, who is Perfect Goodness, is the ground and source of all that is good in the world.

This is a form of theological definism where what is good is defined in terms of the facts of God's nature. I agree with Nielsen in so far as moral evaluation transcends all facts in this world, but disagree in that I claim moral values are ultimately identified with God's nature, as Price would say, that His nature is their origin and sole fountain.[47] As Nielsen would have it, they would have no common boundaries to the extent, it seems, that morality has no link with the real world; it is just some world-independent "moral point of view" to which one decides to become committed, and of which one can have no non-moral criteria by which it can be decided which morality is relevant to reality. To identify goodness with the nature of God as one of His essential attributes makes goodness transcendent of the facts of the world, on one hand, and yet essentially connected to those facts to which they must apply. Morality that is morality cannot be determined by the natural facts which it regulates. What people want or desire, how they behave and the way that things are in the world, cannot provide the criteria for what ought to be. Morality is partially defined as a limitation, a censure of what is the case. As such, how things *ought* to be in the world, their relative purposes and proper functions and especially man's moral behavior must be determined by reference to the Transcendent.

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[47]Price, Principle Questions in Morals, 89.

The biblical command, "Be holy as I am holy . . . because I am holy,"[48] is an example of an obligation entailed by a truth. The truth of "I am holy" (the perfect goodness of God), *entails* the moral obligation, "you must (ought to be) holy," because the holiness or goodness of God is the ground and criterion of the obligation. That God is perfectly good and created us to be good (after His likeness, which is central to His purpose for us), is the ground of the moral obligation and thus entails it. This does not confuse fact and value but relates them to the same reality in the world. To isolate the concepts of fact and value, as Nielsen does, does not account for the necessary interaction or relation required for ethics to be meaningful in the world.

The biblical analogy of light versus darkness links the ideas of truth and moral goodness together and to their divine origin. That "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all"[49] means both that God, who knows all true propositions, is faithful to His perfect nature and that He cannot lie or deceive, and equally, that He is essentially and perfectly good and that He cannot do evil or behave unjustly. It is this same "light" of God's self-revelation that is the light according to which man must live in order to function and behave as man *qua* man and escape the moral corruption that is in the world.

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[48]1 Peter 1:15.

[49]1 John 1:5.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DEPENDENCE OF MORALITY UPON GOD

I commenced my discussion in this work by giving assent, in substance, to Locke's statement that, "Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist. The taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all,"[1] and as Mavrodes said, it was thought that "if religion were to fail . . . it would be *proper* for morality to fail also."[2] Nielsen's claim, as I discussed in Chapter One, that it is not irrational to give "pride of place" to non-moral considerations over moral ones that conflict, is a step toward the fulfilment of Locke's claim, in that it detaches morality from its links with rationality. Further, I argued in Chapter Two that in a secular universe, ethics can only have a superficial significance and hold on reality, and that there is no reason why its prescriptions and obligations should matter. Ethics, for

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[1]John Locke, Toleration, in Nielsen, "Hobbesist," 33. (See my earlier reference on page 1.)

[2]Mavrodes, "Queerness," 213.

an atheist, logically ought to be trivial and have no hold on reality and no hegemony over his life.

Nielsen "justifies" his ethical passion by reference to a "wide reflective equilibrium"--a means of agreeing with others of like mind on what is the "moral point of view" to which they might decide to commit themselves--but, as a coherence view of justification, there can be no epistemic certainty or assurance that the resultant ethical prescriptions and ostensive obligations *should* be followed. His "wide reflective equilibrium" and resulting judgments of goodness and rightness could completely miss the mark. How can morality be said to fit or apply to reality if there is no demonstrable connectedness of the assumed premises of morality to reality, and if there can be no justification of such premises outside of the moral point of view?

Nielsen has given me no adequate metaethical reason why I should abandon Christian ethics and embrace a secularly based ethic. Indeed, Nielsen's denial of theistic foundations for morality amounts to a denial of all foundations, given that his arguments against ethical naturalism are successful,[3] and I have understood this to logically entail that there can be no legitimate overarching authority for moral obligations in the world--something that seems strongly counter-intuitive! The only way that such a hegemony can be postulated is by reference to an authoritative revelation from the vantage of an archimedial reference point outside the world.

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[3]See page 42.

I also argued that moralities generally assume (a "platitudinous" proposition) that human persons are to be valued or held in a certain regard that is uniquely different from the valuation of other objects that people value. On a secular evolutionary account of human nature and origins, however, there does not appear to be any naturalistic basis that would suggest that human value has any more status than that of fiction. There *may* be a case for the equality of persons such that one has equal right to another for just treatment, etc., but it could also be an argument for equal worthlessness. The whole ethical enterprise could be no more than speciesism; a pragmatic device to preserve and enforce the superiority of our kind.[4] That persons are special and can have "value that is value" is only possible on a theistic account of the origin and nature of man.

On one hand I admire Nielsen's belief that morality essentially involves "a commitment to *humaneness* (to lessen suffering) and a commitment to *humanity* (treat

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[4]See Moreland's comment in, Moreland and Nielsen, Does God Exist?, 112. Rachels in Created from Animals, 181-194, argues from Darwinist naturalism that man and animal are different in degree and not in kind and that to value humans above animals because humans are in a unique moral category ("created in the image of God") is speciesism and akin to racism. My argument is that man and animals can possess value and dignity *only* on a theistic account of origins, and on this account, man and animal are to be treated according to their kind. Conversely, on a naturalistic (Darwinian) account of origins, there appears no basis for value and dignity *at all* and a case for equal worthlessness or valuelessness of all sentient beings, indeed of everything, can be made. What we are then left with is Russell's "We are ourselves the ultimate and irrefutable arbiters of value. . . . In the world of values, Nature in itself is neutral, neither good nor bad, deserving of neither admiration nor censure. It is we who create value and our desires which confer value." If it is we who "create" and "confer" value then the accusation against speciesism in our valuations is hollow.

human beings as having intrinsic worth),"[5] and that he sees "unnecessary suffering" and "the torturing of little children" as vile. He has built his consequentialist ethic around such ideals and I am grateful that he does not seem to fulfill Locke's prediction of the practical consequences of atheism. However, my contention is that if he were consistent with his "scientific naturalism" and his secular world view, such moral values (minimal as they are) would "have no hold" on him, and therefore as Locke claimed atheists cannot be trusted.[6]

Nielsen has argued for "ethics without God" and I have granted that a person can be committed to an internally coherent ethical system, can believe in the necessity of moral prescriptions and make moral judgments without reference to God or belief in His existence, but I have argued that on this account, ethical principles and values, whatever their pragmatic benefit to the ordering of one's life and society, are nevertheless trivial and superficial in a secular world. I have argued that such a coherence view of justification does not rescue secular ethics from this plight and therefore, in effect, is *no justification at all.*

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[5]Nielsen, "Revisited," 82 (italics his).

[6]Locke, Toleration, 93.

Can We Be Morally Good Without God?

I have granted Nielsen that we can have an "ethic without God," that people everywhe do in fact have a moral understanding, and that they are moral beings that make daily moral judgments that do not seem to require belief in God. If man is a rational moral being, of course he will engage in ethical reasoning and make moral judgments even without belief in God, but the theist has no reason to accept that ethics without God are justifiable or logically compelling.[7] Central to the thrust of Christian ethics is the belief that the whole of mankind is under the just moral assessment or judgment of a morally perfect and holy God and that man's moral freedom and responsibility for his life and actions is the very thing that makes him accountable to God. In short, even what people may call "good" (ethics without God) is under the just judgment of God.

Nielsen's claim, however, is far more than the possibility of ethics without belief in God. He claims that God is not at all needed to enable man, believer or unbeliever, to perform morally good acts:

> In terms of its fundamental rationale, morality is utterly independent of belief in God. . . . A moral understanding, as well as a capacity of moral

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[7]Commitments to "humaneness and humanity" and the consequent approbation of kindness and disapprobation of infant torture are *entailed* by a theistic world view, but not a secular world view. That an atheist affirms such values and may make claims to intuit them is fully explicable from a theistic world view, as I argued, and thus does not serve to confirm his secular metaethic.

> response and action is available to us even if we are human beings who are utterly without religious faith,[8]

and,

> . . . the religious apologist must show that in a godless world morality and moral values would be impossible . . . that in such a world nothing could be good or bad or right or wrong.[9]

My position has been that every human person who is endowed with fully functioning rational and moral capacities does indeed possess this "moral understanding, as well as a capacity of moral response and action" as an innate moral capacity due to his having been created in the image of God.[10] Further, this capacity is still functional though marred and defective by his alienation from God. Thus, even though a person is anti-theistic and believes that this world is "godless," "morality and moral values" that involve judgments of "good or bad or right or wrong" are still available to him, but in his alienation from God, makes defective judgments and his moral actions and responses fall short of--or violate--God's standards.

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[8]Kai Nielsen, "On Religion and the Grounds of Moral Belief," Religious Humanism (Winter 1977), 33-34.

[9]Nielsen, "Basis of Morality," 344.

[10]The Christian belief in the Judgment requires that each person being judged possesses moral responsibility and accountability for his actions and beliefs; that his moral judgments of good or bad or right or wrong and resulting actions and attitudes were such that they could have been or should have been otherwise. The Judgment thus assumes moral accountability which likewise assumes moral autonomy.

I argued in Chapter Three that moral goodness is a necessary perfection of the divine nature and that human reflections of such logically require an ontological dependence upon God and that our cognitive knowledge of moral goodness can only be a reflection and derivative of the divine perfection which is both the source and standard of goodness. I deny, therefore that man can be truly morally good without God and that his faculty of moral cognition and power of moral action is at all adequate apart from God. Without God, "a moral understanding" is defective and "a capacity of moral response and action" is seriously impaired. "Ethics without God" then becomes a defective discipline of moral judgment and action. If a person cannot be good without God, then secular ethics is doomed to failure.

I am not hereby claiming that moral acts are the exclusive property of Christians or religious people, or that there is some great moral gulf fixed between believers and non-believers. Rather that only God is perfectly moral ("God alone is good"[11]), and that the moral disposition and values necessary to reflect His goodness have their origin in Him and that man possesses these in measure only. The Christian believer who is devoted to pleasing and obeying his Lord, as the Greatest Commandment enjoins, will necessarily self-sacrificially serve the best interests of his fellow. Farrer has well stated,

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[11]Luke 18:19.

> The regard we owe [our fellow man] is unqualified, because it is owed to God through him. And yet he is no mere channel through which regard is paid to God, for God is regarded by regard for what He regards, and what He regards is the man. The worth of the man is determined by his place in God's purposes; and it is not a worth which in any way hides or palliates his imperfections.[12]

Our Western culture has historically been significantly influenced by Judeo-Christian values and by them the moral sensitivities of the non-religious have been awakened. But, according to what has been called "the cut flowers thesis," the roots of the Christian world view have long been severed from significant moral influence in Western culture. It is like, as Mitchell says, ". . . in a culture at large over an appreciable period of time, a moral tradition becomes ossified or disintegrates as it increasingly becomes divorced from the world view which provides its ultimate rationale."[13] I have sought to argue that a secular world view cannot provide a rationale that can justify or sustain morality, and thus, although people do perform benevolent and altruistic acts from a variety of motives and influences, from a biblical Christian standpoint, only acts performed as a consequence of a right divine/human relationship can be truly morally good.

Moral acts performed outside of this relationship are to that degree defective, as they do not perform the whole will of God, but are nevertheless possible

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[12]Farrer, "Philosophical Examination of Theological Belief," 20.

[13]Mitchell, Ethics, 161.

because all men are created in the divine image as morally responsible beings. There are then, grades of moral goodness among both believers and non-believers relative to the divine/human relationship. That man is a reflective and religious being and has capacities to form religious beliefs and world views in no way ensures that he will get them right, even if their usefulness and reliability, etc., is established. So then it is possible that a believing Christian who acknowledges the perfect goodness of God, nevertheless, in a time of rebellion or severe testing, performs morally vile acts, whereas an atheist may be committed to acting with "humaneness and humanity," for whatever reason, and performs admirable acts of kindness and benevolence that outwardly conform to God's standard. Morally beneficent actions are our moral duty but not all our moral duty. Proper motivation for moral action involves regarding others as God does, and an atheist or unbeliever cannot properly buy into this.

The Nature of Moral Goodness

Morality as such is essentially an "other-regarding" activity. It concerns how one ought, and ought not, to behave toward other persons. *True* morality, from a Christian perspective, demands that one's behavior and the regard that one has for others be consistent with the divine value of persons created in God's image, and with the divine

commands that express that value.[14] Further, it demands that the image of the divine perfect goodness, according to which we were created but have lost, be restored in us. Morality, on this account, requires, not merely an outward performance of duty toward others, but an inward transformation of the person, such that moral action is the expression of the "heart" of the person in their regard for God and others. The morality of Jesus and His Apostles is not merely of outward conformity to divine moral laws but it is "of the heart" and springing autonomously from a person who is morally reconciled to God. If God is the sole fountain of goodness, only those moral agents dependent upon God and performing His good will do, and can do, good.[15]

The object of the ethical enterprise, in general terms, is to formulate a *code* and/or principles of conduct as to how people should behave toward each other under certain conditions in a society. Nielsen's consequentialist ethic focuses on the regulation of the outward actions of moral agents. (Indeed, his Marxist convictions are strongly oriented this way.) Moral goodness and moral evil, however, concerns the issue of the

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[14]Far from being arbitrary, God's commands in the Bible, or God's will, is said to be "good, acceptable and perfect" and that His laws were given *for* man and not *vice versa* (Romans 12:2 cf., Mark 2:27). It should be noted here, that in speaking of morality in terms of relations with persons, I am not excluding the extension of moral responsibility toward the rest of the natural order. Rather that the primacy of moral responsibility is to persons--to God first and then to other persons.

[15]This does not necessitate that a person be always consciously dependent upon God but that there be a background relationship of commitment and attitude, etc.

character of those persons who should so behave. Can a morally good action be an action "considered abstractly" from the disposition of the agent? Thomas Reid argued:

> But what do we mean by goodness in an action considered abstractly? To me it appears to lie in this, and in this only, that it is an action which ought to be done by those who have the power and opportunity, and the capacity of perceiving their obligation to do it. I would gladly know of any man, what other moral goodness can be in an action considered abstractly. And this goodness is inherent in its nature, and inseparable from it. No opinion or judgement of an agent can it the least alter its nature.

He continues with this intriguing illustration:

> Suppose the action to be that of relieving an innocent person out of great distress. This surely has all the moral goodness that an action considered abstractly can have. Yet it is evident, that an agent, in relieving a person in distress, may have no moral goodness, may have great merit, or may have great demerit.
>
> Suppose, first, that mice cut the cords which bound the distressed person, and so bring him relief. Is there moral goodness in this act of the mice? Suppose, secondly, that a man maliciously relieves the distressed person, in order to plunge him into greater distress. In this action, surely there is no moral goodness, but much malice and inhumanity. If, in the last place, we suppose a person, from real sympathy and humanity to bring relief to the distressed person, with considerable expense or danger to himself; here is an action of real worth, which every heart approves and every tongue praises. But wherein lies the worth? Not in the action considered by itself, which was common to all the three, but in the man who, on this occasion, acted the part which became a good man. He did what his heart approved, and therefore he is approved by God and man.[16]

Reid's illustration demonstrates that having the functional capacity to make moral judgments and perform the acts that one deems good does not *ipso facto* enable one to do morally good acts. Moral goodness inheres in the character of the person who does good

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[16]Thomas Reid, Essays on the Active Powers of Man (1788), 287.

acts toward others and so morality depends on the virtuous motivation of the agent who acts in accord with right judgments.

What Are Ethics Without God?

If it is claimed that ethics concerns only actions exclusive of the character of the agents, then issues concerning the nature of man and the dependence of the moral agent upon God are irrelevant. So ethical acts, on this account, can be properly performed by immoral people, since a person can fulfill his whole duty outwardly and yet be inwardly evil. A person of evil character may fulfill the actions appropriate to ethical obligations and rules from an evil motive, but if an ethic can go no further than this it must be absurd.[17] Reid's evil rescuer may even be fulfilling his duty--unless his duty also involves a genuine motivation of altruistic benevolence. A person can perform his duties and even

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[17]A person (perhaps a Humean "rational knave" type) could seemingly behave admirably in seeing a disabled person safely home, for instance, only to rape and rob her once inside. The motive is essential to what makes the deed good or evil. Not all actions done from good intentions have beneficent results or consequences, however. In such cases, often the good of the other person is not adequately envisaged or understood and this is essentially a deficiency in the motive. Understanding the consequences is an important part of understanding the good for another person but it is a secondary principle only.

(outwardly) obey God's commands, without being morally good.[18] On this account, Nielsen's subjectivist consequentialist ethic is critically deficient.

Nielsen's secular ethics can do nothing about moral evil in a person's character--the root of the problem of moral evil that ethical reasoning is meant to address.[19] Moreover, even the valid formulation of ethics is in jeopardy if the character of the ethicist is defective--however "rational" and competent he may be. If a person's ability to make reliable ethical judgments and to perform morally good acts is fundamentally and universally flawed, then the ethicist--especially the secular humanist who considers human nature as essentially good--cannot himself rise above this mire in his own normative judgments of the good and right. This inability extends both to the rational assessment of what is the good (affected by his world view) and to his behavioral capacity to perform morally good acts (affected by his essentially evil human nature).

I am not hereby embarking on an *ad hominem* argument against Nielsen or other secularists, but it is important to note that, if morality is held to have any deep hold on reality, no person--ethicists included--can transcend the hegemony of moral demands on his life, even in the activity of meta-ethical thinking. The mere possession of functioning rational and moral faculties ensures that one is a morally responsible agent.

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[18]As Paul said, "If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing," 1 Corinthians 13:3.

[19]Nielsen distressingly remarks about the superficial, or "lip service only," commitment to the "moral point of view" of "humaneness and humanity." See "Revisited," 82.

Motivation for general ethical reasoning appears to come primarily from a kind of self-interest. The welfare of one's class or group will probably accrue benefit to oneself. The tendency of secular ethics, given this state of affairs, is to limit moral requirements to the formulation of minimum duties to others in order to maximize one's self-interests and the perceived interests of a society or class.[20] "Morality" becomes, or is reduced to, the least admissible sacrifice of the pursuit of one's interests. According to the understanding of morality that I have been espousing, this is itself a fundamental moral evil.

The Dependence of Morality Upon God

I have endeavored to show that Nielsen's subjectivist account of the status of moral judgments is false and that moral judgments of right or wrong, good or evil, are in fact cognitive assessments of real moral properties and states of affairs that can properly be designated true or false. I have also claimed that the assumption of human value, common to some degree to all moral systems, is basic to morality and that the objectivity of moral judgments and valuations require that human dignity be an objective cognitive property and not merely a subjective assumption that requires no further justification. I

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[20]Nielsen wants his morality to be categorical, judging from his impassioned arguments for classless egalitarianism, but such transcendent concepts do not belong to his world view.

have granted his arguments against naturalistic reductions of moral statements to non-moral ones and that moral properties are not reducible to natural properties but have argued that cognitive non-natural moral properties supervene on natural facts. Added to all this is the fact that human persons possess these normative, rational, truth-gathering faculties and that these cognitive capacities not only make us morally aware but in doing so subject us to the hegemony of moral obligations and duties to others.

Each of these strands of argument tightly cohere to give us a picture of reality that is utterly strange and incompatible to a secular materialistic world view but is well at home in traditional theism, and I have given a rational defence of theism that I believe best accounts for the metaphysical demands for the justification and foundation of morality. In this way I have argued that morality depends upon God despite the fact that our knowledge of God depends upon our prior moral capacities.

The defence of theism that I have given is that the moral realities of our world and of our natures have their origin and justification in the nature of the perfectly good Creator of the universe who made us in His image according to His purposes and that our moral obligations and accountability is ultimately to Him. Accordingly, our value exists in virtue of the fact of our relatedness and likeness to the Creator who made us and values us beyond our estimation and that His commands are a source of moral obligation.

As Price has said, ". . . His nature [is] the high and sacred original of virtue, and the sole fountain of all that is true and good and perfect."[21] Accordingly, God's regard for others is criterial of what regard I ought to have for them and His commands concerning them are constitutive of my moral obligations toward them. The truth of their status as God's creatures made in His image, and of God's love for them, coupled with the truth of my own nature as created by God in His image and for His purposes, justifies the moral obligations that I have toward others.

This then is the foundation for our belief that all human persons are of equal worth and that, regardless of superficial differences, if I am a human person that has intrinsic value and dignity, this fact is equally true of every other person. If God created all men equal, then this fact affords us a basis for claims of human rights and obligations rather than some inscrutable ever evolving natural facts of human nature.

Christian morality demands that, in obedience to God's "perfect will," a person's ultimate and eternal welfare is the highest priority of man's moral obligation to man. If God made man for a purpose, part of which being to reflect His likeness, God's purpose and man's ultimate welfare must be the *teleos* of morality. Basil Mitchell writes that it is

> an essential part of God's purpose for man that he can fulfill his nature and achieve what will ultimately content him only if he ceases to make himself the centre of his own universe; hence the demands of morality--of

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[21]Price, Principle Questions in Morals, 89.

> principled concern for the needs of others--are both objective and categorical. . . . It is, above all, the love of God which serves both as a motive and as a reason for the love of neighbour. We should love him because he first loved us; and we should love others because he loves them. It is this theme preeminently which explains how it is *possible* for a man to turn away from anxious self-concern and identify himself with the interests of others, however uncongenial those others are, and even if it runs counter to the prevailing ethos of his society.[22]

Conclusion

What, then, is our moral duty to our neighbors--how should we regard them? What is the relation of religious belief to the demands of morality? The quality and boundaries of regard are prescribed by the nature of the object of regard, and in a theistic universe mankind has a special place that contrasts markedly with that in a secular universe. This contrast concerns the foundations of morality. Either morality has no foundations, as in a naturalistic or secular universe, or morality is founded upon the Maker of man and his universe, to whom all moral debt is ultimately owed.

Basil Mitchell says that, "God enters into [the Christian view of ethics] not simply as a guarantee of the seriousness of the moral demand or of its objectivity and meaning, but as himself the goal of the entire human pilgrimage."[23] Judeo-Christian ethics

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[22]Mitchell, Morality, 145.

[23]Ibid., 155-6.

has as its central obligation the two Greatest Commandments, the first of which concerns our "religious" obligation to love God above all else, and the second, our moral obligation to others. But, from the influence of secularism, there has arisen an unwarranted bifurcation between "religious" and "moral" obligation. If man receives his true worth by virtue of his relation to God, then his moral and religious obligations are coextensive. Farrer says, "The evidence of God is not essentially that in Him we can see our neighbours straight, but that in so seeing our neighbours, we are drawn in relation with Him,"[24] for the moral failure to "love your neighbour" is a failure to love and obey our Maker, and the "religious" failure to "love the Lord your God" is essentially a moral failure, and one which results in the further moral failure to "see our neighbours straight." Farrer aptly says, "The 'claimingness' of anything is always consequent upon what we take that thing to be. And . . . the God who makes claims upon us through our fellows is taken to be their maker and redeemer."[25] Our moral behavior, then, is inextricably bound to our religious belief and practice or lack of it.

The demands of morality, in order to make sense in the world, require a theistic, supernaturalistic world view. These demands upon man are both absolute in nature and require a commitment that may bring no lifetime benefit, and may even require

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[24]Farrer, "Philosophical Examination of Theological Belief," 21.

[25]Ibid., 30.

an ultimate sacrifice for the person on whom they are laid.[26] To justify the virtue of such demands, a foundation that is outside the world and yet integral to it can only be found in Judeo-Christian theism. In order to make sense of morality, to justify its hegemony over man, to explain and justify its origin and source, and for man to perform its demands requires the existence of the God of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. Put another way, the logical, ontological and epistemological requirements of morality presents us with teleological evidence for Judeo-Christian theism. If the God described in the Bible is "there," the universe is ultimately benevolent and just, and injustice and evil cannot ultimately triumph.

Hence I have argued against the secularist ethic of Kai Nielsen, in the spirit of Locke, Reid and Price, that morality that *is* morality requires the existence of and dependence upon the God of Judeo-Christianity, and that the justification and validity of ethical rules and principles logically requires their derivation from divine revelation. It is only in this way that morality can be deeply and pervasively established in reality and thus concern what really *matters*.

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[26]See Mavrodes, "Queerness," 225.

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