

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

An Abductive Argument for Theism: A Comparative Analysis

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by

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Abbreviations

CI	Categorical Imperative
DCT	Divine Command Theory
ED	Euthyphro Dilemma
RNR	Robust Normative Realism
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly

Introduction

Individuals and governments alike generally function as if humans possess intrinsic value and as if objective moral values and duties exist. There are disagreements about what good behavior may be, but the idea of good behavior itself seems to be a universal concept. But, what is the foundation and authority of moral obligations? This paper addresses this very question by analyzing and proposing a theistic source for moral obligations. This work will utilize an abductive approach to analyze both theistic and non-theistic positions and will present an informal abductive argument for moral obligations. Furthermore, this work will present an informal deductive syllogism that can be similarly supported by the moral facts abductively presented. Either method can be used to reach the conclusion that moral obligations and their deontic features are better explained by theism and a deontic divine command theory. Some major objections to a theistic view will also be addressed. It should be noted that this work is not striving to present a formal abductive or deductive case, and it is recognized that combining an abductive and deductive conclusion is not a known practice in formal logic. Rather, this work strives to present an informal case of argumentation, so references to abductive and deductive arguments should be treated as such.

Terms should be defined to assist with understanding the ontological foundation of moral obligations and discover what provides the better explanation for these obligations. As such, this section of the presentation will define several terms, including *ontology*, *deontic*, *objective*, *subjective*, and *obligations*. By *ontology*, it is meant that this is a case for the existence of moral obligations. Closely connected are also the deontic features that are objective and serve to guide the right. Ontology and metaphysics have much to offer in understanding various states of affairs in the world. Ontological study has important purposes and James Porter Moreland and William Lane Craig summarize these into three tasks, “(1) to understand the nature of existence itself and

the difference between existing and not existing; (2) to study general principles of being (transcendentals)¹ true of all things whatsoever; (3) to give a set of exhaustive, mutually exclusive categories that are the ultimate, broadest classification of all entities whatever.”²

Intertwined in the ontology of moral obligations are a variety of topics that are relevant and provide strong evidence for the positive case being argued. Because of constraints, only divine command theory and the deontic nature of divine commands (the good versus the right, and prescription versus proscription) will be explored. *Deontic* in this work refers to the aspect of morality that refers to those things people ought to do regardless of their motivation or desires.

Larry Alexander and Michael Moore describe deontological ethics as:

The word deontology derives from the Greek words for duty (deon) and science (or study) of (logos). In contemporary moral philosophy, deontology is one of those kinds of normative theories regarding which choices are morally required, forbidden, or permitted. In other words, deontology falls within the domain of moral theories that guide and assess our choices of what we ought to do (deontic theories), in contrast to those that guide and assess what kind of person we are and should be (aretaic [virtue] theories).³

For the purposes of this work, *objective* means those properties that are not based on personal feelings or desires including a person’s own desires or feelings. The meaning of *subjective* is the reverse. William Lane Craig writes,

¹ Transcendentals are important in this regard as they are objective and beyond the normal common experience and thoughts, but typically many think of them as products of the mind or discoverable contributions of the mind. Moreland and Craig explain the view of medieval philosophers in relation to transcendentals, “Medieval philosophers used the term transcendentals to stand for all those features that characterize all the different kinds of entities that exist. The notions of existence, unity, truth and goodness have been taken by some to be examples of a transcendental. Everything that is, say a carbon atom, a person, a number or the property of being green, is such that it exists, is a unity (i.e., is one entity in some sense), and is true and good.” See James Porter Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 175, Kindle.

² James Porter Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 185, Kindle.

³ Larry Alexander and Michael Moore, "Deontological Ethics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), accessed November 28, 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/ethics-deontological/>.

By objective I mean ‘independent of people’s opinions.’ By subjective I mean ‘dependent on people’s opinions.’ So to say that there are objective moral values is to say that something is good or bad no matter what people think about it. Similarly, to say that we have objective moral duties is to say that certain actions are right or wrong for us regardless of what people think.⁴

People argue for their expectations of others. However, this does not necessarily imply an objective status to these desired obligations. Moral obligations are often associated with right actions, but obligations are not exclusively tied only to right actions. C. Stephen Evans explains that people may have an obligation to develop virtuous character traits, “I believe...that humans have obligations to have (or acquire) such traits as mercifulness, compassion, generosity, and courage...So let us say that obligations apply primarily, though not exclusively, to actions.”⁵

The notion of *obligations* falls into a separate but related category of morality. Evans describes the family of obligations as, “The concept of an obligation is one of the ‘deontic’

⁴ William Lane Craig, *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), 130. See also James Porter Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 490-491, Kindle. Craig’s *On Guard* definition was used for its short, pithy value although it is fully understood this is a popular level work. See p. 490-491 where Moreland and Craig define subjective and objective as, “Many philosophers have argued that if God exists, then the objectivity of moral values, moral duties and moral accountability is secured, but that in the absence of God, that is, if God does not exist, then morality is just a human convention, that is to say, morality is wholly subjective and nonbinding. We might act in precisely the same ways that we do in fact act, but in the absence of God, such actions would no longer count as good (or evil), since if God does not exist, objective moral values do not exist. Thus we cannot truly be good without God. On the other hand, if we do believe that moral values and duties are objective, that provides moral grounds for believing in God...To say that there are objective moral values is to say that something is right or wrong independent of whether anybody believes it to be so. It is to say, for example, that Nazi anti-Semitism was morally wrong, even though the Nazis who carried out the Holocaust thought that it was good, and it would still be wrong even if the Nazis had won World War II and succeeded in exterminating or brainwashing everybody who disagreed with them.

Moreland and Craig give an example of subjective and objective duty on p. 430, “Subjective duty is a duty someone has when one has done one’s best to discover what is and is not the right thing to do. If someone sincerely and conscientiously tries to ascertain what is right and acts on this, then one has fulfilled one’s subjective duty, and in a sense, he is, therefore, praiseworthy. But people can be sincerely wrong and fail to live up to their objective duty—the truly correct thing to do from a God’s-eye perspective—even if they have tried to do their best. Soldier A could only claim that soldier B has a subjective duty to obey his country. But A could also believe that B has an objective duty to do so only if B’s country is, in fact, conducting a morally justified war. Now either A or B is on the right side of the war even though it may be hard to tell which side is correct. Thus A and B could believe that only one of them actually has an objective duty to fight and thwart the other. So the war example may not give a genuine case in which A believes B has a(n) (objective) duty to fight and that he has a(n) (objective) duty to thwart B.”

⁵ C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2.

family of concepts, which include ‘being forbidden,’ and ‘being permitted,’ as well as ‘being obligatory.’”⁶ The deontic nature of morality, or the duties that people have to each other or even the duties people have as people, will be the focus of this work. As such, the focus will be more on the moral right than the moral good. James Porter Moreland and William Lane Craig define *deontology* as follows: “The term deontology comes from the Greek word *deon*, which means ‘binding duty.’ Accordingly, the essence of deontological approaches to ethics lies in the notion that duty should be done for duty’s sake.”⁷ Moral obligations or duties, therefore, are those concepts that place adjudication on people’s understanding of what they, “‘may’ do, or ‘must’ do, or ‘must not’ do.”⁸ Evans summarizes objective moral obligations in this way,

...They involve a kind of verdict on an action, they make it possible to bring reflection on action to closure and make a decision about the action by providing a decisive reason for action, they are the kinds of things people are rightly held responsible for doing or omitting, and they hold for human persons just as human persons.⁹

There is a vast body of work on moral obligations in a variety of disciplines and ethical systems, both secular and theistic, requiring attention from Christian philosophers and apologists. Numerous theories have developed that attempt to account for the ontology and authority of moral obligations. Some of these theories have been beneficial, providing much understanding, but others have brought a fair amount of misunderstanding as well. When discussing obligations, many theistic and Christian thinkers broach the topic of divine command theory. When this theory is discussed, the Euthyphro Dilemma invariably arises. It addresses the question of

⁶ Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*, 3.

⁷ Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 447, Kindle.

⁸ Evans, *God and Moral Obligations*, 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

whether right is commanded by the gods because it is right, or the gods commanding something makes it right.

Moral obligations are a perennial topic of discussion, but the questions of where these obligations arise, what constitutes their nature, and from where their authority derives, all remain hotly contested issues. When a person sees another person in need, or in danger, a sense of obligation to assist arises. Even though a sense of obligation may be felt, human will and personal desire determines how humans freely choose to act on this obligation—assuming that feelings of moral obligation are typically veridical.

Consider this 2017 case in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.¹⁰ A police officer was at a traffic control location behind some wooden barricades. While standing there he was purposely struck with a vehicle in an act of terror by an Islamic suspect. Two pedestrians ran to his aid. As they were standing there the suspect ran from the vehicle with a knife and attacked the police officer on the ground. A third pedestrian began to walk over, upon seeing the attack, froze in his tracks. The two people nearest the officer moved back and provided no assistance. The police officer engaged the suspect in a battle while being stabbed. The suspect also attempted to take the officer's sidearm. The officer fought him off and the suspect fled. Later he procured another vehicle with which, even though pursued by police, he struck four pedestrians before being taken into custody.

The public outcry that arose over the inaction of those pedestrians is understandably strong, to say the least. Was there an obligation for these people to act by coming to the police

¹⁰ Colette Derowiz, "Abdulahi Sharif sentenced to 28 years for trying to kill Edmonton police officer, pedestrians," *Global News*, December 13, 2019, accessed June 2, 2020, <https://globalnews.ca/news/6295290/sharif-sentenced-edmonton-vehicle-uhaul-police-officer-attack/>. Also see Rob Drinkwater, Chris Purdy, and John Cotter, "Officer released from hospital, terrorism charges pending in Edmonton attack," *City News* as reported by The Canadian Press and News Staff, October 1, 2017, accessed June 2, 2020, <https://edmonton.citynews.ca/2017/10/01/officer-released-hospital-terrorism-charges-pending-edmonton-attack/>.

officer's aid? Was there a high level of fear and personal risk involved? Do these people now hold some responsibility for the subsequent victims of this suspect? Many would answer in the affirmative to all these queries. Many would argue there was an objective obligation for these people to assist the officer because it was the *right* thing to do, and had they done so, perhaps the suspect would have been taken into custody before further injuring others. The overarching point is that people sense there are actions that are not only good, but perhaps even more importantly, are *right and obligatory*. Nonetheless, it seems eminently veridical with reality that it is human will that guides how people act on these obligations.

It seems veridical with reality that people can know the difference between right and wrong. For the purpose of this work, it will be presupposed that humans can conceive of *the right*. But what, if anything, is the source of authority for *the right*? In classical theism, this authority arises from God's divine commands. An important distinction can be made here that *goodness* comes from God's all-good, impeccable, perfect nature, but moral duties come from his commands. However, God's nature delimits the sorts of commands he issues. Not everything that is good to do, or viewed by people as good to do, is commanded by God. The topic of God's commands, authority, delimitations, and the views above on classical theism are but a preview of questions and points that will be evidenced later in this work. However, even if such a view is correct, it would not entail that knowledge of objective moral obligations requires knowledge of God, or even belief in God. Many people do not believe in God, but in real respects, recognize moral duties, and often choose to act rightly. The question concerning the authority of moral obligations is a critical one. If it is simply derived from a socio-biological status, the random collection of atoms and matter, a theistic source does not obtain. But, in such a scenario, could

moral convictions even be trusted as reliable? The first two chapters of this work argue in an abductive manner the following:

1. It seems more likely than not that objective moral obligations are real.
2. Theism offers a better explanation than atheism for the realness of objective moral obligations.
3. Therefore, there is some reason to think that God exists.
4. Humans seem to be able to apprehend objective moral duties and discern right from wrong.
5. Objective right and wrong has been consistent over time for all persons, at all times, in all places, in the same way. For example, cruelty for the sake of fun.
6. Therefore, those objectively right and objectively wrong actions (premise 5) have been objectively right and objectively wrong for all persons, at all times, in all places, in the same way.
7. For there to be such an objective rule or standard, 5 and 6, that fulfills these premises, there must be a transcendent standard or authoritative being that exists and has always existed.
8. Because material and physical beings and objects are subjective and subject to change and alteration, the standard, or authoritative being, must exist outside of the material world for this excludes it being subject to change and subjectivity.
9. For humans to recognize this objective standard of moral duties, and moral value, dignity, and worth, demonstrates this is an idea in the human mind which is universal, and this combined with actions demonstrates its existence in reality.
10. If moral duties exist in reality, and in human minds, and humans can conceive of an even greater moral reality, then they appeal to this higher, objective, transcendent standard.
11. This standard must be the greatest standard, and be perfectly good, loving, and personal.
12. It cannot be an abstract object since they are causally effete.
13. Therefore, the *better* explanation is God (abductive conclusion).

Four worldviews – Atheism—Naturalism, Utilitarianism, Robust Normative Realism, and Theism – will be analyzed in the first two chapters and utilize four objective criteria outlined below in the methodology section. These worldviews all provide an account for moral obligations, and as such, need to be analyzed if these views adequately account for moral obligations. It will be argued that theism better accounts for these criteria. Chapter three will address a special atheistic objection to theism known as the Euthyphro Dilemma. It will be demonstrated that this is not, in fact, a true dilemma and there is a reasonable solution. The response will involve Divine Command Theory (DCT) and the deontic version of DCT. It will be

argued, in chapter four, that if the *better* explanation for objective moral obligations is God, then it follows that one can, using the same moral facts presented, reasonably deductively argue for this conclusion as an option. This position will include the following premises supported by the moral facts of the abductive argument:

1. If the better explanation is God, then it follows he is unchanging, impeccable, and cannot command evil acts.
2. If God does not exist, then objective moral duties do not exist.
3. Objective moral duties do exist.
4. Therefore, God exists.

As a matter of methodology and delimitation, while this work argues to a degree for intrinsic human value and moral realism, it does not argue thoroughly for these. It would lead too far astray to enter the realist/anti-realist debate. Moral realism is the view that objective moral facts and obligations do in fact exist. Moral realists believe that there are necessary moral truths that exist in this world and that these truths cannot be changed or altered, even by God.¹¹ The problem of evil and the vast array of ethical theories will not be addressed. It is recognized there is an epistemological issue in relation to moral obligations and moral intuition, but this is not within the scope of this work. As noted above, in Chapter 2, four worldviews will be analyzed. To assess these competing worldviews, there should be a standard by which all are measured with the goal of an equal, objective, and fair assessment. Douglas Groothuis provides some criteria for assessing worldviews and some of these criteria will be employed here. These will be:

- a. Internal logical consistency
- b. Coherence
- c. Factual adequacy

¹¹ It is the existence of these necessary truths that makes this a powerful argument for God's existence. Regarding moral realism David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls submit, "...the view that there are some necessary moral truths that not even God can change...such truths still depend on God in a very important sense." See David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 48, Kindle.

d. Existential viability¹²

Internal logical consistency in a worldview seems to be an obvious requirement for a worldview. It seems if a view is logically inconsistent, one should not follow it. Notwithstanding, it is the case that there are such worldviews, and often people do not analyze their own beliefs to determine if they are internally consistent. Since Groothuis is providing the criteria, his definitions also will be elucidated, “The essential or constitutive elements of any worldview must accord with one another without contradiction.”¹³ Related to logical consistency is coherence. In order for anything to be coherent its premises or concepts must be consistent and in agreement with one another. Groothuis submits, “This test is related to consistency, but moves beyond it to speak of the essential propositions of a worldview being tightly interrelated and conceptually linked. A collection of noncontradictory ideas is not sufficient to form a coherent worldview.”¹⁴ The third criterion to be used is factual adequacy. Factual adequacy relates to the facts a worldview is describing and if they match reality. Consider if a worldview makes claims that contradict specific known and widely accepted historical or scientific evidence, then this worldview would be factually inadequate. Groothuis posits, “This concerns the historical and empirical dimensions of life. A worldview may be internally consistent yet inconsistent with respect to the reality it attempts to describe.”¹⁵ The final criterion is existential viability, which is related to factual adequacy. For something to be existentially viable, consists in a view being

¹² Douglas R. Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), loc. 492-565, ch. 3 heading “Criteria for Worldview Evaluation”, Kindle.

¹³ Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, loc. 501-502, ch. 3 heading “Criteria for Worldview Evaluation,” Kindle.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, loc. 513-514, ch. 3 heading “Criteria for Worldview Evaluation,” Kindle.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, loc. 521-522, ch. 3 heading “Criteria for Worldview Evaluation,” Kindle.

livable, and not requiring a person to internally contradict themselves and reality because they desire their view to be true despite the philosophical and existential reality. Groothuis elucidates this, “This is a kind of factual adequacy, but focuses on the inner reality of human beings... To claim that a worldview is existentially viable means that it can be affirmed without philosophical hypocrisy... Philosophical hypocrisy requires a person to engage in perpetual doublethink in order to live according to his or her worldview.”¹⁶ With these criteria defined, the analysis of the noted worldviews can begin to compare how they answer the designated standards. Proof to an absolute certainty is generally considered to be an unrealistic standard for any research project. It is, perhaps, more realistic to consider the evidence put forth and come to the determination of what is reasonable, or what is more probabilistically true. It is this standard of proof that is sought in determining the ontological foundation of moral obligations.

The focus of this project will be a moral realist argument that seeks to make an inference to a better explanation for the ontological foundation of the deontic features of morality. These facts will ultimately lead to the support of an abductive conclusion or can also support a deductive conclusion. The authority of moral obligations is vital in maintaining their objectivity. It will primarily be abductively argued that God and his commands provide a better explanation for the authority of moral obligations than the atheist worldview, or the utilitarian and robust normative realist ethical systems.

¹⁶ Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, loc. 528-532, ch. 3 heading “Criteria for Worldview Evaluation,” Kindle.

Chapter 1

Moral Obligations

This work is concerned with the objective and prescriptively binding duties people seem to have, and what provides a better explanation for the source of these given the available evidence. Upcoming in this chapter is a description of moral obligations as this work argues for those same obligations. It seems that there is general agreement among people that there are objective moral obligations that are universal. Some obligations are prohibitions against stealing, murdering, or lying. Most are inclined to think that such actions are objectively wrong and for the positive objectively right. The positive side of these are obligations to respect other people's property, respect for the sanctity of life, and to keep your promises. It is important to distinguish between objective and subjective duties. A parent's duty to care for and provide for their child, as opposed to torturing their child when they are annoyed with them, is an objective duty, just as it is an objective duty not to murder. Prohibitions are duties not to perform such heinous actions. In contrast, a person's desire that other people should agree with and endorse their viewpoints, choices, and lifestyle, and further, to expect these people to work to accomplish their personal desires or agenda is purely subjective, and potentially narcissistic. On a realist picture, moral obligations are binding on people in an objective fashion. For the purposes of this work, these facts of the binding nature of objective moral obligations on people that seems evident in how humans behave and in language are presupposed. Personal subjective desires are different, although it may be possible that a person's subjective desires could very well be in alignment with objective duties. Objective moral obligations are a set of moral facts in need of explanation. As David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls put it, "The sorts of moral facts requiring explanation are objective, prescriptively binding moral duties, objective moral values, requisite

moral freedom, ascriptions of moral responsibility, and other relevantly similar data of that ilk...moral duties pertain to matters of rightness and wrongness, usually of actions.”¹⁷ This project is concerned with these moral obligations, in particular, and their adequate explanation.

The Nature of Moral Obligations

Moral obligations, including their authority, require robust explanation. It will be argued here that theism provides this robust explanation. Key elements of moral obligations are their authoritative and objective nature. As noted above by Baggett and Walls, moral obligations are those moral facts that are objective and are prescriptively binding. If one looks critically at the interaction and intricacies of human social engagement, much of what people do is predicated on obligations to each other and an objective set of obligations as human persons in general.

Moral obligations hold the following characteristics: (1) they are real and objective, (2) they are universal, (3) they are authoritative, and (4) they are distinctively human. These characteristics give humans powerful reasons to act *rightly*. When one does not act rightly, feelings of guilt and remorse occur. In many cases alienation or segregation from loved ones or society are the results of failing to comply with objective obligations. It is true that some of these come about through agreements, social norms, and learned or taught behaviours. However, if one digs further for the authority behind these categories, even these concepts are plausibly thought to have developed from some sort of authoritative beginning. None of this shows moral realism to be true, but it does reveal how common the assumptions of moral realism are, assumptions that this project presupposes to be true. Baggett and Walls succinctly submit, “To summarize, then, the most important distinguishing feature of moral obligations, classically construed in the

¹⁷ David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 16, Kindle.

Socratic and theistic traditions, is that they are authoritative, offering us compelling reasons to comply with them. Failure to discharge our moral duties typically results in objective guilt, alienation from others, and, where damage is rendered, even greater guilt.”¹⁸

Language is filled with references to moral duties and responsibilities; even professing moral skeptics easily fall into such patterns of discourse. Case in point, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong submits, “In my view, what makes it morally wrong to murder, rape, steal, lie, or break promises, for example, is simply that these acts harm other people without any adequate justification. I can’t help but believe that it would be morally wrong for someone to cause such unjustified harm to me. There is no reason why I would have any more rights than any other person.”¹⁹ Sinnott-Armstrong, although writing on morals, is a skeptic who here describes his view of morality. Described in this quote is a subjective, harm based moral system that provides no ultimate foundation for why all humans should follow these duties described. Evans posits,

Virtually all human persons recognize the importance moral obligations play in human life. Even those who are skeptics about the reality or validity of such obligations acknowledge that most people do believe that morality is important, and even moral skeptics admit that human societies would likely be fundamentally different if people generally ceased to believe that they were subject to moral obligations.²⁰

Furthermore, C. S. Lewis noticed this when he wrote about the statements people make to each other that apparently appeal to some sort of standard of fairness or behaviour. Lewis submits:

Now what interests me about all these remarks is that the man who makes them is not merely saying that the other man’s behaviour does not happen to please him. He is appealing to some kind of standard of behaviour which he expects the other man to know about. And the other man very seldom replies: ‘To hell with your standard.’ Nearly

¹⁸ Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 154, Kindle.

¹⁹ Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, “Why Traditional Theism Cannot Provide an Adequate Foundation for Morality” in *Is Goodness Without God Good Enough?: A Debate on Faith, Secularism, and Ethics*, ed. Robert K. Garcia and Nathan L. King (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2009), 101, Kindle.

²⁰ Evans, *God and Moral Obligations*, 4.

always he tries to make out that what he has been doing does not really go against the standard, or that there is some special excuse.²¹

Clearly, just because one can sense or feel moral obligations does not settle the question of whether they are real. Still, for present purposes, their reality is presupposed. The authority of moral obligations is not best explained simply from intuition or feelings of rightness because the fact is that human thoughts, memories, and feelings are not always reliable and can be incorrect. They are eminently fallible. Despite this, many people rely heavily on *moral intuition* to guide them to *right* action, and although these intuitions might be accurate, questions about an explanation of the presumed authority and objectivity naturally arise. Evans explains, “To be morally obligated to perform an action is to have a powerful reason to perform that action, a reason many would describe as a decisive or overriding one.”²²

Feelings of moral obligations do not prove there are moral obligations, but it is a common assumption that such feelings put people in touch with at least some moral obligations. Again, this assumption is not being defended here, but presupposed. Baggett and Walls submit,

More typically...feelings of obligations at least roughly correspond to actual obligations, but the counterexamples are effective in showing that no identity relation obtains. This means that accounting for one’s feelings of moral obligation does not suffice to explain moral obligations themselves...As a result, if moral obligations really exist, the stiff challenges remain to account for their reality and to explain their nature.”²³

Again, moral obligations, including their authority, require robust explanation. It will be argued here that theism provides this robust explanation. It is difficult to argue with the existence of objective moral obligations and their authoritative force on people’s actions. This seems evident

²¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* in *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 15.

²² Evans, *God and Moral Obligations*, 9.

²³ Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 147, Kindle.

in human language and actions when people describe what they, or others, *ought to do*. C.

Stephen Evans posits:

It is hard not to take at least some moral ideals as objectively binding, giving us guidance as to what we *ought to do* [emphasis added], regardless of how we think or feel about this. Our moral experience often suggests to us (at least those of us who are not sociopaths) that some acts are really wrong and others are really right. Such an experience is far from a proof, but perhaps it does show that, even if the claim that there are objective obligations can be doubted, it is a reasonable belief.²⁴

Moral obligations can be described as the actions one is permitted to do, required to do, or required not to do. Results of infractions range from personal guilt to critical scrutiny by society to tangible consequences imposed by one's community. Robert Merrihew Adams explains this:

The obligatory, we may say, is what we have to do. Part of what we mean in saying this is that doing something that would otherwise be good instead of something obligatory would normally be grounds for serious moral criticism. There are things that would be good to do that we don't have to do. I think there are even things it would be best to do (indeed, morally best to do) that we don't have to do; actions that are better than we have to do are supererogatory.²⁵

In defining moral obligations, it seems eminently veridical with reality that a significant portion of these obligations are related to the social realm. This makes sense since many moral obligations are associated to social relations and a social context. In this context, people perform or fail in obligations and may be subject to social consequences and feelings of guilt. This is part of objective moral obligations being distinctively human. This does provide some grounding for moral obligations, as will be argued later, but it is not the ultimate grounding. Adams affirms the social connection to moral obligations:

²⁴ C. Stephen Evans, *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God: A New Look at Theistic Arguments* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), 113.

²⁵ Robert Merrihew Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 232, loc. 4004-4007, Kindle.

The most important difference between the right, or obligation, and the good, in my opinion, is that right and wrong, as matters of obligation, must be understood in relation to a social context, broadly understood, but that is not true of all the types of good with which we are concerned. The beauty of a scene or the badness of a pain can be understood in abstraction from any social setting.²⁶

An important facet of obligations is how one relates to others and how one feels about the right or wrong one has performed. Some may argue against objective moral obligations, but the world and language are suffused with the serious response to both right and wrong actions and words. These actions are predicated on the value of humans as humans above other life on earth. This is an important point since this work, and the overall argument, will demonstrate moral obligations are: (1) real and objective, (2) universal, (3) authoritative, and (4) distinctly human.

Social requirements do not explain all aspects of objective moral obligations, but these provide helpful insights. There are aspects that are universal to obligations. One must know that there are objective moral obligations. There must be an authoritative basis to these that is good and worth following. There must be a relationship worth admiring and/or a feeling to which one is obligated. And, one must value the obligations. Adams posits, “Part of taking moral obligation seriously is our response to violations of it—that is, to wrong actions, in the relevant sense of ‘wrong’. If an act is morally wrong, then in the absence of sufficient excuse, it is appropriate for the agent to be blamed, by others and by himself.”²⁷ Often when one contemplates moral obligations one may consider obligations to themselves, obligations to others, and obligations to society at large. All of these are components of moral obligations, and it seems to correspond to objective truth that many of the values and obligations people hold dear are taught by, or are an expectation of, society. People generally have learned some moral values and duties from their

²⁶ Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 233, loc. 4021-4023, Kindle.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 235, loc. 4065-4067, Kindle.

upbringing and the close societal influences surrounding them. This would be referred to by some as social contract theory, or, as Adams calls it, social requirement theory.²⁸ Proponents of social contract theory argue that humans, being human and personal social creatures, have obligations that are based in these relationships. These characteristics form part of objective moral obligations, but also are similar to social requirements as well. Adams submits four conditions of social requirement theory and moral obligations as:

(1) Moral obligations arise from rightly valued social relationships, (2) Reasons for complying with demands or obligations arise from the evaluation of relationships and those that are admired will be followed, (3) Compliance with obligations depends on the goodness of the source as well as the goodness of the systems of relationships and the actual obligation, and (4) the demand for obligations need not only be good, but the demand must actually be made whether explicit or subtle.²⁹

These qualities will compliment the existence and authoritative source of moral obligations shown later in this work. Obligations are indicative of *the right* and *ought*; there is also wrong action or bad action. Just as something may be good does not entail that it is right or obligatory, something can also be bad in some sense but not wrong to do. Adams posits,

Behavior may be bad in some way (slothful or cowardly, perhaps, or aesthetically crude) without violating any obligation or moral requirement, but what is wrong, I think, must always be bad. Wrong action as such opposes the good in one of the ways that constitute badness. That is because anything we can plausibly regard as moral obligation must be grounded in a relation to something of real value.”³⁰

These deontic facts described above span across time and cultures. C. S. Lewis addressed this when he wrote *The Abolition of Man* and called these “the Tao.”³¹ Lewis goes on to detail

²⁸ Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 241, loc. 4170, Kindle.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 244-246, loc. 4217-4258, Kindle.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 232, loc. 4010-4013, Kindle.

³¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* in *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics* (New York: HarperOne, 2002), 701.

the various cultures' moral commitment that seem to extend beyond simple human constructs. Lewis submits, "But what is common to them all is something we cannot neglect. It is the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are...but to recognize a quality which *demand*s a certain response from us whether we make it or not."³² Most people sense, or claim to sense, real moral authority. Lewis fairly recognizes the fact that some may argue that there is no right and wrong but cautions that as soon as such a person is wronged, they will be quick to point out wrongdoing. He concludes with making two points, "First, that human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid of it. Secondly, that they do not in fact behave in that way. They know the Law of Nature; they break it. These two facts are the foundation of all clear thinking about ourselves and the universe we live in."³³

Considering the feelings of moral obligations, the apparent facts of obligations, and duties to each other, questions about the nature of moral obligations remain. One of the great moral philosophers of the past, Immanuel Kant, can assist here. Although aspects of his ethics are disputed, his work is vastly important to the study of morality and moral obligations. A central feature of his work was the Categorical Imperative (CI). In Kant's moral and ethical philosophy regarding the CI, he cast this as an objective and necessary imperative that people must follow. Often it is characterized as doing one's duty for duty's sake regardless of personal

³² Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 701.

³³ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 17-18.

desire.³⁴ Kant was convinced that moral duties require that people treat each other as ends in themselves rather than only means to an end. This speaks to intrinsic value that is objective.

Immanuel Kant declares, “There is therefore but one categorical imperative, namely, this: Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”³⁵ Kant further explains the tenants all maxims have in the CI:

1. A form, consisting in universality; and in this view the formula of the moral imperative is expressed thus, that the maxims must be so chosen as if they were to serve as universal laws of nature.
2. A matter, namely, an end, and here the formula says that the rational being, as it is an end by its own nature and therefore an end in itself, must in every maxim serve as the condition limiting all merely relative and arbitrary ends.
3. A complete characterization of all maxims by means of that formula, namely, that all maxims ought by their own legislation to harmonize with a possible kingdom of ends as with a kingdom of nature.³⁶

According to Moreland and Craig, two important features of Kant’s CI are:

- (1) First, a moral rule is universalizable in the sense that it is equally binding on all people at all times in relevantly similar situations. Among other things, this principle expresses the principle of consistency: one ought to be consistent about one’s moral judgments.
- (2) Second, moral rules are categorical imperatives, not hypothetical indicatives.... Moral rules present themselves to us as categorical statements that apply across the board and not as statements conditioned on the acceptance of some hypothetical goal. Further, moral rules present themselves as imperatives, not as simple means-ends indicatives.³⁷

The following summarizes Evans on moral obligations: (1) Moral obligations provide a verdict on actions, (2) make it possible to end reflection and to make a decision on action by

³⁴ Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 450, Kindle. Also, for detail on Kant’s characterization for the objective and necessary nature of duty for its own sake see Robert Johnson and Adam Cureton, “Kant’s Moral Philosophy,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/kant-moral/>

³⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Kant: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott (Radford, VA: Wilder Publications Inc., 2014), 46, Kindle.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 63-64, Kindle.

³⁷ Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 449-450, Kindle.

providing decisive reasons for action, (3) are the things people are held responsible for doing or omitting, (4) hold for persons as persons.³⁸ Essentially, it can also be summed up in the statement that moral obligations are doing the right thing(s) even when no one is looking regardless of whether it is a benefit to that individual, or whether there is an adequate explanation of the source.³⁹ Adams calls moral obligations, the things “we have to do.”⁴⁰ A final point is that the above descriptors hold authority over people, as people, in how they act and conduct themselves. Failing to carry out these obligations results in associated consequences like individual guilt, societal consequences, or damage to relationships. Another defining characteristic of moral obligations being real and authoritative is that to be human is to behave morally. Moreover, humans universally behave as if there are moral obligations.

The topic of moral obligations is vast, but as demonstrated above the facts of moral obligations are at least reasonable. Some interlocutors may argue against the existence of objective moral obligations, but the belief that there are objective moral obligations, and these obligations are real and objective, universal, authoritative, and distinctly human is at least reasonable. Moving forward, it is stipulated that this is at least granted for the sake of argument as determining the authoritative nature of these obligations is crucial. Since moral obligations are distinctly human, moral values and the value of humans as humans will also be explored.

Moral Values

The topic of moral values embodies the intrinsic natural human rights that all persons as persons should be afforded. Moral phenomena are prone to subjective definitions, and of course

³⁸ Evans, *God and Moral Obligations*, 12-15.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴⁰ Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 232, loc. 4004-4013, Kindle.

there is a subjective component to morality. The facts concerned here are of an objective nature, free from personal opinion and desires. Human persons having inherent value and intrinsic worth is a proposition most people would agree with, but intuition and agreement by consensus does not necessarily make this true. It is important to recognize the difference between moral values and moral obligations or duties. This research project's objective is concerned with the ontology and authority of objective moral obligations. However, for a person to have moral obligations to another person there must be moral value in that person as a person. It is the value of human persons as human persons that leads to the binding objective moral obligations with which this work is concerned. Humans have moral value, and this value is (1) real and objective, (2) universal, and (3) authoritative.⁴¹ Moral values and the intrinsic worth of people, as people, eminently seems to make sense. Human beliefs and epistemic apprehension seem to point to moral values and duties and the human mind seems to be designed to understand and develop these skills.

Consider the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the first portion of the preamble from this document, "Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world."⁴² These inherent rights recognized by this prestigious international committee have been agreed to by multiple nations and people. If one considers not only this document, but also the manner in which most societies function with the principles of

⁴¹ Although not explicitly argued at this point from the Christian view all human persons have inherent value and worth as persons being made in the likeness, or also referred to as the *imago dei*, of God our Creator. Being an image bearer gives the inherent worth that should be held with the utmost respect and dignity. This will be referred to later in this work.

⁴² The United Nations General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, resolution 217 A (III), (Paris: General Assembly, 1948), 1, accessed March 2, 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>.

law, order, justice, equality, and attributes such as love, respect, and kindness; it is not an unreasonable conclusion to see the link to moral values and the intrinsic worth of humanity.

Returning to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights consider a few of the articles from the document:

Article 1

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 3

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 4

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Article 5

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.⁴³

As the UNGA asserts, human persons have inherent worth and inalienable rights. This is a position upon which theists, most atheists, and secular humanists agree. The proposition that people have intrinsic value and worth eminently seems to make sense, and as noted, if one analyzes objectively how societies, laws, and systems function, at their foundation is the respect, the value, and the flourishing or well-being of human persons. Considering these systems of order, many may rightly draw the conclusion that the basis of these *rules or obligations* are for the maintenance and furthering of inherent human rights and justice. These inalienable rights and worth also underscore human dignity.

⁴³ United Nations, *Declaration of Human Rights*, 2.

This harkens back to the Kantian concept of the value of human persons as persons, or that people are ends in and of themselves not to be treated as another person's means to an end. The worth or dignity of being humans is not based on the value or usefulness of persons, but rather it is based on persons for their own sakes. This is a concept that Kant upheld as part of his moral system where there was a difference between value and dignity. Value essentially was ascribed to something that could be replaced, but dignity was something intrinsic that was not gained by any instrumental value or as a means to an end.⁴⁴ Kant explains:

In the kingdom of ends everything has either value or dignity. Whatever has a value can be replaced by something else which is equivalent; whatever, on the other hand, is above all value, and therefore admits of no equivalent, has a dignity.

Whatever has reference to the general inclinations and wants of mankind has a market value; whatever, without presupposing a want, corresponds to a certain taste, that is to a satisfaction in the mere purposeless play of our faculties, has a fancy value; but that which constitutes the condition under which alone anything can be an end in itself, this has not merely a relative worth, i.e., value, but an intrinsic worth, that is, dignity.

Now morality is the condition under which alone a rational being can be an end in himself, since by this alone is it possible that he should be a legislating member in the kingdom of ends. Thus morality, and humanity as capable of it, is that which alone has dignity.⁴⁵

Kant's principle does appear veridical with reality and how people treat each other as well as the authoritative nature of obligations towards people as people. Mark D. Linville, in describing the Kantian principle of humans being valuable in and of themselves, explains, "Dignity thus constitutes the unconditional worth of its possessor. The worth of persons is unconditional in that it derives from their intrinsic nature as persons and is in no way contingent upon their

⁴⁴ Kant, *Groundworks*, 60-63, Kindle.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 61-62, Kindle.

performance or their contribution or usefulness to anyone or anything.”⁴⁶ With this in mind, moral value or intrinsic worth logically points to objective moral obligations. The relation of moral value to moral obligations then is: if humans have intrinsic value, then it follows that there are obligations humans have to each other and to themselves. Nicholas Wolterstorff posits:

Natural rights are in good measure inherent to those who have them. That is to say, they have these rights not because the rights have been conferred on beings of their sort by God or by some socially transcendent norm extrinsic to themselves; they have them on account of the worth of beings of their sort. I hold that all rights are ultimately so grounded. I call this way of thinking about justice *justice as inherent rights*.⁴⁷

This points to the inherent worth of human beings and the rights, or value, afforded them.

Although Erik J. Wielenberg is an atheist, he refreshingly acknowledges moral values and duties, and submits support for this line of thinking, “What might be the basis of obligations that are not divinely imposed? I have already suggested that some of our moral obligations derive from the various relationships we have to other human beings. But I do not think that all of our obligations derive from such relationships. Obligations may also be *grounded in intrinsic value* [emphasis added].”⁴⁸

The grounding of moral values will not be comprehensively argued here, although it will become apparent later. The important connection here is the inherent worth human persons have as persons. It is not within the scope of this work to argue what is considered a human person. All human life is of value, regardless of stage of life, or states of dependency or independency. The moral value and worth of people or persons are evident all around. Referring to Ronald

⁴⁶ Mark D. Linville, “The Moral Argument” in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 432, Kindle.

⁴⁷ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), loc. 527, Introduction under heading “THE CONTEMPORARY POLEMIC AGAINST JUSTICE AS RIGHTS”, Kindle.

⁴⁸ Erik J. Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 64, Kindle.

Dworkin, Wolterstorff submits, “Almost all of us accept, says Dworkin, ‘as the inarticulate assumption behind much of our experience and conviction, that human life in all its forms is sacred.’ For some of us this sacredness of human life ‘is a matter of religious faith; for others, of secular but deep philosophical belief.’”⁴⁹ Consider the oft used example in philosophical discussions of the moral argument. The torture of innocent persons, or of a baby, for fun is wrong. The thought of such a scenario is reviling. Intuitively, people assess humanity, particularly the innocent and dependent, to have intrinsic worth. If people do indeed possess moral value and inherent worth, then it follows that every person must be afforded certain rights and these lead to objective moral obligations. Erik J. Wielenberg posits:

...intrinsic value is connected with normative reasons as follows. When a given set of intrinsic properties of a given thing makes that thing intrinsically good (or bad), those same intrinsic properties provide normative reasons for (or against) various courses of action. For example, whatever intrinsic features of the activity of participating in a loving relationship with another person make it intrinsically good also give us reasons to pursue this activity. Since intrinsic value is connected with normative reasons and normative reasons are in turn connected with obligation—including moral obligation—it follows that intrinsic value is connected with moral obligation.⁵⁰

Wielenberg clearly advocates for moral obligations and has an admirable sense of right and wrong. Be that as it may, when one analyzes Wielenberg’s normative moral realism, ambitious as it is, he still appeals to an objective standard of morality that his worldview cannot justify. More on this later in the analysis chapter.

There are those naturalists who do take a strong position and equate humans to nothing more than what their worldview suggests, that being a random collocation of chance plus matter

⁴⁹ Ronald Dworkin, “Life is Sacred. That’s the Easy Part,” *New York Times Magazine* (May 16, 1993): 36, quoted in Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*, 311.

⁵⁰ Erik J. Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics: The Metaphysics and Epistemology of Godless Normative Realism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7-8, loc. 379-384, Kindle.

that exists in a biologically determined state. In this view, humans are essentially a collection of matter and atoms in a skin sack that is biologically determined to act and behave in certain ways. This is a strong view that many philosophical naturalists would not agree with, but there are some, as with any worldview, that take a strong or extreme position. Baggett and Walls point to an example of this extreme sort of view when they submit, “While Richard Dawkins is hardly the highest-caliber representative of a naturalistic perspective—though he’s certainly one of the most read if book sales are any indication—we still think telling his recent bold Twitter declaration that there is a moral imperative to abort children conceived with Down Syndrome.”⁵¹ This comment and view is not only shocking, but gruesome. Moreover, what Dawkins is asserting, or trying to accomplish, is a set of duties. With no objective standard, *the right* becomes a matter of opinion. This is not to say that atheists, secular humanists, or other secular worldviews have nothing to offer, or that all of them agree with this perspective. In fact, Dawkins’ view is likely a minority view. However, in this extreme sense, there is no basis of intrinsic worth, and a species’ main goal would be that of personal survival and its particular line of DNA propagation. As with the example of the torture of a baby for fun, most people bristle at this position as well since such an idea *seems* wrong. Although our intuitions do not prove this is wrong, the importance of human persons as persons and the function of the world seem to be veridical with moral value and intrinsic human worth. Law, community, reciprocity, and altruism all stand against this strong form of the naturalistic position. Just as moral obligations and moral values require an explanation for its authority, each worldview must account for and provide the best explanation with the resources available to it, to account for these. It is dangerous simply to abandon ontological grounding to conform a worldview to the shifting tide of current times. If

⁵¹ Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 273, Kindle.

one ignores the foundational components of a worldview, it follows then that a worldview can easily become distorted and subject to where the winds push it with no resistance. If a worldview cannot account for the ontological foundation of conditions such as morality, it stands to reason that the *standards* can be adapted to suite the ideas of the day; agreement by consensus may rule. Baggett and Walls aptly summarize, “IDEAS HAVE CONSEQUENCES; morality matters. Foundations inadequate to sustain strong moral convictions jeopardize both individuals and whole societies.”⁵²

It has been argued that the intrinsic worth of people, as people, eminently seems to make sense. Furthermore, it was asserted that people’s beliefs and epistemic apprehension seem to point to moral values and duties. It is posited that the human mind seems to be designed to understand and develop these skills. Sam Harris, a well-known atheist, neuroscientist, and philosopher posits:

The human brain is an engine of belief...Belief also bridges the gap between facts and values. We form beliefs about facts: and belief in this sense constitutes most of what we know about the world—through science, history, journalism, etc. But we also form beliefs about values: judgements about morality, meaning, personal goals, and life’s larger purpose...beliefs in these two domains are very important features.”⁵³

As submitted, the brain is designed to accept certain values and beliefs and Harris readily accepts this. Judging by his book, and debates, for the most part he appears to have a solid sense of moral values and duties. He voices disdain for moral nihilists⁵⁴ and for this he is to be applauded. Harris establishes his thesis of the scientific understanding and development of moral values

⁵² Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 273, Kindle.

⁵³ Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1999), 14.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

essentially in what is best for the “well-being of conscious creatures.”⁵⁵ However, Harris and those of his ilk seem to lack a cogent explanation for the authority of moral obligations. Instead, they appeal to a standard their worldview cannot justify and still rests outside their material worldview. More on this in the analysis chapter. Suffice it to say, if God does exist and possesses the omni-attributes of classical theism, even skeptics ascribe to him for arguments sake, then it is entirely conceivable, and in fact veridical, that he would endow humans with the capacity of moral values and duties as part of their nature. This includes the ability to apprehend moral obligations, discern them, perform them, and grow and develop to a higher or even lower level depending on one’s chosen relation to them. Evan’s argues:

It seems possible (and, from the viewpoint of a theistic view quite plausible) for God to endow humans with a moral psychology, in which doing what is morally right can lead to a kind of satisfaction, and doing what is morally wrong can lead to negative feelings of guilt and shame...we can understand why moral obligations are universal...All humans are God’s creatures and thus all participate in the social relation that grounds moral obligations.⁵⁶

If a theistic God is granted, then it is conceivable that humanity has been endowed with the ability or as Evans indicates, “moral psychology”, that allows for *all* to develop this universal sense of moral obligations.

Although not comprehensively proven, it seems to be universally accepted and more likely than not that humans are valuable as humans and have intrinsic worth. Moreover, this value is (1) real and objective, (2) universal, and (3) authoritative. Human beliefs and epistemic apprehension seem to point to moral values and duties and the human mind seems to be designed to understand and develop these skills. With this understanding of the moral value and intrinsic

⁵⁵ Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 28.

⁵⁶ Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*, 31-32.

value of human persons, and the link to moral obligations, this leads to the abductive argument for moral obligations.

Abductive Argument

An abductive argument with supporting premises, 1-13, was put forth above for the deontic nature of morality.⁵⁷ The essential premises of this argument are as follows:

1. It seems more likely than not that objective moral obligations are real.
2. Theism offers a better explanation than atheism for the realness of objective moral obligations.
3. Therefore, there is some reason to think that God exists.

From a moral realist perspective and given the evidence and argumentation presented to this point, this argument can at least be affirmed as a reasonable explanation. In this section, the coherence and rationality for the abductive argument presented will be argued touching on some objections and weaknesses with objectors. Alongside this, the issue of what qualifies for evidence and the need for explanation will be touched on as well as the assertion that a search for, and embracing of, truth should be the goal of any objective investigation.

The strength of the abductive version of an argument is that it does not make so bold a claim that there is no room for discussion or hearing one's interlocutors' positions. Certainly, there is some coherence and existential viability to opposing positions, and this will be granted where it is evident. If moral obligations are real, and the *better* explanation for these obligations is the God of theism, and this leads to the logical inference to the existence of this God, where does this leave one? For a person that holds to moral realism and that objective moral obligations are real, one must seriously consider the claim made here. If there is a reason to think that God exists and may be the better explanation for moral obligations, then one should look seriously at

⁵⁷ See p. 7 above.

the argument and the evidence. One could object regarding the reliability of the evidence. This writer has heard some skeptical people indicate even if a miracle occurred right before their eyes, or if Jesus appeared to them, they still would not believe theism. Instead, they would question their own senses and sense experience. Consider David Hume when he questions the reliability of eyewitness evidence:

The reason we place any credit in witnesses and historians, is not derived from any *connection*, which we perceive *a priori*, between testimony and reality, but because we are accustomed to find a conformity between them...The very same principle of experience, which gives us a certain degree of assurance in the testimony of witnesses, gives us also, in this case, another degree of assurance against the fact...and mutual destruction of belief and authority.⁵⁸

Hume argues that opposing testimonies cancel each other out and he calls into question the weighing of evidence that is part of how people calculate and come to conclusions everyday. This is not to suggest one should abandon critical thinking and reasoning. If in a particular situation the only evidence before a person are two opposing views, one should weigh them accordingly, and based on the evidence and facts present, come to the most reasonable conclusion. This speaks directly to the law of non-contradiction. Two opposing facts cannot both be true at the same time and in the same way. Certainly, it can be that both witnesses in Hume's scenario could both be wrong, but is it reasonable to operate under the premise that if there are two opposing views these cancel each other out? May it not be! This would cause humanity to have to be agnostic on everything and there would be no advances anywhere.⁵⁹ Granted, Hume is

⁵⁸ David Hume, "Of Miracles" in *In Defense of Miracles*, ed. Douglas Geivett and Gary Habermas (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 32.

⁵⁹ The writer wishes to be clear; it is not the position of this project that theism is true based on the alternatives of agnosticism or nihilism not being satisfying worldviews. The writer understands many people are committed to worldviews other than theism and indicate they are satisfied with these. Rather, the position argued here is in relation to evidence and that in daily situation people weigh contradicting evidential accounts and use reason and arguments to come to conclusions. For example, this would be something present in police investigations or in the forensic sciences as this writer would have personal knowledge of this.

speaking on miracles in this piece of his work, but what is evident in his position is that he approaches the topic with a presupposition against miracles. This writer has heard atheists indicate that even in the face of multiple eyewitnesses to a miraculous event, they would not accept this as evidence. This flies in the face of how the world operates and what is considered evidential. This presupposition against miracles, or selective acceptance of what qualifies as evidence, is apparent in the opposing positions to moral obligations. Consider the famous quote by Richard Lewontin:

Our willingness to accept scientific claims that are against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real struggle between science and the supernatural. We take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, in spite of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, in spite of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism.

It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. *Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door* [emphasis added].

The eminent Kant scholar Lewis Beck used to say that anyone who could believe in God could believe in anything. To appeal to an omnipotent deity is to allow that at any moment the regularities of nature may be ruptured, that Miracles may happen.⁶⁰

Hume and Lewontin clearly have evidenced, by their statements, anything supernatural must categorically be excluded as an option. Any search for truth should be open to all explanations, even the supernatural, if that is where the evidence leads or is an inference to the best, or a better, explanation. To oppose this, as noble as it may be contrived to sound or thought to be, is flawed. People should follow the truth and evidence where it leads and affirm the most logical, reasonable, and simple explanation.

⁶⁰ Richard Lewontin, "Billions and billions of demons," review of *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark* by Carl Sagan, 1997, *The New York Review*, January 9, 1997, 31.

In criminal investigations and collecting various forms of evidence, it is typical to have two statements that oppose each other. Would it be acceptable to conclude the case and cease investigation, or perhaps, to continue investigating but simply disregard these competing statements completely, since they rule each other out? One likely would already be thinking at this moment how preposterous this would be and how negligent such an officer would be. When it comes to criminal investigations, or large segments of the hard, social, and forensic sciences, people working within these fields live and conduct research questions in an objective way to make findings without dismissing opposing assertions. Claims to the ontological foundation of moral obligations should be researched the same way. Sometime, the burden of explanation is completely thrust or presupposed onto the theist to argue their case, but to claim there is no divine explanation or something outside of time and space is a knowledge claim as well. Therefore, such a claim requires an explanation that should be equally weighed against the others.

A more thorough analysis follows in chapter 2 of four worldviews, but a brief consideration of the objectors is worthwhile here in relation to the abductive argument. Certainly, one could argue that people have come to have moral obligations in a variety of ways such as with the basis in social agreement theory, on the basis of what is in the best interests of the flourishing of sentient creatures, or even based on a Platonic account on the brute facts that these values and duties just exist independent of anything. Some of these, or at least portions, are not without merit, but none of these theories fully answer the binding authoritative aspect of moral obligations. Any of these explanations could be welcomed by the atheist, naturalist, or utilitarian for that matter. Although moral obligations involved actions, or inaction, there is still an epistemic portion of these. Like the laws of logic that are not concrete or physical there is a

portion of moral obligations that are not physical. For the naturalist then, it becomes difficult to square the binding, authoritative nature of moral obligations with a view that ascribes to a purely physical world. David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls submit, “Naturalism is the view that the physical world is all there is, and behind it is no ultimate pattern or plan or purpose.”⁶¹ The feelings of moral obligation are real and although this does not prove the ontology or authority of moral obligations, it is submitted they do several times correspond to real objective moral obligations. A naturalist view struggles to account for feelings and any theory of feelings, or feelings of moral obligations, is suspect since feelings are not physical, and even the agreement or promise to uphold certain obligations asserts an *ought*. In a purely material mind one could not rely on, or trust, its functions, or conclusions, and this calls non-theistic theories of moral obligations into question. L. Russ Bush asserts:

If the rational human mind is merely a biological product...then the mind is not an independent observer, no matter how complex or sophisticated it may be, and it is therefore not truly free to explore or examine reality...so atheism and theism would simply be examples of natural variations of human thought, and one could not be more true than the other in any objective or absolute sense.”⁶²

One will see in the chapter 2 analysis that there certainly are some compelling arguments from the secular interlocutors.

However, theism also offers a compelling view. Consider that naturalism or secular views may struggle to provide an authoritative foundation for moral obligations. In fact, some might say on a naturalist view some moral obligations can be counter productive to the genetic integrity or propagation of DNA. This is of course an extreme view, but it is a logical outworking of this

⁶¹ David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 10, Kindle.

⁶² L. Russ Bush, *The Advancement, Keeping the Faith in an Evolutionary Age*, (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2003), 39.

view. Most people who ascribe to secular views rise above their own worldview whether knowingly or not. Not only does theism provide a compelling argument, but it is one that is arguably simpler. As will be touched on later, Ockham's razor,⁶³ indicates the simpler explanation is preferred and most often the true one. If God does exist, and he is a good God with an impeccable nature, and he chose to create this world and people with inherent value and dignity, then it makes sense that not only would people have moral obligations, but people would be designed to be able to apprehend these and develop ethical theories without belief or knowledge of God. In light of Adams' discussion of guilt and alienation for wrongdoing this also makes sense more on a theistic worldview. Baggett and Walls submit:

Choices are deemed moral to the extent that they satisfy such needs. Such an account might seem to make morality objective, yet it's difficult to see how purely empirical properties could really account for binding obligation or intrinsic value. The attempt to define morality in terms of the satisfaction of our desires tries to replace theism's objective account of value and meaning with subjective satisfaction, but the exchange leaves us worse off. It remains a leap of blind faith to affirm that anything like objective obligation would emerge from such empirical properties. For that matter, persons themselves, especially persons with intrinsic value and dignity, seem much less likely to emerge from valueless impersonal stuff than from the intentional hand of a personal Creator...So morality gives us some significant preliminary reasons to believe in God.⁶⁴

The abductive argument points to a better explanation for the objective moral obligations evident in our world. The famous atheist J.L. Mackie wrote about the unlikely nature of moral properties and how God could be the best explanation. Mackie wrote, "Moral properties constitute so odd a cluster of properties and relations that they are most unlikely to have arisen in the course of events without an all-powerful god to create them."⁶⁵ One can see as this is sketched out it

⁶³ Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 244-266, 487, Kindle.

⁶⁴ Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 11, Kindle.

⁶⁵ J.L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and Against the Existence of God* (Oxford, NY: Clarendon Press, 1982), 115.

certainly is not unreasonable or irrational to believe and hold to theism as the grounding for objective moral obligations. Baggett and Walls surmise:

The force of the moral argument is that theism is no more outlandish or outrageous than many of our most cherished moral convictions. If we want to take seriously moral freedom, ethical obligations, and genuine responsibility, then we are hard-pressed to do so on naturalistic grounds. Such notions classically construed make little sense in a purely physical world, but they reside quite comfortably in a world sustained by a loving Creator.⁶⁶

It has been established that the abductive argument as presented is at the least reasonable. Given this reasonableness, if a perfectly good and loving God in fact exists, this would provide a better explanation for the foundation of objective moral obligations being authoritative, real, universal, and distinctively human. Although the case for an abductive argument at this point is not comprehensive, in coming chapters the case will continue to become stronger in the analysis of worldviews, and this will lead to the presentation of a deductive argument as an option.

Chapter 2

Analysis of Four Worldviews

Four worldviews will be analyzed in this chapter according to the four criteria outlined in the methodology section above in the introduction.⁶⁷ The worldviews that will be analyzed will be Atheism—Naturalism, Robust Normative Realism (RNR), Utilitarianism, and Theism. It is important to address these views since each one puts forth an answer, or explanation, for the existence and authority of moral obligations. Furthermore, RNR and Utilitarianism are, primarily at their core, ethical theories dealing with the moral argument. If any of these three theories

⁶⁶ Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 28, Kindle.

⁶⁷ See pp.8-10.

successfully were able to give a better explanation for the ontological foundation of objective moral obligations, this would not only undermine the theistic position, but also premises 7 – 10 of the abductive argument put forth.⁶⁸ After each worldview is analyzed this project will argue that theism provides the better explanation for the ontological foundation of moral obligations. Chapter 3 will then deal with a special atheistic objection known as the Euthyphro Dilemma.⁶⁹

Atheism—Naturalism

Atheism—naturalism is the first view requiring analysis. This worldview makes moral and ethical claims about how moral obligations exist and develop. Atheists, while believing there is not a theistic God, recognize the importance of moral and ethical questions. Due to this, atheists advocating for this worldview need to provide a response, but this view will be seen to be unable to account coherently for objective moral obligations. Atheism directly opposes theism when it comes to the explanation of the ontology of objective moral obligations; therefore, it must be included in the scope of this project.

Some people believe, and some atheists even assert formally, that their worldview is simply a *lack* a belief in God. To the contrary, to *lack* a belief is not an accurate definition of atheism. Atheism makes a positive case, or assertion, for the position that there is no God. It is a small difference, but an animal, a human baby, or a rock also *lack* a belief in God, but this does not make any of these an atheist. Kerry Walters writes that many people believe atheists are simply people who do not believe in a God, but this definition is far too broad and general,

⁶⁸ See p. 7 above.

⁶⁹ Refer to the introduction for the methodology to be used for the analysis on the worldviews that will be detailed in chapter 2. See pp. 8-10 above.

especially when analyzing a worldview on a philosophical level.⁷⁰ Atheism—naturalism will be analyzed according to the four outlined criteria, and will fail to be internally logically consistent, coherent, factually adequate, and existentially viable.

To understand this view, one must also consider that, knowingly or not, many atheists would adhere to methodological naturalism as part of their worldview. Although this sounds somewhat scientific, this would be the philosophical perspective of their view and their applications of science. It is not to be confused however, with the actual scientific method. Marshal “Rusty” Entrekin describes methodological naturalism, “Often, methodological naturalism is confused with the scientific method, but it’s not the same thing. The scientific method is the process by which science is conducted, but methodological naturalism is a philosophical approach to science.”⁷¹ At times an atheist or naturalist will not commit to a particular worldview, citing that they adhere only to science and what is verifiable by the scientific process. This is a philosophical position and is part of their worldview. Entrekin posits that there are two forms of atheism:

Those who have concluded that there is no God or gods, and that all which exists came about by chance, are called metaphysical naturalists, or more commonly, atheists. Atheists like to divide themselves into two camps: strong atheists and weak atheists. Strong atheists assert that there is no God, or that there is probably no God. Weak atheists are very close in the spectrum to agnostics.”⁷²

⁷⁰ Kerry Walters, *Atheism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2010), 9, accessed August 11, 2015, <http://site.ebrary.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=10427532>. Also, see Erich Reule “A Christian Response to Atheistic Objections” paper for Introduction to Apologetics class at Liberty University August 2015.

⁷¹ Marshall “Rusty” Entrekin, *God vs. Chance: Which is the Most Probable Explanation for our Existence*, 3rd ed., (N.p.: Marshall Entrekin, 2015), loc. 109-110, ch. 1 heading “The Rise of Methodological Naturalism,” Kindle. It is recognized Entrekin’s work here is not at the academic level, but he provides some short, pithy insightful remarks that were included here and cohere with the work of J.P. Moreland.

⁷² *Ibid.*, ch. 1 heading “The Spectrum of Belief,” Kindle.

Another view associated to this is scientism. There is both a strong and weak view of this as well. James Porter Moreland writes:

Strong scientism implies that something is true, rationally justified, or known if and only if it is a scientific claim that has been successfully tested and that is being used according to appropriate scientific methodology.

Weak scientism is still scientism, but it allows for more “wobble room.” Weak scientism acknowledges truths apart from science, granting them some minimal rational status even if they don’t have scientific support. Nevertheless, weak scientism still implies that science is by far the most authoritative sector of human knowing.⁷³

The key part to this worldview is the fact that atheists do assert there is not a God. Although some more militant atheists do attempt to make a case for this, often it is laced with a case premised on a *lack of evidence* or *apparent lack of evidence* for a God. However, as is widely known, the absence of evidence is not evidence to the contrary. If one accuses a person of murdering another person on the basis that there is no evidence proving they *did not* murder said person, this certainly would not be acceptable as a case to receive a hearing before a court. However, a strong case can be made even with many pieces of direct, circumstantial, and secondary sources of evidence. One need not have the proverbial smoking gun to charge and convict a person. In fact, conviction often becomes a balance of probabilities and whether the evidence and facts eliminate a *reasonable* doubt. The discussion of what counts as evidence is not the topic of this work, but the point here is the atheistic worldview makes a strong assertion and requires a positive case, as does theism. Moreland and Craig submit,

The assertion ‘God does not exist’ is just as much a claim to knowledge as the assertion ‘God exists,’ and therefore the former requires justification just as the latter does. It is the agnostic who makes no knowledge claim at all with respect to God’s existence, confessing that he does not know whether God exists or does not exist, and so who requires no justification.”⁷⁴

⁷³ James Porter Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism: Learning to Respond to a Dangerous Ideology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 29-30, Kindle.

⁷⁴ Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 156, Kindle.

Returning to atheist and moral obligations, many questions arise such as what atheists think about moral obligations, how they explain their authority, or from where they derive, to name a few. This certainly is a complicated issue since some atheists are moral realists, but some atheists hold to the *strong* view of their position and assert there are no such things as moral obligations, and these sorts of things are illusory. The well-known atheist/agnostic philosopher of science Michael Ruse posits:

I do not mean that ethics is a total chimera, for it obviously exists in some sense. But I do claim that, considered as a rationally justifiable set of claims about an objective something, it is illusory. I appreciate that when somebody says ‘Love thy neighbor as thyself,’ they think they are referring above and beyond themselves...Nevertheless, to a Darwinian evolutionist it can be seen that such a reference is truly without foundation. Morality is just an aid to survival and reproduction and has no being beyond or without this.⁷⁵

One must give credit that Ruse does in fact recognize that moral obligations exist in some sense, but what he gives with one hand he takes away with the other. He goes on to explain, if one only had to help others when they wanted to, people would likely do it rather infrequently. For this reason, the field of ethics must be objective because people think they do not have choice about assisting others because they *ought* to.⁷⁶ Regarding ethics being objective he asserts, “...even though we now know that, truly, it is not.”⁷⁷

Ruse offers a point about where moral obligations come from, and in summary, reciprocity is the key. Ruse explains, “A person can ask help of another, not return for help offered, but because it is right that the other extend help. You have an obligation to help me, and

⁷⁵ Michael Ruse, “Evolutionary Theory and Christian Ethics: Are They in Harmony?” in *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* no. 1, vol. 29 (March 1994), 20, accessed January 21, 2019, ATLA0000877242.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

if you do not, then (in the name of morality) I and others regard you as beyond the pale, in some sense.”⁷⁸ This theory is remarkably similar to that of Robert Merrihew Adams and the social requirement theory, as described above. This is not without merit, although this does cohere with much of reality, it does not give ultimate explanations or authority for the clearly felt or perceived moral obligations humans have.

Perhaps there is some explanatory power derived from social and societal influence and cooperative agreements that lead to morally obligatory positions. Again, it is not the position that this is not without some merit. Adams makes a compelling case in this regard, and he integrates the nature of God and his *imago dei* on humans in a way that makes sense. However, humans also engage in altruistic acts and behaviours that are most definitely not in their best interests, or that of their offspring. Think back to the case of the police officer fighting with the suspect, and the outrage at the citizens standing by not offering any assistance. On atheism—naturalism these people could arguably not be in the wrong. In fact, some may suggest they were acting wisely and might even be criticized for staying within the vicinity. However, setting this example to the side; one can think of many examples of altruistic behaviour. This begs the question of why?

Ruse posits:

As we have seen, altruism is put in place to promote ‘altruism.’ We are better off if we work together and cooperate than if we lead selfish, hostile, lonely existences. So we have evolved sentiments of friendliness and obligation—the very ‘natural morality’ of the weaker interpretation. We should help our neighbours, because they in turn will help us, so we all benefit...And, in any case, no evolutionist thinks that for every kind of act you expect immediate return. Morality is like an insurance scheme. You throw your policy into the general pool and then can draw on it as needed.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Ruse, “Evolutionary Theory and Christian Ethics,” 18.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

Although the self-serving aspect of this information is certainly veridical with Ruse's worldview, it still begs the question as to whether such acts would in fact be altruistic, and if moral obligations are in fact performed only to fill our moral bank account for withdrawal when needed. It is suggested Ruse, in fact, does in many ways rise above his worldview, but he falls short when it comes to providing a coherent and authoritative explanation for the evidence of the authority of moral obligations present in the world. An area where he fails is when he declares, "Morality is an ephemeral product of the evolutionary process, just as are any other adaptations. It has no existence of being beyond this, and any other deeper meaning is illusory (although put on us for good biological reasons)."⁸⁰ If morality is an illusion and is a biological adaptation, then by what authority does society hold a criminal responsible for a transgression; for on this view, it seems the offense is simply part of his biology, and perhaps even for what he views as essential for his betterment. Ruse mentioned 'good reasons', but it seems, given an unguided, blind process, this raises more questions than it does provide answers or an authoritative explanation for moral obligations. Ruse delineates, "The positions of the modern evolutionist, therefore, is that humans have an awareness of morality—a sense of right and wrong and a feeling of obligation to be thus governed—because such an awareness is of biological worth. Morality is a biological adaptation no less than are hands and feet and teeth."⁸¹ Although at face value this is most assuredly consistent with Ruse's worldview, it does not offer the authoritative explanation demanded. Consider that a person's hands and feet serve a purpose, and they are clearly designed for a purpose, multiple purposes in fact. Ruse has submitted that our moral obligations also serve a purpose. However, this morality that Ruse indicates people are aware of,

⁸⁰ Ruse, "Evolutionary Theory and Christian Ethics," 21.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

and serves such a purpose, calls for an explanation of the purpose and of who or what designed it for such a purpose. The teleology of these features simply cannot be left to chance, plus matter, plus time. Richard Dawkins submits it can,

In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect, if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference."⁸²

Dawkins' view does in fact cohere with an unguided process, but it fails to offer an authoritative explanation for objective moral obligations and duties.

Some, like Ruse, may outright deny moral obligations, and although remaining true to their atheist—naturalist worldview, most still rise above it. Many a famous atheist will stand with the theist in decrying atrocities whether past or present. The issue one begins to uncover as this worldview is pressed and analyzed, is the unraveling of, and the violations of basic laws of thought, such as the law of non-contradiction. Harris declares:

However, many people seem to think that because moral facts relate to our experience (and are, therefore, ontologically "subjective"), all talk of morality must be "subjective" in the epistemological sense (i.e., biased, merely personal, etc.). This is simply untrue...I am not denying the necessarily *subjective* (i.e., experiential) component of the facts under discussion. I am certainly not claiming that moral truths exist *independent* of the experience of conscious creatures—like the Platonic Form of the Good—or that certain actions are intrinsically wrong. I am simply saying that, given that there are facts—real facts—to be known about how conscious creatures can experience the worst possible misery and the greatest possible well-being, it is *objectively true* [emphasis added] to say there are right and wrong answers to moral questions, whether or not we can always answer these questions in practice.⁸³

Harris rightly identifies there is a subjective component to moral obligations. This seems to be veridical. Certainly, one's moral assessment may be wrong at times on certain accounts, but this

⁸² Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1995) 133.

⁸³ Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 30.

may come down to the difference between what is good to do and what one *ought* to do. Harris is quick to ensure he eliminates any moral truths that are independent of what people or science can discover, but he asserts that there are real facts to be known. Harris goes so far to even write that there are right and wrong answers to moral questions. This assertion is correct, but Harris does not ground this in any authoritative foundation. Although Harris clearly seems to have a good sense of moral values and duties, he does appear to be guilty of the fallacy of special pleading or excluding himself from being subject to the normal rules of thought and logic. Harris seems to have *special knowledge*, and one might argue Ruse does the same, that only he is aware of to make the claims he does throughout his work.

For example, Harris later posits that free will is simply an illusion and he brings in an accomplice, Daniel Dennett, who affirms this view. Although free will is another separate argument it is directly related to moral obligations since it takes free will to act on moral obligations.⁸⁴ Harris makes a case for free will being an illusion⁸⁵ but goes on to write that all actions can be traced back to “biological events about which we have no conscious knowledge.”⁸⁶ This view seems question-begging as to how he has conscious knowledge to be able to trace these events. Regarding moral obligations, an objective moral code, and the independence from contingencies of human nature, remember Ruse’s submission, “This independence is expressly denied by the Darwinian evolutionist. Morality is an ephemeral product of the evolutionary process, just as are other adaptations. It has no existence or being beyond this, and any deeper meaning is illusory (although put on us for good biological

⁸⁴ This project will not delve further into the free will argument, although directly related to the moral argument, as it is not within the scope of this project but bears brief mention here.

⁸⁵ Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 102-106.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

reasons).”⁸⁷ It seems veridical that a critical part of moral obligations is that they are universal, connected to human free will (distinctively human), and are not illusory but have real and bindingly authoritative sway on people.

Consider an explanation by Richard Dawkins of how Darwinism can explain the underpinnings of moral obligations. He clarifies the “selfish *gene*”⁸⁸ theory specifically related to altruism viewed in nature. Similar to how Ruse indicated the view that acting good is like a bank account, so too, Dawkins indicates that the selfish gene theory is a “reciprocal altruism (‘You scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours’).”⁸⁹ Dawkins explains there are two pillars to altruism in the naturalistic world, those being “kinship and reciprocation,”⁹⁰ but he submits that language, gossip, and reputation play a secondary role in altruistic acts. This seems to not be entirely off the mark since one can see in nature examples of the memory of animals as to what creatures or organisms they can cohabitate with in a symbiotic relationship. Dawkins provides an example of a vampire bat who remembers whom in their social group will repay their debt of regurgitated blood.⁹¹ This is an interesting social example, but it seems like a large leap to equate this to moral obligations. Although there may be some weight to this argument, it is question-begging. Dawkins summarizes his four good reasons for acting moral to each other as follows:

1. The special case of genetic kinship,
2. Reciprocation: repaying favours and acting in anticipation of favours,
3. Darwinian benefit of acquiring a reputation of generosity and kindness, and

⁸⁷ Ruse, “Evolutionary Theory and Christian Ethics,” 21.

⁸⁸ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), 215.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 217-218.

4. The benefit of conspicuous generosity as a way of buying unfakably authentic advertising.⁹²

In contemplating these ideas, it is not that these are without merit, but they do not explain a deep foundation for moral obligations. Dawkins cites a study conducted on moral dilemmas and the conclusion he indicated was "...there is no statistically significant difference between atheists and religious believers in making these judgments. This seems compatible with the view, which I and many others hold, that we do not need God in order to be good – or evil."⁹³ This is a point that a theist can partially agree with. The evidence apparent in the world does indicate people do not need to believe in God to be considered a good person by societal standards. One need not believe in God to perform actions that appear virtuous. The theist would argue that it is the *imago dei* and the fact humans have inherent worth which provides good reasons for 'being good.' This is a clear demonstration of Dawkins not understanding the moral argument, and in fact affirming one of the premises; that moral obligations at least seem real. It appears Dawkins is affirming moral obligations in the world. Dawkins' ignorance is further exposed when he accuses religious people of being good for the sake of "sucking up" or "apple polishing."⁹⁴ He goes on to declare humanism in fact leads to higher morals and higher education:

I'm inclined to suspect...that there are very few atheists in prisons. I am not necessarily claiming that atheism increases morality, although humanism – the ethical system that often goes with atheism – probably does. Another good possibility is that atheism is correlated with some third factor, such as higher education, intelligence or reflectiveness, which might counteract criminal impulses.⁹⁵

⁹² Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 219-220.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 229.

This conjecture, without statistical basis, seems to be an ad hominem attack on religions. In essence, Dawkins' argument is that theists are good due to the belief that God has humanity *under surveillance*. He uses the example of police being removed from a city and the chaos and looting that occurred. He then concludes this thought questioning if God were removed, would religious people still be good?⁹⁶ Certainly, there is clearly truth to the fact that these situations have really occurred, but the conclusions and assumptions drawn do not follow. Dawkins presumes that none of the looters in his example were atheists. Furthermore, there is still an abundance of criminality present with the police working as planned and at their full levels. It seems as though Dawkins has *a priori* ruled out the possibility that theists may be good and perform objective moral obligations because humans have inherent value, there are right actions to perform, universal obligations exist, and a good God commands these sorts of things, like a good parent requires their children to act rightly.

Internal Logical Consistency

Having some understanding of the atheistic worldview and scientific belief system, the four established analysis criteria can be applied to atheism—naturalism. The first being whether this view has internal logical consistency.⁹⁷ In order to analyze this worldview, a summative list of some points, as outlined above, related to the atheistic claims related to the ontology of moral obligations will expedite this:

1. Moral obligations, and moral values for that matter, are illusory.
2. Moral obligations exist, or at least seem to apparently exist.
3. Social controls or influence are an explanation for moral obligations, or at least one explanation.
4. We observe altruistic acts that are contrary to naturalism.

⁹⁶ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 228-231.

⁹⁷ See pp. 8-10 above.

5. Morality (moral obligations) is an evolutionary/biological adaptation.
6. There is no design, no purpose, no evil and no good only the appearance of these facts.
7. There are right and wrong answers to moral questions.
8. Morality is subjective.
9. Free will is an illusion.⁹⁸

This list clearly is not exhaustive of the worldview in general, but it captures some of the main ideas indicated by some of the leading thinkers or spokespeople representing this worldview. In answering the first evaluative criteria of logical consistency, the above list does not meet this standard. On the one hand, claims are made that moral obligations are illusory, and then on the other, they are a biological adaptation as well as are a sociobiological development. Some of the other claims do not appear veridical. For instance, morality is subjective, but it at least seems real that people can observe moral standards that people of all cultures and places adhere to.

Although the list above is comprised from the claims of the atheist thinkers noted in this project, some of these contradictory claims come from the same person. Take for instance, Harris indicating that free will is an illusion, but then he declares there are right and wrong answers to moral questions. It seems a key component to there being right and wrong answers to moral questions, or obligations, leads to the conclusion that the reality of free will is undeniable. From free will follows the ability to make a choice, and Harris is implying a standard of right and wrong that is logically inconsistent with free will and naturalism.

One need not go into depth with the preponderance of questions that arise from the claim that there is only an appearance of design in the world. This claim violates one of the basic philosophical and scientific principles that of all the evidence and explanations available the simplest one is preferred and typically correct (Ockham's razor). Simply put, if the world and all the complex living organisms seem to be designed and goal or purpose driven, perhaps they are.

⁹⁸ This list is compiled from the atheist authors and material quoted above.

This includes objective moral obligations. To implicitly deny this is to turn a blind eye to a potential answer, and this is unacceptable in any discipline. Moral obligations seem complex and to be objective seems to require an appeal to a standard outside of subjective humans or an unguided process. Take for example Ruse recognizing the complexity and beauty of the human brain and submits, “At the other extreme, the brain would be like a super-powerful computer, where every problem is weighed and assessed rationally.”⁹⁹ It seems to follow that the *super-powerful computer* people all possess must have been constructed and designed by an all-powerful and immensely intelligent designer that designed this computer to be able to apprehend and act on objective moral obligations. Denying this seems to speak to the logical inconsistencies in the atheist—naturalist worldview. James Davison Hunter and Paul Nedelisky submit:

Today’s moral scientists no longer look to science to discover moral truths, for they believe there is nothing there to discover. As they see it, there are no such things as prescriptive moral or ethical norms; there are no moral ‘ought’s’ or obligations; there is no ethical good, bad, or objective value of any kind. Their view is, ironically—in its net effect—a kind of moral or ethical nihilism.”¹⁰⁰

Although some atheists would embrace nihilism, most rise above the constraints and reality of their worldview and indicate they are not nihilist or fatalistic. However, this does not deny the fact that many atheists do not follow the evidence where it leads, the very accusation they level at theists. As noted above Lewontin posited that nothing supernatural can be allowed as an option to not allow a divine foot in the door. This approach does not reflect reason or the scientific approach in being open to the evidence where it leads.

⁹⁹ Ruse, “Evolutionary Theory and Christian Ethics,” 12.

¹⁰⁰ James Davison Hunter and Paul Nedelisky, *Science and the Good: The Tragic Quest for the Foundations of Morality* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 21, Kindle.

Clearly, this is an indication of anything outside of naturalism to be *a priori* ruled out without consideration of where the evidence leads. One could go on at length, but given the evidence available and presented, atheism as a worldview is not internally logically consistent.

Coherence

Moving now to the next criteria to evaluate this worldview is coherence.¹⁰¹ Something is coherent when its premises or concepts are consistent and in agreement with one another. It is not to be dismissive, but the above information in the description of atheism and the above internal logical consistency details has established the contradictory statements made from our atheist friends. However, a point related to the potential acknowledgement of objective moral values, and the belief these have existed for quite some time, is the question of epistemology. Although not the focus here, is worth mentioning since one does have to be able to apprehend these moral obligations. Harris submits, “Morality—in terms of consciously held precepts, social contracts, notions of justice, etc.—is a relatively recent development. Such conventions require at minimum, complex language and a willingness to cooperate with strangers, and this takes us a stride or two beyond the Hobbesian ‘state of nature.’”¹⁰² Notwithstanding whether or not Harris and other fellow atheists see eye-to-eye on all of their views, no doubt some of their views on science and naturalistic development may well be similar. This position Harris refers to would interfere with the long held moral standards and valid moral obligations, in addition to the epistemological capacities to apprehend these. However, theism can in fact account for these

¹⁰¹ See pp. 8-10 above.

¹⁰² Harris, *Moral Landscape*, 59.

objective, intrinsic, and universal, authoritative obligations. It is concluded that based on this information atheism—naturalism has been found wanting in the area of coherence.

Factual Adequacy

For a worldview to be factually adequate, the facts a worldview describes must be compared to reality and these should not contradict each other.¹⁰³ Consider the atheist—naturalist list of claims compiled above. The first two deal with the claim that moral obligations are illusory and only appear to exist. With all due respect to one’s interlocutors, this seems to be a case of special pleading. When Ruse or Harris, for example, make these claims, it begs the question as to how they seem to be elevated to a level of special knowledge to know these facts. One could counter with the claim that their beliefs are themselves illusory. Analyzing this claim, it seems they are acknowledging there are moral obligations, even though the reality of these is an illusion, but this illusion does create a reality for people. So, this creates moral obligations, which in turn creates *right* acts people should and must carry out. For example, parents are required to provide the necessities of life for their offspring, and in addition, it is good to nurture them beyond this. If these conditions are not met with the satisfaction of government institutions, there are several stages of intervention including children being removed from the custody of biological parents. This seems to cohere to the moral reality, and when stories such as the unfortunate conditions some children endure under abusive and negligent parents come to light, most people abhor the parents and cry out for typically more stern consequences than are meted out. But what if the government determined they in fact have no obligations to these children? It is suggested society, as a whole, would not condone this because these obligations are not illusory or even a useful fiction. This is an example where the *good* and the *right* seem to come

¹⁰³ See pp. 8-10 above.

together to clearly demonstrate that not only parents, but all people have an obligation to our youth. This example also serves to demonstrate how Adams' social requirement theory does provide a partial answer to some of the authority of the development and epistemological apprehension of moral obligations. It is submitted that Ruse and company would agree with this as well. However, it does not answer the more important question of the ontology and the binding, objective, and universal nature of moral obligations. Given the above claims it seems difficult to square this example with the claims. It certainly seems right that parents and society have a moral obligation to youth as outlined, but given the claims detailed from the atheist interlocutors there does not seem to be a deep, universal, objective, authoritative answer here. This theory is unable to fully account for all the authority to the very foundation or core of humanity.

When one considers the atheism—naturalism worldview and the argument that human flourishing and species propagation is a primary goal, this calls to account the explanation of altruistic acts. Returning to the example of the police officer fighting for his life, or the many emergency services first responders who willingly put themselves in harms way for the sake of other unrelated people or strangers. This contradicts the facts, or claims, of atheism—naturalism as these acts most certainly are not in the best interests of those individuals and their genetic line. These acts go far beyond human flourishing and scream loudly beyond just a bank account of hoping these people will repay the favour later. The reality is that these individuals will likely not encounter each other again. One could argue the good favour may cause the recipients to pay it forward but suggesting this as a possibility does not necessarily cohere to what occurs in reality. If there is no design, or teleology, and we are biologically determined with the programming to ensure our DNA is propagated, then from whence comes the internal drive to

perform these acts and seek the betterment of others even at our own detriment? The facts and claims of this worldview do not appear to cohere to reality. Os Guinness aptly submits, “Absolute evil calls for absolute judgment. Instinctively and intuitively, we cry out for the unconditional to condemn evil unconditionally. The atheist who lets fly “Goddammit!” in the face of evil is right, not wrong. It is a signal of transcendence, a pointer toward a better possibility-and unwittingly a prayer.”¹⁰⁴ Certainly, some components of this worldview and many, if not most, atheists in fact are better in reality than the tenants of their worldview. However, they cannot in a factually adequate way explain moral obligations or the ultimate authority of these obligations.

Existential Viability

Considering a worldview to live by requires deep critical thought. It requires more than just blindly ascribing to a worldview due to embracing some sound bites that case build for one’s own personal preferences. This is where existential viability offers the fourth criterion for evaluation.¹⁰⁵ It requires a person to not internally contradict themselves and reality because they desire their view to be true despite the philosophical and existential reality. Consider Harris’ claims. As indicated, he asserted there are right and wrong answers to moral questions. Harris also discussed consensus among people, but this shows that a group of people may, or may not, have the same bias. This is not an indicator of moral truth, but of what is going on in the world or within a group of people. He also posits there is moral truth in relation to human and animal well-being, but this is discoverable through science.¹⁰⁶ Here Harris suggests that even though

¹⁰⁴ Os Guinness, *Time for Truth: Living Free in a World of Lies, Hype & Spin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 103.

¹⁰⁵ See pp. 8-10 above.

¹⁰⁶ Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 31.

society may create influence, or agreement on right and wrong, this is only a bias and a thermometer of what the current climate of the world or that segment of the population tells us. His assertion then begs the question of what scientists tell us of moral obligations and why there is not a clear answer. This seems to be a Euthyphro type problem as on this view there is not objectivity to moral obligations, and the duties people hold may change depending on the influence of society and what scientists dictate. Harris declares, “I am arguing that everyone also has an intuitive ‘morality,’ but much of our intuitive morality is clearly wrong (with respect to the goal of maximizing personal and collective well-being). And only genuine moral experts would have a deep understanding of the causes and conditions of human and animal well-being.”¹⁰⁷ This is interesting as it is another example of Harris rising above his worldview, but also of special pleading. He clearly understands people do have an internal moral intuition, but at times it may be wrong. As an aside, this may be attributed to the confusion between what an individual values as something they should or should not do and what is in fact *good* and *right*. The last portion of his statement is question-begging as to who are the “genuine moral experts” and what qualifies them? This is again special pleading as well as an appeal to a standard that must lie outside of humanity to be universal, authoritative, and binding. The question of how science can qualify someone is unable to be answered. The double think present here seems untenable to make this liveable. There is great contradiction between the claims that moral obligations and free will are an illusion, but there are objectively right and wrong answers to moral questions; morality is subjective, yet free will is an illusion. The quest of scientists to try and understand and answer questions of morality is admirable, but it is evident that this field is highly philosophical and logical, an area science relies on for answers, not one that it explains. It

¹⁰⁷ Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 36.

is not that science has nothing to offer, but many of the claims outlined harken back to science and philosophy of old. Claims where it is ultimately reason and an external and knowable standard, as well as the explanation of social disapproval. Davison and Nedelisky summarize one view, “In short, good and evil are not unlike heat and cold. We don’t have knowledge of them except through certain feelings. We come to understand the moral good by experiencing the pleasure of social approval, and we understand evil by experiencing the uneasiness and pain of disapproval.”¹⁰⁸ Good and evil based on feelings akin to temperature do not seem to be a reliable or tenable manner by which to live. They further elucidate on the naturalism Darwin promoted:

Darwin’s extensive observations as a naturalist and his systematic account of the evolutionary development of all living things in a theory of natural selection depicted humans as part of the same order as all other life. Humankind, long held to be categorically unique and distinct from the broader animal kingdom, could now be seen as continuous with it. Human attributes and behavior should therefore admit of the same sort of natural explanation as the attributes of any other species. Morality was no exception. Like any other biological capacity or behavior, human morality must be somehow explicable as an adaptation to environmental conditions.¹⁰⁹

This does cohere with some of the views held by naturalists, but with no actual authoritative explanation as to the ontology of moral obligations, does not appear to be existentially viable. Science cannot provide a basis for the ontology of moral obligations. To use an old phrase, *it simply is not in its wheelhouse*. Frequently, atheists or naturalists proclaim that they are following the evidence and hold themselves up to be a beacon of reason, but it seems as though there is a presumption against any *supernatural* or *religious* conclusion. Remember, Lewontin indicated they wish to avoid a “divine foot in the door.” Edward Feser posits:

The fact is that secularists are “for” reason and science only to the extent that they don’t lead to religious conclusions; they celebrate free choice only insofar as one chooses against traditional or religiously oriented morality; and they are for democracy and

¹⁰⁸ Hunter and Nedelisky, *Science and the Good*, 53-54, Kindle.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 63, Kindle.

toleration only to the extent that these might lead to a less religiously oriented social and political order. Again, the animus against religion is not merely a feature of the secularist mindset; it is the only feature.¹¹⁰

Certainly, social influence has some merit and again our secular interlocutors often rise above their worldview, but an exclusion or bias towards evidence or truth is never *good science*.

Moreover, humans do seem to have an internal moral compass, although it can at times be incorrect or misguided, that for the most part seems to be veridical. It is for this reason that the pursuit of truth and realism is good for humans and humanity. Feser addresses this as he elucidates:

So, a good human being will be, among many other things, someone who pursues truth and avoids error. And this becomes moral goodness insofar as we can choose whether or not to fulfill our natures in this way. To choose in line with the final causes or purposes that are ours by nature is morally good; to choose against them is morally bad.¹¹¹ ... Like everything else, human beings have a formal cause – their form, essence, or nature – and this formal cause entails certain final causes for their various capacities. So, for example, our nature or essence is to be rational animals, and reason or intellect has as its final cause the attainment of truth. Hence the attainment of truth is good for us, just as the gathering of acorns is good for a squirrel.¹¹²

Although one can applaud people for being better than their worldview, atheism is deficient in meeting the assessment criterion. Regarding an explanation for the ontology of moral obligations, atheism is not internally logically consistent, it is not coherent, it is not factually adequate, and it does not appear to be existentially viable. G. K. Chesterton aptly pointed to the problem of factually inadequate or contradictory worldviews, albeit this may not have been his exact intention,

The man of this school [Speaking of the modern man or revolutionist] goes first to a political meeting where he complains that savages are treated as if they were beasts. Then

¹¹⁰ Edward Feser, *The Last Superstition: A Refutation of the New Atheism* (Southbend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2008), loc. 481, ch. 1 "Bad Religion", subheading "Religion and counter-religion", Kindle.

¹¹¹ Ibid., loc. 2601, ch. 4 "Scholastic Aptitude", subheading "Natural law", Kindle.

¹¹² Ibid., loc. 2644, Kindle.

he takes his hat and umbrella and goes on to a scientific meeting where he proves that they practically are beasts...In his book on politics he attacks men for trampling on morality, and in his book on ethics he attacks morality for trampling on men.”¹¹³

As noted above, it is important to analyze the alternative views and explanations for moral obligations, since searching for the truth of claims is important. In addition, views that make opposing claims to one’s position deserve analysis and consideration. Although not necessarily another form of atheism, another view that demonstrates more promise is Wielenberg’s robust normative realism. This view holds promising characteristics that would appeal both to the theist and atheist, and although Wielenberg holds to atheism, this view would not be exclusively atheistic and is next to be analyzed.

Robust Normative Realism

Wielenberg asserts that there are ways people *ought* to act sometimes. This is connected to the normative reasons people have, and it is the intrinsic value ascribed onto these properties that makes them good or bad. This provides the normative reasons.¹¹⁴ He concludes this thought with positing, “Since intrinsic value is connected with normative reasons and normative reasons are in turn connected with obligation—including moral obligation—it follows that intrinsic value is connected with moral obligation.”¹¹⁵ Despite the fact that the logic seems somewhat circular here—normative reasons come from the intrinsic value of certain properties and this is what provides them a value of good or bad, hence the normative reasons for moral obligations—Wielenberg does acknowledge a moral realist position in regards to intrinsic value and moral

¹¹³ G.K. (Gilbert Keith) Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (1908; repr., Great Britain: William Clowes and Sons Limited, 1934), 29, Kindle.

¹¹⁴ Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 7-8, loc. 374-382, Kindle.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8, loc. 382, Kindle.

obligations. To be fair, and not uncharitably take this quote out of context, Wielenberg provides a compelling case for his version of moral values and duties, and he has written much on this topic as well as debating opponents. He does provide an explanation for how something comes to have intrinsic value:

To claim that a given thing is intrinsically valuable is to claim that some of that thing's intrinsic properties make it valuable, and the intrinsic value of a given thing is whatever value it has that is explained by its intrinsic properties... An important feature of my view is that while many of the non-moral properties upon which moral properties D-supervene can produce causal effects, the moral properties themselves are epiphenomenal—they have no causal impact on the rest of reality.¹¹⁶

There is some circularity to this reasoning, but it is important to understand that at certain points Wielenberg, and his *Robust Normative Realism* (RNR), does part ways with the naturalist at some point and *seems* to be somewhat akin to Platonism, the theory that abstract objects timelessly exist, objectively independent of the physical world. These objects are discoverable and would be akin to *brute facts* of the universe that Wielenberg defends. These brute facts or basis of moral obligations may be derived from intrinsic value as Wielenberg posits. “I have already suggested that some of our moral obligations derive from the various relationships we have to other human beings. But I do not think that all of our obligations derive from such relationships. Obligations may also be grounded in intrinsic value.”¹¹⁷ Wielenberg provides an example to give some context to this claim and it is worth quoting at length:

If I know that I can prevent some intrinsic evil without thereby introducing a greater evil into the world – or sacrificing some good, or violating some obligation, or doing anything else morally untoward – then I have a moral obligation to prevent the evil in question. If I can prevent an innocent baby from being tortured merely by lifting my finger (and doing so will have no morally untoward consequences) then I have a moral obligation to prevent the baby from being tortured. This obligation does not derive from any relationship between the baby and myself, or from any relationship between myself or the

¹¹⁶ Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 13, loc. 487-494, Kindle.

¹¹⁷ Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue*, 64, Kindle.

baby and some third party. Rather, it derives from the fact that an innocent baby being tortured is a fantastically bad thing. This is an obligation I have regardless of whether I stand in any interesting relationship to any other being – including a divine creator.¹¹⁸

Few would disagree with Wielenberg's assertion that anyone in this situation has a moral obligation to prevent the evil in question. However, this example seems to be predicated on a number of assumptions as well as qualifiers. To be brief, he assumes a standard of good and evil, but there is no authoritative ontological explanation where this standard is derived. His assertion of the existence of intrinsic evil entails there is intrinsic good and value. Value often is something ascribed and the value of this baby, or any baby, is a value that could be subjective to some. More people, than one would like to admit, do not hold babies as having a priceless intrinsic value. Then, there is the caveat of not introducing any 'morally untoward consequences.' This too could be subjective. For example, would a morally untoward consequence be a great risk of harm or death to this individual about to rescue this baby? This could be subjective based on an individual's own interpretation of risk versus reward. Think back to the example of the police officer fighting. The bystanders could be viewed as thinking it was morally untoward for them to intervene. However, had they intervened they could have assisted in the quick apprehension of the suspect resulting in the preservation from harm of the other people he injured later. It seems their inaction would be morally untoward to others, but from Wielenberg's position it seems as though it would be morally untoward for them to act since the chance of harm is high.

A core piece of Wielenberg's worldview is intrinsic value. Wielenberg's further describes his position when he refers to the Euthyphro in submitting, "Moreover, at least some good things

¹¹⁸ Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue*, 64, Kindle.

are not because God loves them. Instead, some things are intrinsically good.”¹¹⁹ This position would, initially seem to be something even a theist could agree with. But, when considering things that are intrinsically good such as knowledge, love, rationality, human beings, beauty, etc. for the theist, these are part of the *imago dei*, and for this reason the theist would disagree with Wielenberg’s assertion. However, this is an integral part to what makes Wielenberg’s theory appealing that even a theist may consider agreement on some points.

The question arises as to how something is ascribed or attains the quality of intrinsic goodness and where the obligation to do what is right derives. Wielenberg declares:

The response is simply that the fact that a given course of action is morally obligatory is itself a reason – indeed the most powerful kind of reason – for performing the action in question regardless of whether the action is in one’s interest. More generally, the fact that a given course of action is a way of being moral is a reason for performing that action. To the question “why be moral?” a perfectly acceptable answer is “because it is moral.”¹²⁰ ...Grown-ups recognize that the fact that a given action is morally obligatory is itself an overriding reason for performing that action. A morally obligatory action is an action that one has to do whether one wants to do it or not. Rewards and punishments may provide additional reasons for doing what we morally ought to do, but they do not constitute the only reasons for doing so.¹²¹

As noted in his work, this coheres with Kant’s CI indicating that one should do one’s duty for duty’s sake, and this is not incorrect. On the face of it, this seems to be circular reasoning—be good because it is good. In fact, this speaks to the development of virtue. It is a virtuous character that develops in someone that enables the ability to be altruistic and dutiful without regard to one’s own interests. In today’s world, this is more and more a counter-cultural way to behave, and many will question why they should behave in this way. According to this

¹¹⁹ Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue*, 65, Kindle.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 78-79, Kindle.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 80, Kindle.

worldview, it seems to be a brute fact of the universe that the authority for being good or doing right is contained in the old mantra of ‘be good for goodness’ sake.’ On the surface, people may *feel* this is fine and coincides with pursuing what makes you happy, so long as one does not harm another, but these statements are loaded with relativism and subjective definitions that can work adversely to what is truly *good and right*. This is the reason the ontology of moral obligations is vital, so the truly *good and right* do not wax and wane with the subjective moors of society.

Wielenberg makes a strong statement in what we *ought* to do, but again, on his atheistic view of the world, it is question begging. In light of this, consider Wielenberg’s assertion:

As already noted, I do not see any way of proving that a given thing is intrinsically good (or bad). But I think that the claims I have advanced about intrinsic value so far are at least initially plausible. Thus, we should provisionally accept them unless and until we are given good reason to reject them. I think that intrinsically valuable activities are closely connected with meaningful lives.”¹²²

This same assertion could be made for theism as well. It seems perhaps Wielenberg and the theist have reached a stalemate. It is worth noting, once again Wielenberg is appealing to a standard outside of humanity and begs the question of what is a *meaningful* life? Theism at least appeals to a competent, authoritative standard giver, and has a reasonable explanation for intrinsic value leading to a meaningful life.

A final point on Wielenberg’s theory that bears mentioning is that morals can supervene, and he takes the stance of a making relation. An in-depth treatment of supervenience would take this work too far askew, but some understanding is necessary. Supervenient relationships are not limited to moral obligations, but essentially such a relationship is the claim that one property is related to another, or there is a direct relation between classes of properties that have an effect one on the other or even on each other. Brian Mclaughlin and Karren Bennett submit:

¹²² Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 4, loc. 316-320, Kindle.

The core idea of supervenience is captured by the slogan, “there cannot be an A-difference without a B-difference.” It is important to notice the word ‘cannot’. Supervenience claims do not merely say that it just so happens that there is no A-difference without a B-difference; they say that there cannot be one. A-properties supervene on B-properties if and only if a difference in A-properties requires a difference in B-properties—or, equivalently, if and only if exact similarity with respect to B-properties guarantees exact similarity with respect to A-properties. Supervenience claims thus have modal force.¹²³

Wielenberg takes a making relation position and above he was quoted in relation to the intrinsic value of something. He posits, “To claim that a given thing is intrinsically valuable is to claim that some of that thing’s intrinsic properties make it valuable, and the intrinsic value of a given thing is whatever value it has that is explained by its intrinsic properties.”¹²⁴ He characterizes his view that moral properties supervene on non-moral properties. He further submits that torturing someone for fun is wrong and asks the important question of what makes it wrong. To this, it is the act of torturing someone for fun that *makes* the act wrong.¹²⁵ So, the moral wrongness of torturing someone for fun supervenes on the non-moral act of torture. Supervenience has a lengthy and technical philosophical history and forms a significant part of Wielenberg’s view. An analysis of his theory on moral obligations may assist in shedding some light.

Internal Logical Consistency

In applying the same analytical criteria to this worldview, and despite the thoughtful effort, it does not quite have the fortitude to demonstrate internal logical consistency.¹²⁶

Wielenberg does not wish to appeal to a divine creator since clearly, he is not convinced by the

¹²³ Brian McLaughlin and Karen Bennett, "Supervenience", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), accessed May 22, 2019, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/supervenience/>

¹²⁴ Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, 13, loc. 487-494, Kindle.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 24, loc. 692-696, Kindle.

¹²⁶ See pp. 8-10 above.

evidence and arguments. Per contra, his theory is predicated on things having intrinsic value, and these are *brute* facts that are assigned to things of value. He declares that unless one can disprove something's intrinsic value, we should provisionally accept this fact. This seems to equate pleading that one should 'just believe me.' All acrimony aside, Wielenberg is of course theorizing on values that most rational, thoughtful people would agree to, so there is some merit to his assertion to believe this unless proven otherwise. On the other hand, the theist could argue the identical claim, and one could come to see this position is just as rational, logical, and with merit.

Furthermore, RNR has as an integral part of its theory, intrinsic value for the good and the right. It is understood that Wielenberg posits this is where normative reasons for the good and right come from, and intrinsic value comes from a thing's intrinsic properties. This is where his explanation of supervenience comes to bear. Recall that moral properties supervene on non-moral properties, which do have the ability to produce causal effects. Wielenberg does indicate that moral properties are epiphenomenal, meaning that these are a secondary phenomenon that would accompany another and be caused by it (supervenience). He follows this indicating that these have no causal impact on reality.

These facts do not appear to have the *robust* internal logical consistency required to account for the ontology of moral obligations. Be good for goodness' sake and brute facts of intrinsic value beckon to an external standard, or facts that are agreed upon. When he suggests intrinsic value is assigned, this, it is suggested, screams that there is an external standard that is appealed to and is knowable. As mentioned, robust normative realism does seem much like Platonism on a few levels, but Wielenberg is a naturalist not a Platonist.¹²⁷ If Wielenberg is not a

¹²⁷ Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue*, 38, 140-141, 150-158, Kindle.

Platonist, then the question of where his theory derives its authority remains. Wielenberg would argue he and the theist reach a stalemate on this front as both argue for something that cannot in fact be disproven.

This theory appears to have much circularity posited from the intrinsic values to the supervenience. The appeal to properties being supervenient seems like an attempt to answer the ontological questions Wielenberg rightly recognizes need an answer, but it seems overly complicated. This sort of response seems like if a theist argues the Bible is true because it is the Word of God, and we know that God exists because the Bible says so. This view is not internally logically consistent, although Wielenberg is consistent in his application of the theory.

Coherence

RNR has as part of its view that people should be good because it is good to be good, and Wielenberg indicates that there are actions that people *ought* to do. As noted above, this is predicated on the fact that people should provisionally accept things that appear to have intrinsic value unless one can prove otherwise. On the face of this, it all sounds good and coherent to some. However, when people assert that one *ought* to do something or not do something there could follow the question of why. The why in the case of a moral ought leads to the ontological foundation of moral obligations and should be able to be answered. Take for example the laws that govern speed on roadways. One could ask, “Why?” The answer would be comprised of several points, ranging from simply the safety of those using the roads and those around the roads, to because it is good, and unless proven otherwise, everyone should do this. Be that as it may, the answer is much deeper than this. There are *qualified* engineers that determine the maximum safe speed for the road, there are competent authorities who review this information and make recommendations, and there are people with recognized and legitimate authority that

draft and enact the laws. Finally, there are those appointed with the legitimate and clear authority to enforce these laws. Now there is a robust case for why one should obey the speed laws. When it comes to real moral obligations and the theory Wielenberg puts forth, there is no question he has a coherent view that there is good and evil; right and wrong; ought and ought not, but what his view lacks is a coherent answer as to the ontological foundation for this view. Without an outside, qualified, competent, authoritative law maker and value giver, it appears he lacks the authoritative coherence to justify his claims, given the evidence available to his worldview. His view justifies itself in a circular manner. Normative reasons for good and right come from intrinsic value, intrinsic value comes from intrinsic properties, moral properties supervene on non-moral, and moral properties are epiphenomenal. When pressed for explanation of where the authority may come from, Wielenberg as a naturalist, points to science having the ability to potentially answer this question. He details humanity's vast weapons technology, and if only people put science, and the dedication to advancement to other uses, these questions may be answered. He asserts:

We have used science to master many of the fundamental forces at work in the external world. We ought to focus our efforts now on using science to master the heart of darkness within us. In a naturalistic universe, there is no a priori reason to think that such a project cannot succeed. There is no divine guarantee that such a project will fail, and there is no divine command that we ought not make the effort. Moreover, the source of the heart of darkness – the human nervous system – is part of the natural, physical world; it is not a nonphysical soul, forever inaccessible to science.¹²⁸

Wielenberg has hope for his view, but he has closed the door to the possibility of a supernatural answer should the evidence point this way. Remember, science is the search for causes in the material world. Moreland submits, “The problem for scientism is that science is descriptive, not prescriptive; science attempts to describe what is the case, but it cannot prescribe

¹²⁸ Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue*, 140-141, Kindle.

what *ought to be the case* [emphasis added]. Thus, science must remain silent when it comes to normative laws and principles.”¹²⁹ As a moral realist Wielenberg strongly maintains people have moral obligations, “Even in a naturalistic universe, each of us can help someone – and we are obligated to make the attempt.”¹³⁰ Wielenberg’s theory does not cohere with itself as evidenced here. If the theist used this method, it would be akin to the theist claiming they know God exists because the Bible says so, and we know the Bible is true because God says so. This is not to say it is completely false, but it is circular reasoning which is not a good sign nor coherent.¹³¹ A final piece of evidence for the ontology Wielenberg gives is that some of our obligations exist due to social relationships. As noted above, this is Adam’s view, and Wielenberg does refer to him since this view is somewhat complementary. Adam’s view is certainly true in many ways, but it does not answer and cohere to the very deep ontological authority required of such an important question of objective moral obligations.

Factual Adequacy

On the surface, RNR, would appear to in some facets to be factually adequate.¹³² It is agreed and affirmed that social influence does have a strong impact on moral obligations, as per Adams. One need not describe in detail the examples of social influence on moral obligations and attitudes. If a people are honest, most could likely think of instances where they have refrained from certain words or actions out of a duty and obligation felt to their fellow person. However, in this analysis, it has been evident that the *ultimate* authority of moral obligations, for

¹²⁹ Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism*, 156, Kindle.

¹³⁰ Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue*, 156, Kindle.

¹³¹ See pp. 8-10 above.

¹³² See pp. 8-10 above.

RNR, is based on intrinsic worth, which appears to be a *brute fact* of the universe. Moreover, the entire supervenience theory does not seem to correspond to reality and *objective* moral obligations.

Earlier it was argued that the value of a particular thing is equal to the value someone places on that thing. History has demonstrated that certain values have waxed and waned. Wielenberg likely would agree that there are certain moral obligations and duties that have been consistent, but the circularity and appeal to brute facts does not correspond best to the evidence available. Consider for instance the value on any human life regardless of geography or circumstances. This was once not such a contested issue, but currently in society the debate over topics such as abortion or euthanasia rages like never before. There often is little discussion, but more an attempt to force one's subjective morality on society regardless of what science textbooks indicate. This seems to be an issue of *intrinsic value*, but many deny this in favor of the right of choice. Here is an example of a vital issue that has redefined what many argue as intrinsic value, but inherently there is intrinsic worth in *every* life as written Declaration of Human Rights. Due to the circularity and lack of authoritative foundation it seems RNR has not met the standard of factual adequacy.

Existential Viability

As was with factual adequacy, this view would be held by some to be existentially viable.¹³³ Many would read Wielenberg's work and find it compelling and robust, and not feel in the slightest that they are engaged in philosophical hypocrisy. For many, this worldview would be completely satisfying and livable. However, if submitted to analysis and delved deeper into,

¹³³ See pp. 8-10 above.

one will find this view not livable since there really is not an authority. In many ways, Wielenberg submits that science, if harnessed and channelled, will give the answers people seek. This really is the same as what atheists accuse theists of using, called the God of the Gaps argument, but here it is in fact Science of the Gaps. Intrinsic value and moral obligations being brute facts of the universe really is question-begging to say the least, and on the whole, in a deep way, makes this view not existentially viable.

Utilitarianism

Before moving to theism, the third view for summary and analysis is Utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is itself a moral and ethical system.¹³⁴ It is not an exclusively atheistic view as there are theistic Utilitarians. Not only this, but Utilitarianism is also a useful theory when considering certain classes of decisions. For example, some decisions government bodies make at times, it is reasonable to conclude the use of the Utilitarian view is evident. Due to some of the implications of this view on objective moral obligations it is important to interrogate this view as well. The Utilitarian view of moral obligations or morality is essentially what is best for the aggregate of society. Some aspects of Utilitarianism seem to cohere with portions of atheism and RNR in the sense that it would also align with social contract theory. Take for example the view espoused by Harris. Much of his theory is predicated on what is best for human flourishing, and what society determines to be in the best interests of the whole. Where Utilitarianism deviates from someone like Harris is on the standing of individuals, and this will be discussed below. Some advocates of Utilitarianism may argue against this stipulation, but this would be fallacious since there is obvious correlation between these views arguing for what is in the *best interests*.

¹³⁴ The writer recognizes Utilitarianism may not actually be considered a worldview per se, but due to its potential negative implications on moral arguments it has been included in this project.

This posits at least some implicit agreement or concession to there being a best interest for a culture or society.

A significant concern with Utilitarianism is the status of individual rights and well-being. Baggett and Walls submit that Utilitarianism appears to be a theory that is concerned with the well-being and flourishing of the aggregate of humanity. Baggett and Walls point to the fact that some variances of this theory even extend to all sentient creatures, but for the purposes of this work the view will be limited to its concern for humanity. Baggett and Walls rightly raise their concern about the readily apparent flaw of this theory, wondering what standing an individual's rights would have.¹³⁵ This view essentially casts *the right or oughtness* as what would be in the best interests or is *most* advantageous to society. This is evidence already of how such a worldview would not be existentially viable or coherent since individual rights would appear not to have a place on this view.

However, some who hold to this view do indicate that individual justice and rights do have a standing within Utilitarianism. John Stuart Mill contends that Utilitarianism ties justice and individual rights together for reasons of general utility. He categorizes moral obligation into those of perfect and imperfect obligations. In defining these, he contends that perfect duties are “those duties in virtue of which a correlative right resides in some person or persons; duties of imperfect obligation are those moral obligations which do not give birth to any right.”¹³⁶ So, Mill indicates that these duties account for justice and individual rights, and only gives one reason for

¹³⁵ Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, loc. 2348-2355, ch. 4 Moral Value, heading Utilitarianism and Moral Standing, Kindle.

¹³⁶ John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 7th ed. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1879), loc. 835-847, ch. 5, Kindle.

this: “general utility.”¹³⁷ As Mill bridges these together to indicate this is what resembles justice, or what is justice, it is worth noting how he defines *justice*. Mill posits, “Justice implies something which it is not only right to do, and wrong not to do, but which some individual person can claim from us as his moral right.”¹³⁸ This definition sounds righteous, but on the understanding of general utility one may question the authority or reasoning behind how individual rights have any bearing or influence on general utility. One may suppose the answer would be that to uphold individual rights would be in the best interests of the aggregate of society. However, it would not take a great deal of work in some thought experiments to construct some scenarios, although hypothetical, that would not be unrealistic and would overrule individual rights in the interests of *the greater good*.

In the use of the term *individual rights* and sketching out the view of Utilitarianism, Mill defines individual rights and the obligation of society as, “When we call anything a person's right, we mean that he has a valid claim on society to protect him in the possession of it, either by the force of law, or by that of education and opinion.”¹³⁹ Mill is quite clear here on the claim an individual has and also now on the moral obligation society owes to them. To conclude the summary on understanding the position of Utilitarianism, it is worth quoting Mill at length in relation to justice and moral obligations:

Justice is a name for certain classes of moral rules, which concern the essentials of human well-being more nearly, and are therefore of more absolute obligation, than any other rules for the guidance of life; and the notion which we have found to be of the essence of the idea of justice, that of a right residing in an individual, implies and testifies to this more binding obligation. The moral rules which forbid mankind to hurt one another (in which we must never forget to include wrongful interference with each other's freedom) are more vital to human well-being than any maxims, however important, which only

¹³⁷ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, loc. 922, ch. 5, Kindle.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, loc. 854, ch. 5, Kindle.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, loc 911, ch. 5, Kindle.

point out the best mode of managing some department of human affairs. They have also the peculiarity, that they are the main element in determining the whole of the social feelings of mankind. It is their observance which alone preserves peace among human beings: if obedience to them were not the rule, and disobedience the exception, every one [sic] would see in every one [sic] else a probable enemy, against whom he must be perpetually guarding himself.¹⁴⁰

As mentioned earlier, this worldview has the elements of social agreement theory, and even of what Ruse had alluded to earlier and this writer has referred to as a moral bank account. To round out his discussion in chapter 5 of his work, Mill refers to the fact people may have no need for another person, but they do not harm them so that they too will hope to not be harmed. This refers to the terminology coined earlier of Ruse's theorizing as 'the bank account theory.' Mill includes in this view, being good for the sake of good, and of the immorality of breaching a friendship or promise. He goes on to conclude this chapter by describing ultimate duty:

If it is a duty to do to each according to his deserts, returning good for good as well as repressing evil by evil, it necessarily follows that we should treat all equally well (when no higher duty forbids) who have deserved equally well of us, and that society should treat all equally well who have deserved equally well of it, that is, who have deserved equally well absolutely. This is the highest abstract standard of social and distributive justice; towards which all institutions, and the efforts of all virtuous citizens, should be made in the utmost possible degree to converge. But this great moral duty rests upon a still deeper foundation, being a direct emanation from the first principle of morals, and not a mere logical corollary from secondary or derivative doctrines. It is involved in the very meaning of Utility, or the Greatest-Happiness Principle...All persons are deemed to have a right to equality of treatment, except when some recognised social expediency requires the reverse.¹⁴¹

In sum, the theory of Utilitarianism has at its core the primary concern of good for the aggregate of society. Although making attempts at preserving individual value and rights, one

¹⁴⁰ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, loc. 1016-1020, ch. 5, Kindle.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., loc. 1057-1061 and 1070, ch. 5, Kindle.

can see that as noted above equality of treatment is required to be jettisoned in the interests of “social expediency.”

Internal Logical Consistency

As noted, at the heart of Utilitarianism is what is in the best interests of the aggregate of society. It now comes to the point of answering whether, given the facts and evidence available, can this view give a better answer to the ontology of moral obligations and account for their authority. Utilitarianism will fail to adequately meet the four analytical criterions. To the point of internal logical consistency¹⁴², Utilitarianism falls prey to some of the same inconsistencies as the atheist—naturalist view suffers from. One point that is abundantly clear is this view does refer to *the good* and *the right*. It also assumes the intrinsic worth of humans. Moreover, Mill himself, in chapter five of his work, referred to a standard to be maintained and repeatedly used words such as ought, rights, equality, and duty. What was lacking was any deep, authoritative explanation of where this standard, or a competent authority behind it, is derived. This deficiency speaks directly to the logical inconsistency of this view. It is not logical or consistent to apply a standard or rule to something without an authoritative reason where this comes from. Linville addresses this and affirms the definition of the principle of Utilitarianism as that which “...tells us that right actions are those that have good consequences for the community. This is ‘generic’ because a great deal of variation is possible in defining what ‘good’ and ‘community’ mean here.”¹⁴³ This is an excellent point that raises questions about how on the Utilitarian worldview these concepts of ‘good’ and ‘community’ are accounted for. As mentioned, Utilitarianism

¹⁴² See pp. 8-10 above.

¹⁴³ Linville, “The Moral Argument,” 421, Kindle.

advocates for the *good* of the aggregate of society, which demonstrates *good* and *community* as essential to this view. Again, the standing of the individual in this sense becomes a deeply important issue. The argument put forward by Utilitarianism is that to look out for individual rights is what is best for society as a whole. This harkens back to the bank account idea, but if this is what moral obligations are predicated on, then this would fail. Reason being many people have demonstrated over time the use and abuse of other people's kindness to gain advantage and get ahead in a self-serving way. A further concern raised that Linville points to as well is what is defined as 'community.' It seems logical this itself is a subjective component leading to further issues as a whole, but especially for individuals. It is question begging how there can be objective moral obligations if there are so many subjective components such as community; who decides the definition of a community, and what standards are *right or best* for the community? Linville posits, "The utilitarian's 'moral community' is not identical to the set of individuals who enjoy moral standing. Utilitarianism does not accord moral standing to individual members of the moral community."¹⁴⁴

Another important point to note is that as Mill elucidates the concept of Utilitarianism it was suffused with moral language and obligations. However, another proponent of this view, Jeremy Bentham, makes clear that there are no such things as natural rights. Bentham, in analyzing the *Declaration of Rights* Article II, in reference to natural and imprescriptible rights, posits that this is "dangerous nonsense."¹⁴⁵ On Bentham's view then, the rights argued for are in fact nonsense or an illusion. This falls in line with the naturalistic view that has been pointed to,

¹⁴⁴ Linville, "The Moral Argument," 421, Kindle.

¹⁴⁵ Jeremy Bentham, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, ed. John Bowring, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: William Tait, Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1843), 500.

that given all the evidence available, it does not seem there is any objective, valid, ontological explanation for moral obligations. Bentham may just be honest in his assessment of any non-theistic worldviews that do not have a competent authority behind their assertions. It is certainly desirable to have an agreed set of moral obligations, and societies do certainly seem to function this way, but does this correspond to the claims of Utilitarianism? Wanting or wishing for something does not make it so, whether natural or supernatural. Even Bentham echoes this when he declares,

In proportion to the want resulting from the want of rights, a reason exists for wishing that there were such things as rights. But reasons for wishing there were such things as rights, are not rights; — a reason for wishing that a certain right were established, is not that right — want is not supply — hunger is not bread. That which has no existence cannot be destroyed — that which cannot be destroyed cannot require anything to preserve it from destruction. Natural rights is simple nonsense: natural and imprescriptible rights, rhetorical nonsense, — nonsense upon stilts. But this rhetorical nonsense ends in the old strain of mischievous nonsense: for immediately a list of these pretended natural rights is given, and those are so expressed as to present to view legal rights. And of these rights, whatever they are, there is not, it seems, any one of which any government can, upon any occasion whatever, abrogate the smallest particle.¹⁴⁶

As indicated here by Bentham, natural rights, according to him, do not actually exist.

Furthermore, wanting something to be true does not make it so. As this project is applying specific criteria to evaluate claims and evidence, this is an effort to demonstrate what is reasonable and supported by the evidence, not simply what one wants. Although Utilitarianism strives for the greater good, it is submitted that as Mill and Bentham elucidate this view, it is not internally logically consistent with the reality of the moral obligations, and individual rights, that seem to be present in the world. This will be further proven through the next evaluative criteria of coherence.

¹⁴⁶ Bentham, *Works of Jeremy Bentham*, 501.

Coherence

Many of Utilitarianism's proponents make a valiant effort to be coherent. A clear premise of this argument is the greater good for the aggregate of society, and on that front, it seems a coherent worldview.¹⁴⁷ However, the coherence and consistency of this view come apart when subjective criteria are applied to what should be an objective set of facts. Bentham points to a subjective, and arguably, changing category to assess and reject individual rights. This standard sets apart that whatever possible rights may exist are contingent on the circumstances of society, Bentham posits:

In proportion as it is right or proper, i.e., advantageous to the society in question, that this or that right - a right to this or that effect - should be established and maintained, in that same proportion it is wrong that it should be abrogated: but that as there is no right, which ought not to be maintained so long as it is upon the whole advantageous to the society that it should be maintained, so there is no right which, when the abolition of it is advantageous to society, should not be abolished.¹⁴⁸

One can, without too great of reasoning, see the implications of this and the host of questions that arise. Clearly, a society's circumstances will change over time. Furthermore, this begs the question of who within society decides the rights to be maintained. Moreover, it is worth noting Bentham's language of *right* and *ought*, but with no objective, universal, authority to support this. Linville deduces:

And, of course, the court of appeal will be found in the Principle of Utility. But whether rights are extended or abrogated will be determined by the circumstances of utility, and this is always with a view to the advantage of society. There cannot be "imprescriptible" rights precisely because a concern for social utility may call for their abrogation. If there were such rights, then there would be occasions on which it is morally inappropriate to calculate consequences. But if the Principle of Utility is true, then it is always appropriate

¹⁴⁷ See pp. 8-10 above.

¹⁴⁸ Bentham, *Works of Jeremy Bentham*, 501.

so to calculate. Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the benefit of society.¹⁴⁹

One sees here that rights are based on the benefit of society and individuals would be subject to this rule or hope that the circumstances are in their favour. Mill did put forth an argument for individual rights or justice and the case that people do have a claim for individual rights. The justification for this comes back to what has been referred to as the bank account theory and Mill's reasoning of 'general utility.' This simply does not seem to be enough as an explanation to the authority required for obligations to be obligations, or for these to cohere with what seems clearly evident in reality. It seems to claim it is best to be good to each other in a general sense with no authoritative reason why, except to hope others will follow this, so long as it is best for the aggregate of society.

In the current climate of society, there is arguably an unprecedented outcry for individual rights and autonomy. It is not the scope of this project to address these individual demands, but suffice it to say, that the Utilitarian ethic, in some respects, would be a welcome adoption since many of these demands are conceivably not good for the aggregate of society. Be that as it may, truth and reason is what is admirable to strive towards and accept. If a worldview is incorrect, or does not correspond to reality, it should not be adopted. Another point demonstrating the lack of coherence stems from the disparity between something maximizing utility and it being fair. Universal, objective moral obligations with a competent authority behind them can answer the dilemma of both the aggregate and an individual. Linville rightly points to this, "The worry is that there appears to be no necessary connection between an action's maximizing utility and its being fair or just. It is sometimes urged that the consistent utilitarian would be in a position of

¹⁴⁹ Linville, "The Moral Argument," 422, Kindle.

justifying, say, slavery, the torture of innocent persons, or even rape should the circumstances of utility call for it.”¹⁵⁰ This goes against what nearly all people would agree is acceptable. It is accepted that the ‘average’ Utilitarian would likely contest this point, arguing that rape is not in the best interests of society. They might submit that individual harm is not conducive to general human flourishing, considering the whole host of societal problems created by a culture that would condone rape. It is with wholehearted agreement that such cruelty is unacceptable and abhorrent.

Given the last point, consider this thought experiment, although it is somewhat *reductio ad absurdum*, it is only for the sake of argument. Imagine a terrible virus ravages the globe and decimates a huge majority of the population, threatening human extinction. Fortunately, there are some intelligent scientists still alive, and they set to researching a cure. They collect samples from victims and the living, and they learn there is a select set of males and females who have a genetic marker that provides them immunity to this virus. Furthermore, they discover that if they procreate with anyone of the opposite sex from this select group the offspring will also be immune. Obviously for genetic diversity, the scientists recommend that this select group should procreate with a variety of individuals for the perpetuation of humanity. While this is occurring, the scientists will commit to working on a synthetic cure and the possibility of alternate fertilization methods, but this will be a long process. With these actions the scientists are confident humanity will survive, but without them humanity surely will be extinct soon. Consider now that some or many of the select group do not wish to engage in the prolific and immoral scenario the scientists are suggesting, and they refuse to cooperate. Two questions worth considering are: (1) Is it morally right for the government to attempt to force the scenario

¹⁵⁰ Linville, “The Moral Argument,” 424-425, Kindle.

by law, essentially deeming rape legal in these dire circumstances, and (2) Would it be right to condone rape or overlook it? Both these actions would be for the general utility of society and for the flourishing of humanity. It seems likely most people would say rape is wrong under any circumstances. This scenario adds a difficult dynamic where Utilitarianism, it seems, clearly indicates what *should* be done under the circumstances is what is best for society. Linville aptly summarizes, “Nevertheless, I maintain that any and all versions of utilitarianism worthy of the name must fail to account for that portion of commonsense [sic] morality that we are holding up as a criterion: that individuals have moral standing.”¹⁵¹ In order to be charitable and not inflammatory, it should be worth noting that Linville does acknowledge that a correct understanding of Utilitarianism would not have any of these terrible consequences, but he maintains the preceding position regarding individual standing.

It must be emphasized, there is an important deficiency regarding individual worth and dignity in Utilitarianism. As noted above, this worldview is laced with moral language about *the good* and *the right*, but truly individuals have no standing. Given the reality of the evidence in the world and the way the world is, this view seems incorrect. Baggett and Walls argue:

We must not lose sight of the logic of the utilitarian analysis. The principal concern of utilitarianism is to maintain the greatest possible net pleasure or satisfaction. And this net pleasure is not for the sake of any individual persons. Rather, the reverse is true; any regard for the individual is ultimately out of a concern for increasing net utility. Utilitarianism, so this argument goes, fails to accord moral standing to individuals, and thus fails to safeguard human dignity and worth.¹⁵²

Baggett and Walls indicate that an argument to this position would be “...that the traditional utilitarian can distinguish between *standards* and *decision procedures* while insisting that

¹⁵¹ Linville, “The Moral Argument,” 425, Kindle.

¹⁵² Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 122, Kindle.

utilitarianism should be construed more along the lines of the former than the latter.”¹⁵³ They of course go on to indicate that we humans are poor calculators of these decisions and that humans would likely make things worse. History of course would affirm this repeatedly. The glaring deficiency here is that despite the moral language, and the goal of the greater good, this view does not give any standing for the individual or for individual dignity and worth. Linville points this out when considering Mill’s account of rape being ‘generally injurious’, that this, even though sounding like it is considerate of individual rights and well-being, is in fact more concerned with the well-being of humans generally rather than an individual.¹⁵⁴ For the reasons cited thus far, it is argued that Utilitarianism does not meet the standard of coherence.

Factual Adequacy

This brings the analysis to the final two categories of factual adequacy and existential viability.¹⁵⁵ Remember, factual adequacy is if the worldview’s claims match with reality. The above information has demonstrated that Utilitarianism does not, as a whole, match with reality and how humans view and operate in the world regarding objective moral obligations.

Utilitarianism is most definitely not a view to be simply discarded as it has definite usefulness within ethics, since there are numerous decisions a whole host of persons, such as governments, make concerning the greater good at a variety of levels. Utilitarianism can be *one* of the factors to consider in such decisions. Furthermore, there are also Utilitarians who are theists, and this view does hold some claim on moral obligations, but the goal here is to determine what overall is

¹⁵³ Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 122, Kindle.

¹⁵⁴ Linville, “The Moral Argument,” 425, Kindle.

¹⁵⁵ See pp. 8-10 above.

the better explanation, given all the evidence available, and Utilitarianism falls short of a fulsome explanation.

Existential Viability

Like RNR, this view on the surface would be quite livable. On the surface, it makes many decisions much simpler since its focus is on general utility for the aggregate of society. Several scenarios come to mind that could be simplified if an individual's rights and what is fair are not accounted for. Considered this way, this view is not existentially viable, especially considering some of the examples and information provided above. It is emphasized that this view is not without merit or use, but it clearly does not measure up to the criteria for analysis. This concludes the analysis of Utilitarianism and brings this project to the final view to be considered, Theism.

Theism

Any one of these four worldviews could be a project in and of themselves, and now theism will be held to the same criteria of analysis.¹⁵⁶ Throughout this project, several theistic points have been made in relation to objectors and in building the arguments surrounding the ontology of objective moral obligations. A great deal more could be covered in the realm of the moral argument. As far as theism goes, the other two major monotheistic positions, Judaism and Islam, will not be touched on in this work. Theism refers to the belief in a loving, personal, and just God who necessarily possesses all the omni-attributes of the Anselmian God. Saint Anselm

¹⁵⁶ Although throughout this project the writer has referred to "Theism", that the specific view this writer holds to, and argues has the better explanation to account for objective moral obligations, is Christian Theism. Theism in general is argued in this project since to argue for Christian Theism may require the test of biblical authenticity and reliability to then select between the Worldviews. It is this test that would assist in differentiating between the major theistic views of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

constructed an argument where he described God as the greatest conceivable being. Anselm posited:

Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality.¹⁵⁷

The greatest of all possible beings would contain all perfect attributes. For theism one can learn more about God's qualities from the Bible such as perfectly good, loving, merciful, etc.

However, Anselm further described God in the following manner:

But that which is greatest of all, and through which exists whatever is good or great, and, in short, whatever has any existence—that must be supremely good, and supremely great, and the highest of all existing beings.¹⁵⁸

It is from Anselm's argument and biblical material one can formulate the Anselmian God of classical theism. Finally, Alvin Plantinga further elucidates the concept of a maximally great being:

God doesn't just happen to be a greatest possible being; He couldn't have been otherwise. Perhaps we should make a distinction here between greatness and excellence... Then it is plausible to suppose that the maximal degree of greatness entails maximal excellence in every world. A being, then, has the maximal degree of greatness in a given world W only if it has maximal excellence in every possible world. But maximal excellence entails omniscience, omnipotence, and moral perfection. That is to say, a being B has maximal excellence in a world W only if B has omniscience, omnipotence, and moral perfection in W—only if B would have been omniscient, omnipotent, and morally perfect if W had been actual.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Sidney Norton Deane with Saint Anselm, *The Major Works of Anselm of Canterbury: Proslogium; Monologium; An Appendix In Behalf of the Fool, by Gaunilon; and Cur Deus Homo* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1939), 8, Logos.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 42-43, Logos.

¹⁵⁹ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), loc. 1200-1207, Part II, section C., part 8, Kindle.

With some additional understanding of the Anselmian God of classical theism and his attributes this will assist in the analysis.

Regarding objective moral obligations, the clear line of argument being pursued is that God is responsible for the ontology of moral obligations and for the moral law for that matter. Again, one need not believe in or follow God to be considered a good person, to be able to advance the moral law or obligations or know right and wrong. To begin interrogating theism as the other three views, it is important to remember that this view includes version of Divine Command Theory (DCT) in relation to the deontic part of morality. DCT will be addressed in the chapter 3. The view of DCT put forth is that moral value is not commanded by God, but rather it is inherent in our nature being the *imago dei*. The DCT is specifically attributed to the deontic nature of morality, which refers to those things that God commands should be done and those things he prohibits. This addresses the Euthyphro dilemma objections, also covered in chapter 3. As theism is interrogated, it will become clear: When it comes to objective moral obligations and duties, these require grounding or authority because without that, these fall prey to the same objections made by our interlocutors as to subjectivity and arbitrariness. Furthermore, theism provides a better explanation for these objective moral obligations.

As covered in this project, common responses to the foundation of morality have been that these obligations evolved, society decides, they are anything that promotes the flourishing of sentient creatures, they are whatever is best for the aggregate of society, or they are an illusion, to name a few. As the analysis has demonstrated these objections are not correct, or at least not wholly correct. Evans addresses the question accurately, “However, to say that we can gain knowledge of morality by reflecting on social practices does not mean that those social practices can adequately *ground* morality. What is lacking is an account of the *authority* of the norms that

are embedded in our social practices.”¹⁶⁰ It is the familiar theme that continually forces its way to the surface like a balloon held under water; there is a requirement for the authority of the moral obligations and duties people see and expect of others, and of themselves, in the world. Some people may wish to avoid the truth of this, or may be indifferent to it, but the question to anyone who thinks about this seems unavoidable. Just because people have some of the reasons above that without deep thought may subjectively satisfy, this does not mean these beliefs are necessarily true. Evans posits, “Even if the fact that I find certain norms embedded in the social practices of my culture gives me a prima facie reason to think they are genuine norms, this would hardly be an explanation of the authority of those norms.”¹⁶¹ Theism can offer a better explanation of the ontology and authority of objective moral obligations.

Internal Logical Consistency

Often objections against theism encapsulate the idea that theism, and its supporting materials such as the Bible, are full of contradictions. Biblical inerrancy is no where near the scope of this work, but this objection applied to moral obligations is the heart of this project. Often objections such as this are indirectly aimed at arguments for theism, arguments such as the moral argument. However, theism provides an internally logically consistent expression of the ontology and authority of moral obligations. The claims made here are grounded in the impeccable character of an Anselmian God possessing all the omni-attributes typically ascribed to him. It is stipulated, for the sake of argument, God’s character is perfect in every way, and as such, his commands are good and right. It is argued there is a separation of moral value and

¹⁶⁰ Evans, *God and Moral Obligations*, 49.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

dignity from the deontic nature of morality. This will be further covered in chapter 3 when the special objection of the Euthyphro dilemma is answered.

Some of the objections on this position are ad hominem attacks on God's character. For example, the problem of evil is often used to impugn God's perfectly impeccable character. This objection certainly warrants analysis, but for what has been presented in this project it is at least reasonable that theism offers an internally logically consistent position that sustains itself and those who follow it. The argument of God issuing abhorrent edicts is a misunderstanding of the character of God, as well as the answer to the Euthyphro. Evans elucidates this,

...it is only the commands of a God who is essentially good that can create moral obligations...Although the goodness of what God commands does not by itself make those acts obligatory, God's goodness puts a constraint on what can be morally obligatory. The good itself cannot be determined by God's commands, since it is the good that motivates and provides the point of those commands.¹⁶²

Some would argue if one does not believe in God, then what is being posited is they are not good people or cannot apprehend moral obligations. This could extend further to those who have never heard of God. This confuses moral epistemology with ontology. This project has taken a moral realist position, but suffice it to say, it has been plainly indicated that the claim here is that belief in God is not required to be qualified by society's standards as a good person who fulfills moral obligations. Both the atheist and the theist can be qualified by society's standards as good people who fulfill objective moral obligations. Consider for instance Harris or Wielenberg. Clearly from an assessment of their work and watching their debates they seem to be morally upstanding people. The same could be said of one who has not heard of God. All people, from the view of the theist, are made in the *imago dei*, and as such, the moral law is *imprinted or written on their hearts*. It is not at all surprising that people of varying beliefs still

¹⁶² Evans, *God and Moral Obligations*, 62.

fulfill moral obligations and duties, as society would expect, and that cohere with God's commands. Baggett and Walls address this:

Some have argued that inferences to such a God's existence are undermined by the fact that plenty of people from an array of worldviews are able to grasp moral facts clearly. We have argued to the contrary, however, that such nearly universal moral insight doesn't at all detract from the possibility that God is the ontological ground of morality, because the way of knowing goes in one direction, while the way of being goes in another (meta-ethical distinction). Similarly, the necessity of certain moral facts and their resulting inability to be changed doesn't rule out their dependence on God, because we can and must distinguish between dependence and control and between necessity and aseity (ontological distinction). This still makes some divine commands difficult to square with inviolable moral intuitions, but not impossible, while others are flat impossible (epistemic distinction).¹⁶³

If the God of theism is the impeccable God as described in the Anselmian fashion, and the deontic aspect of morality of his commands are a result of and in alignment with his perfectly good character, then what theism contends is not internally logically inconsistent. Objectors may disagree or not like this conclusion, but it is not illogical or inconsistent. One is on good ground that theism, on the claim of objective moral obligations, is certainly internally logically consistent.¹⁶⁴

Coherence

Groothuis qualified that for something to be coherent a set of "premises or concepts must be consistent and in agreement with one another...the essential propositions of a worldview being tightly interrelated and conceptually linked."¹⁶⁵ Consider the abductive argument for moral obligations:

1. It seems more likely than not that objective moral obligations are real.

¹⁶³ Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 199, Kindle.

¹⁶⁴ See pp. 8-10 above.

¹⁶⁵ Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, loc. 513-514, ch. 3 heading "Criteria for Worldview Evaluation", Kindle.

2. Theism offers a better explanation than atheism for the realness of objective moral obligations.
3. Therefore, there is some reason to think that God exists.¹⁶⁶

This argument is sound and coherent.¹⁶⁷ This work has been addressing objections to the theistic view of moral obligations and it is submitted that the refutations and answers are at least rational and coherent. Ultimately, it is up to an individual if they find these convincing. Notwithstanding, reality demonstrates that people see and expect certain duties and obligations to be performed by others and themselves. Some may dispute this assertion, but it seems that to do so is to be intellectually dishonest. If a person were to strike an objector in the face with no reason or provocation, this person most certainly would cry out for the wrong done or for justice. Consider the following brief thought experiment. If you were at a beach and from a distance saw a person drowning in the water. You observe bystanders clearly seeing and recognizing the individual as being in distress and drowning. Nearby there are all the necessary tools and equipment to assist the person. Most people would expect that any one or all these people who saw the person in distress, barring any disabilities or physical incapacities that prohibited them, has a duty to assist the individual in distress. This is because humans have inherent value, and this combined with God's command to love your neighbour grounds this duty to assist in rescuing the person in distress. There is, as argued, clearly a moral obligation here. Nonetheless, non-theistic views try to, and can make it part of the way, but they cannot provide an *ultimate* and *final* authority for moral obligations. In this last example at the beach one can certainly argue that it is the interests of human flourishing that can motivate people to save the individual, but one can also argue on

¹⁶⁶ These premises as argued were based of the work of Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, Kindle. This argument is based on the work of David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls although not expressly stated in this manner in the book. Their argument is: 1. Objective moral duties exist. 2. The best explanation for such duties is God. 3. Therefore, one can infer that God exists, or at a bare minimum this aspect of morality gives some reason to think God exists.

¹⁶⁷ See pp. 8-10 above.

an extreme view this could be a case of natural selection and will assist in decreasing the surplus population, thereby benefiting the aggregate of humanity. This is abhorrent, but on a worldview that is chance, plus matter, plus time, people are left in a system that requires a mechanical explanation, but there are no ultimate explanations in a materialistic view. Even the argument of human flourishing fails since that would presuppose a purpose, or teleology, to humanity.

Linville declares how theism rises to answer this:

The most ultimate explanations - including an explanation of why we observe lawlike relations that obtain among physical things - are teleological in nature because the world exists due to the creative activity of God. On theism, teleological explanations are irreducible and more basic than mechanistic explanations. And the justification for taking them as irreducible in this way is found precisely in the resulting implausibility and possible incoherence of attempting such reductions. We simply cannot explain all that calls for explanation unless there is a place for irreducible teleology in the scheme of things. For the theist, teleology factors in principally at the level of divine purpose and activity, but theism also offers an account of human persons that permits the irreducibility of human consciousness and purposes.¹⁶⁸

Linville rightly points out the other worldviews surveyed fail to account for the teleology present in nature. It seems evident that nature is suffused with teleology, and this extends to the lawlike moral obligations present, and to deny so seems to defy logic and our normative states of affairs. Moreover, the theistic explanation is simpler than a naturalistic explanation. Richard Dawkins famously wrote, “Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose.”¹⁶⁹ Dawkins goes on to deny any design or purpose in our world, but this does not seem veridical. Although he provides a detailed explanation of his view, he supplements this with examples of things in the world that are designed. His objective seems to be that if there is no design and no purpose there is not a designer. On the other hand, Dawkins

¹⁶⁸ Linville, “The Moral Argument,” loc. 11846, 443, Kindle.

¹⁶⁹ Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (1986; repr., New York, NY: Penguin Books Inc., 2006), 1.

provides theories to explain for the appearance of design, but this still indicates a designer as he only pushes the question back one step. If there is design, and a designer, then there is hope for an authoritative and rational explanation for objective moral obligations. It is ironic to see on the copyright page of Dawkins' *The Blind Watchmaker* book are the following words, "The *moral right* [emphasis added] of the author has been asserted"¹⁷⁰ considering he argues that there is no good or bad.

Theism, on the other hand, does account for teleology and coheres with the philosophical and scientific concept that the simplest explanation is most often the correct one. Theism, in this regard, best explains the coherence of moral obligations and duties with the reality and the teleology that is abundantly evident all around us. Theism provides a better account, as Linville pointed out, for the existence of a personal God. This is important since God being personal accounts for human persons having inherent dignity and worth. Moreover, God personally chose to create and command *the good* and what is *right* as well as prohibit what is *bad* and *wrong*. Linville submits, "According to the theist, then, God is personal and is the source of all value so that the value of personhood is found in the fact that the metaphysically, axiologically, and explanatorily ultimate Being is a person."¹⁷¹ On theism, therefore, this argument has such great force and coherence. God's command to love your neighbor as yourself is rooted in the fact that humans, all humans, being made in the *imago dei*, are intrinsically valuable and are to be held in high esteem being the rational and moral, and morally obligated, beings they are. Linville declares, "But this is precisely the option that the theist embraces: God values human persons because they are intrinsically valuable. Further, they have such value because God has created

¹⁷⁰ Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*, copyright page.

¹⁷¹ Linville, "The Moral Argument," loc. 11846, 443, Kindle.

them after his own image as a Person with a rational and moral nature.”¹⁷² In maintaining a simple view of the essential argument of moral obligations, even if one does not want to agree or embrace the idea, the argument and support for it is at least coherent.

Factual Adequacy

It has been touched on that theism coheres with a better explanation for objective moral obligations that in the real world, and in argumentative form is coherent, and is veridical to what is present in our world given all the facts. It seems to be of the four evaluative criteria factual adequacy is where one could object the most strongly.¹⁷³ This is based on a purely materialistic, or methodological naturalistic view of the world. Such a view has also come to be known as scientism. James Porter Moreland, as noted previously, defines this as, “Roughly, scientism is the view that the hard sciences—like chemistry, biology, physics, astronomy—provide the only genuine knowledge of reality.”¹⁷⁴ Scientism makes a bold claim, and along with significant portions of the associated worldview, it is self-defeating. Consider the definition, it is a claim to knowledge that none of these hard sciences can prove. As pointed to earlier, Moreland noted the problem for scientism is, “...that science is descriptive, not prescriptive; science attempts to describe what is the case, but it cannot prescribe what ought to be the case. Thus, science must remain silent when it comes to normative laws and principles.”¹⁷⁵ When one considers some of the other views that assert that morality is an illusion or a social convenience, this does not seem to cohere to reality. This strong assertion serves the purpose of ridding people of moral

¹⁷² Linville, “The Moral Argument,” loc. 11846, 445, Kindle.

¹⁷³ See pp. 8-10 above.

¹⁷⁴ Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism*, 26, Kindle.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 156, Kindle.

knowledge, and the subsequent obligations, to the end of fulfilling individual desires or the quest for personal happiness over the good and the right. Yes, this is strong language, but the truth is, this is the end these views bear out, and this seems veridical in the world with greater frequency. Theism can offer hope with an explanation that is better given the evidence and normative situation. Although some of the secular views may claim that morality is an illusion, in reality the advocates of these views are some of the first to decry injustice and cruelty in the world. Many are quick to rid the world of moral knowledge when it suits them, but in truth many of their other words and deeds do not match this belief or claim. This is an example of them rising above their worldview. Dallas Willard et al declare, “Moral knowledge could be absent or disappear from life only if responsibility, and holding people accountable in the peculiarly moral manner, were to be absent or disappear. (The centrality of intention to law is only one persistent indication of this.) And that is not going to happen.”¹⁷⁶ As much as we can intellectually analyze and comprehend the assertions of some of the competing worldviews on moral obligations, it certainly does not fit with human behaviours, values, expectations, and language.

The claim that religion, Judeo-Christian religion, is responsible for much of the ethic and laws in society today is widely accepted. When one considers the factual adequacy of theism, there is solid ground here. If a person is truly on a quest for the truth, then one should objectively consider the claims put forth in this project. This requires setting aside subjective personal beliefs, bias, and dogmatic materialistic inclinations. Some struggle with theistic arguments for God’s existence, but the claim here is that the existence of the Anselmian God provides a better explanation for the ontological reality of objective moral obligations and prohibitions. This view

¹⁷⁶ Dallas Willard, *The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge*, ed. and completed by Steven L. Porter, Aaron Preston, and Greg A. Ten Elshoff (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), xxxi, Kindle.

is factually adequate when accounting for objective moral obligations. Throughout this work and the views examined, as well the examples considered for thought experiments; one thing that has clearly stood out is the fact of the *ought*. If there is an *ought*, then that equals a moral obligation. If morality is reduced to naturalistic views, and its proponents argue that naturalism can explain morality as the behaviours that best suit survival, one is faced with a worldview that tests only the physical. This cannot account for ontology, authority, or the why. This view, as has been demonstrated, contradicts itself. Robert Wright posits, “Human beings are a species splendid in their array of moral equipment, tragic in their propensity to misuse it, and pathetic in their constitutional ignorance of the misuse.”¹⁷⁷ Here Wright points out humans have moral equipment that serves people in a good way, but he also indicates how people tragically misuse it. This appears to be an accurate reflection on reality, but he goes on to submit, “Go above and beyond the call of a smoothly functioning conscience; help those who aren’t likely to help you in return, and do so when nobody’s watching. This is one way to be a truly moral animal.”¹⁷⁸ This sounds good, but Wright later in his work, appeals to a higher standard, almost of a transcendent nature. Then only a few lines later he details how clearly fortunate humanity was with a 50-50 chance of moral versus non-moral creatures. Wright elucidates:

Another antidote to despair over the ultimate baseness of human motivation is, oddly enough, gratitude. If you don’t feel thankful for the somewhat twisted moral infrastructure of our species, then consider the alternative. Given the way natural selection works, there were only two possibilities at the dawn of evolution: (a) that eventually there would be a species with conscience and sympathy and even love, all grounded ultimately in genetic self-interest; (b) that no species possessing these things would ever exist. Well, a (sic) happened.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Robert Wright, *The Moral Animal—Why We Are the Way We Are: The New Science of Evolutionary Psychology* (New York, NY: Pantheon, 1994), 12, accessed October 16, 2019, <https://epdf.pub/the-moral-animal.html>.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 261.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 261.

This begs the question of how a random, unguided process can account for the complex nature of moral obligations and the apparent reality that they have authority over people, beyond just survival, or filling a bank account. On theism, where there is a standard that transcends our reality, and a loving God who has commanded our obligations, or *the right*, and prohibited *the wrong*; this does seem to provide a better explanation of these, and the claims are factually adequate, putting aside other personal subjective dispositions.

If we consider moral obligations on naturalism and their chance development for survival, this reduces them to patterns of behaviour. On naturalism, or for science, this view can only be descriptive not prescriptive, and this does not appear to equate to moral obligations. This begs the question of their force and authority. Francis J. Beckwith and Gregory Koukl aptly point out the fact that one can be immoral without acting out a behaviour. They point to the act of planning out or conspiring to commit a violent act, “Indeed, it seems one can be immoral without any behavior at all, such as plotting an evil deed that one is never able to carry out. Morality informs behavior, judging it either good or bad; it’s not identical to behavior. Rather it is something deeper than habitual patterns of physical interaction.”¹⁸⁰ Morality informing our behaviour seems completely veridical with what most people would naturally experience and understand to be true of the obligations one performs and for what is expected of others. If moral obligations are reduced simply to patterns of behaviours, this does nothing to explain how people know right from wrong, good from bad, and ethical decisions from unethical. Beckwith and Koukl posit, “When morality is reduced to patterns of behavior chosen by natural selection for

¹⁸⁰ Francis J. Beckwith and Gregory Koukl, *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 161, Kindle.

the survival value, then morality is not explained; it's denied."¹⁸¹ Again, the importance of oughtness is evident and naturalism simply cannot answer this demand, and the question of why one ought to perform some moral action and why people ought to continue to perform those actions, remains insufficiently answered. Beckwith and Koukl succinctly point to this and the inherent appeal to a standard:

One of the distinctives of morality is its 'oughtness,' its moral incumbency. Assessments of mere behavior, however, are descriptive only. Since morality is essentially prescriptive—telling what should be the case as opposed to what is the case—and since all evolutionary assessments of moral behavior are descriptive, then evolution cannot account for the most important thing that needs to be explained: morality's 'oughtness.' One question really needs to be answered: Why shouldn't the chimp (or a human, for that matter) be selfish? The evolutionary answer might be that when we're selfish, we hurt the group. That answer, however, presumes another moral value, that we ought to be concerned about the welfare of the group.¹⁸²

A valuable point here is the presumption that there is an obligation to care for the group. On theism and the evidence put forth, there is a factually adequate explanation to ground the ontology of moral obligations; this is the inherent value of all human beings and a good God whose commands are good. Let us be reminded of the scientific and philosophical principle of Ockham's Razor, also known as the principle of parsimony or simplicity. This principle stipulates that assumptions or explanations for something must not be multiplied beyond necessity, leading to the conclusion that the simplest explanation should be accepted as correct. It appears the simplest explanation for the grounding of moral obligations is in God, the Anselmian God argued for in this work. Other explanations considered either lead to an infinite regress, deride human worth and dignity, or are self-refuting.

¹⁸¹Beckwith and Koukl, *Relativism*, 161, Kindle.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 162-163, Kindle.

Existential Viability

It seems, to an informed theist, this is a simple answer, in that theism certainly is livable and does not lead to philosophical doublethink.¹⁸³ As has been affirmed throughout this work, many of the interlocutors cited do not, by appearances, seem to be bad people, and it is clear belief in God is not necessary to be considered a good person as defined by society. Certainly, there are many atheists or people of other religions that appear to be eminently good, have good moral values, and carry out the moral obligations expected of them and that they expect of others. This is attributed to the understanding if people are in fact made in the *imago dei*, this should come as no surprise, as the moral law and a sense of *the good* and *the right* are to use the phrase, ‘written on their heart.’ Of course, many arguments could be leveled at the criterion of factual adequacy. For example, the atrocities of the Old Testament, the hypocritical behaviour of those who profess to be theists, errors of churches in how significant cultural issues have been handled, and probably the greatest of all, the problem of evil and suffering in the world considering a loving God. This list is not exhaustive, and it should be noted that theism can handle the questions, answer them, and welcomes them. Clearly, any one of these topics could be a work in and of themselves. There are logical and cogent answers to each one of these, and they do warrant some brief remarks. The reason being is these objections challenge the objective moral law and good of the good commands, from a good God.

In contemplation of the difficulties of some parts of the Old Testament, one must first be aware this is often read with today’s knowledge and eyes. The reality is, the Old Testament is an ancient document, although relevant, not written recently with the developments and state of current society. Per contra, one who diligently studies the text will be amazed how relevant it

¹⁸³ See pp. 8-10 above.

remains, and how it has outlived those who claimed it would become forgotten and defunct, but this work is not addressing biblical authenticity and reliability. Furthermore, many people who read the Bible are not aware much of the material is descriptive and not prescriptive. Just as people often instruct others by describing experiences they have had in life and what was learned from these experiences, many events in the Bible are “what not to do.” The connection to God’s commands and moral obligations is, just because something is contained in the Bible does not mean God is prescribing or condoning such a thing. To the contrary, the Bible is a rescue story and is progressive in nature. Most people who have lived for a significant amount of time can likely attest to observing the development and growth of people and cultures, but it has not been without pains and difficulties. The Bible lays out a plan and progression where God’s people progressively improved and rose above the cultures they were surrounded by. This applies to the progressive development of moral obligations and standards.

Another objection is hypocritical theists, whether historically or currently. This simply does not hold warrant, for the same could be said of any people group. Therefore, this is an ad hominem attack. The key point here is that one must measure a worldview, not by its abuses, but by what the worldview in fact affirms and teaches. Certainly, many people have committed terrible acts, all the while claiming some religious right to do so, but God would not condone this, nor is this taught. This writer has encountered theists who are not good representatives of theism, but this fact is not a weakness but a strength of this worldview. This bolsters the internal logical consistency, coherence, factual adequacy, and existential viability because theism expects this. This is the uniqueness of this theistic view in that there is a God that answers this problem and accounts for this. There is redemption available, and this fact makes this view become extremely existentially viable. This redemption does not require perfection to attain it, but it is

the embracing of this view that fuels a person towards it, although they will falter and fail at times. The errors of the church in dealing with societal issues falls into this category too, as people are fallible, as expected by theism, and the church is led by people. This is the importance of work such as this, as well as theology, philosophy, and open questioning and discussion. As old as the Bible is, people are still learning from it. Beckwith and Koukl provide four observations worth detailing:

1. Moral rules exist, but they do not have physical properties.
2. Moral rules are a type of communication from one mind to another. For this to occur one mind must give an imperative and another mind receives it.
3. Moral rules have a force we feel 'prior' to any behaviour; the incumbency or oughtness of moral obligations.
4. People feel a deep discomfort when clear and weighty moral rules are violated. This ethical pain makes us keenly aware we have done something wrong and deserve punishment.¹⁸⁴

These four observations give pause for thought and seem to correspond to reality. Beckwith and Koukl point to three options people are left with, "One: Morality is simply an illusion. Two: Moral rules exist but are mere accidents, the product of chance. Three: Moral rules are not accidents but are the product of intelligence."¹⁸⁵

The problem of evil is arguably one of the most common challenges to theism people make, given the claims of Christianity. This challenge is difficult not just for those outside of theism, but even for those within. There are two forms of this objection. The first is the logical problem and the second is the emotional problem. It is widely accepted that the logical problem has been largely answered, and this means the presence of evil and suffering in the world in the logical sense is not at odds with the existence of a good and loving God. Given the free will of sentient creatures in this world, this may well be the best of the possible worlds that could have

¹⁸⁴ Beckwith and Koukl, *Relativism*, 165-166, Kindle.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 167, Kindle.

been created to have the most possible good. For to have creatures with free will means that there must exist the possibility that they could chose wrongly. This argument, the problem of evil, also betrays itself in that the objector is assuming a moral standard of obligations and a moral law while also assigning value to creatures. This is typically asserted without providing an explanation for where this standard is derived. This brings us full circle back to the argument of this work, for on atheism—naturalism there really is no right or wrong. Nonetheless, this is a difficult problem, especially for someone not aware of the arguments and evidence that assist in answering this objection. This is especially true when one is amid crisis or pain that seems unnecessary. People oft do not think of the fact that humans are finite, and one of the points that eminently makes theism existentially viable is that it provides hope for something greater and something infinite. Considering the claims of theism and the eternity of God, this life is a small blip on the line of time and there is something greater beyond. The emotional problem of evil cannot be fully addressed in this work, but it can assist to gain some perspective on the eternal picture if a good God exists. This assists to provide a basis for the objective moral obligations commanded by a good God who is omniscient. Certainly, many people, including this writer, have endured suffering over their lifetimes; some that seemed senseless at the time but later resulted in good. There are many examples in the world of tragedies that occurred where people rose to the call of objective moral obligations for the good of humanity that might not have otherwise occurred.

If the Anselmian God exists, he provides a foundation for objective moral obligations, and he is omniscient and can providentially work in this world to rescue those who wish to be rescued, theism is existentially viable. Some may retort they do not want some cosmic dictator telling them what to do, but it is under the law and the objective moral obligations God issues

that provide true freedom. If humans abolished all laws that are enforced by police and society, one may have to think deeply if one would wish to live in such a world. People can look at recent history to see instances of the depravity of humans left to their own devices. In light of this, it would not take much hypothesizing to conclude that it is law, morals, and moral obligations that allow people to live freely and securely. Theism is not simply about rules and not living life but is much more than that. It is about living a life of purpose and fulfillment. It is about living in the truth. This is connected to moral obligations as on theism, living within this worldview and with the epistemological and ontological grounding of moral obligations, becomes eminently, existentially viable leaving personal beliefs and bias aside. This claim is grounded not in personal preference or desire, but what provides a better explanation of the evidence present in the world. Consider George I. Mavrodes' analysis of Bertrand Russell's view of the world. Russell still has influence in today's time, and his view coheres with some of the objectors expressed in this work. It is instructive, and it is worth quoting Russell at length for context:

That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins--all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.¹⁸⁶

Mavrodes provides three key points in analyzing the Russellian view of the world and moral obligations:

¹⁸⁶ Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship" in *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays* (1917; repr., Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Nobles Books, 1981), 41.

(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 activities, (2) Human life is bounded by physical death and each individual comes to a permanent end at his physical death, and (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.’¹⁸⁷

Russell points out, as Mavrodes aptly identifies, that on the view of not having a creator, our minds are the product of no mental entities. This is relevant for several reasons. One being, this begs the question of how something highly intelligent can come from non-intelligence, and furthermore, it contravenes much of what is visible in our world. That fact being that complex entities seem to be designed by something with intelligence. It follows then, that moral obligations and duties should also have some grounding beyond minds that are derived from, as Russell puts it, “accidental collocations of atoms.” Certainly, moral obligations on Russell’s view are quite an odd thing. Russell indicates as much on his view of net losses and gains, and this view is strikingly like some of the interlocutors covered in this project. Ultimately, Mavrodes submits a key insight here regarding what is now termed as the cooperation and social agreements essential to the flourishing of humanity. Mavrodes indicates that it is not that those in a “Russellian” world do not have moral feelings, for this is to be expected if we have minds. Rather, Mavrodes posits, “...it is rather the existence of moral obligations that is absurd.”¹⁸⁸ Mavrodes explains that, according to this naturalistic view, there is no doubt feelings can lead to one believing they have moral obligations and acting accordingly. There is a clear distinction to be had between feelings of obligations and actual obligations. Mavrodes concludes this line of thought, “Consequently, an ‘evolutionary’ approach such as this cannot serve to explain the

¹⁸⁷ George I. Mavrodes, “Religion and the Queerness of Morality” in *Philosophy and Religion: An Anthology*, 5th edition, ed. Louis P. Pojman and Michael Rea (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 2008), 580.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 582.

existence of moral obligations, unless one rejects my distinction and equates the obligations with the feelings.”¹⁸⁹ On Russell’s view, or the atheistic–naturalistic view, there is a struggle to ground moral obligations. The view is question-begging on several points, even on the problem of the suffering and evil in the world. Often this is posed to theism as the unanswerable question considering a loving God. Per contra, on theism perhaps this question in fact has some reasonable answers and in fact give strong reasons to believe in the existence of the impeccable God as described in this work.

Mavrodes indicates that Christianity describes the fallen nature of the world, but of one that will be redeemed.¹⁹⁰ This is not to say that the problem of evil is not still a difficult task for the theist to contend with. However, given naturalistic claims and the reality of the observable world, if there are all the obligations that have to do with what is best for human flourishing, this certainly does not cohere with naturalism. However, the evidence of moral obligations apparent in the worldview fits nicely with theism. Mavrodes concludes his piece with pointing out how on theism moral obligations are not so queer since, “...it provides a view of the world in which morality is not an absurdity.”¹⁹¹ He goes on with the second and final point:

...it perhaps suggests that morality is not the deepest thing, that it is provisional and transitory, that it is due to serve its use and then to pass away in favor of something richer and deeper. Perhaps we can say that it begins by inverting the quotation with which I began and by telling us that, since God exists, not everything is permitted, but it may also go on to tell us that, since God exists, in the end there shall be no occasion for any prohibition.”¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Mavrodes, “Queerness of Morality,” 582.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 586.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 586.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 586.

Mavrodes was referring to the famous quote by Dostoevsky (*The Brothers Karamazov*, 1880) “if there is no God, then everything is permitted.” Mavrodes’ conclusion is poignant, in that this is the claim of theism. It goes beyond just simple moral obligations; it is about the development of virtue and the sanctification of an individual to a point where moral obligations and prohibitions are no longer required. Russell’s view is nihilistic and offers no hope, but the fact that a view offers hope is not a reason to embrace it. People should pursue truth and embrace the truth of any matter because it is the truth. However, the hope offered by theism makes it highly existentially viable.

Another important distinction to point out is the *ought* implication in the world. As covered in this work, it seems as though things like moral obligations at least seem to exist. This implies there are things people ought to do and ought not to do. The reasonable implication seems to be if there are actions people ought to do, then, people can do these things. Humans often strive for, or expect, perfection, but this does not seem attainable. People often fall short. When considering the four views analyzed, theism can provide a better explanation for the ability to be able to carry out these actions. Clearly, it goes without saying that perfection is not attainable, or at least not yet, but people still strive for it and become frustrated when falling short. Moral obligations seem to have authority on us and affect how people operate in the world.

Baggett and Walls characterize this fittingly:

If morality makes us aware of a demand on our behavior, character, intentions, and motivations beyond what we can accomplish through our best effort, perhaps this feature of morality provides additional evidence about the sort of explanation required to account for morality. Note that a full-fledged moral account has to encompass matters of character and virtue, not just a consideration of moral behaviors. Morality pertains not only to what we do, but to who we are.¹⁹³

¹⁹³ Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, loc. 4257, ch. 7 “The Moral Gap,” Kindle.

This further affirms that if people have moral obligations, and people certainly seem to be aware of these obligations, it most certainly does demand an answer as to what the basis or grounding for this authority is. As noted, people always seem to fail at achieving the standard one should or would like, and this would lead one to question if this is out of reach. Since it seems reasonable that there is *the ought*, it most certainly should not be out of reach. With some reflection, most people can reasonably provide examples of individual moral and virtuous progress, as well as societal moral progress. It seems reasonable to suggest humanity is not where it should be, and although in some respects there has been great moral progress, there are other areas where there has been moral decline in the pursuit of virtues and moral obligations. Baggett and Walls posit, “If morality requires of us what we cannot do, however, then we might complain. Ought implies can, after all, an axiomatic principle of deontic logic. So if morality is beyond our reach, exceeding our natural capacities, then perhaps it does not carry the authority we thought it did. If we cannot live up to the standard, then it is not the case that we ought to.”¹⁹⁴ This emphasizes the importance of why the ontological foundation of moral obligations is so vital. If naturalistic or societal agreements cannot answer the tough questions of where the authoritative and normative reasons for our moral obligations are grounded, and it seems that possibly the *can* is not achievable, it raises the issue as to whether this is beyond people’s reach.

When considering what provides a better explanation for moral obligations, and if it is at least a possibility the impeccable Anselmian God exists, then it is reasonable to assume that his nature grounds moral obligations. If this is possible, then an explanation exists that God can assist in providing the resources for becoming virtuous, and in achieving this higher standard.

Baggett and Walls declare:

¹⁹⁴ Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, loc. 4290-4296, ch. 7 “The Moral Gap,” Kindle.

On the other hand, if such resources exist, there may be a duty to use them, and neglecting them might be culpable. The operative deontic principle, then, when confronting the moral gap, might not be “ought implies can,” but rather “ought implies can with the help available,” and therefore we ought to seek that help. So, if naturalism does not offer enough resources to hold out the realistic hope for moral transformation, it does not follow that the high moral demand is unreasonable, but rather that naturalism itself may simply be inadequate to the task.¹⁹⁵

Considering this explanation, this aligns with the feelings of moral obligations, what one ought to do, and that one can do it with help. Furthermore, it aligns with the nature of human relationships and the love and beauty in the world. This again harkens back to Ockham’s razor and the simplest explanation. Returning to Baggett and Walls they beautifully surmise:

If God is the source and root of morality—in any fashion close to the way that we have depicted it here—then the tug of morality within us is less like a cold deliverance of reason, and more like a warm and personal invitation to come and partake, to drink from a brook whose water quenches our thirst in the most deeply satisfying way we can imagine. The voice of morality is the call of God to return to our only true and ultimate source of happiness. It’s not an overactive superego or a societally imposed joy-killing curfew, but an intimation of the eternal, a personal overture to run with rather than against the grain of the universe. It’s a confirmation of our suspicions that love and relationship have not just happened to bubble up to the top of the evolutionary chain, reflecting nothing, but rather that they penetrate to the very foundation of all that is real. Reason and relationship, rationality and relationality, go hand in hand, and they weren’t merely the culmination of the elaborate process that enabled us to reflect about it all and inquire into the meaning of life; no, they were what began it all and imbued the process with meaning right from the start.¹⁹⁶

Baggett and Walls put this so well and they go on to correctly identify the relation of virtue theory to cohering with theistic ethics. The key is that when people consider ethics, they are relational, and theistic ethics are all the more relational as they are built on the foundation of a relational God. Baggett and Walls contend:

...ultimately, a true understanding of the human condition and telos reveals even more: that ethics must be understood relationally. It’s not a matter of following the rules; it’s not ultimately even a matter of finding forgiveness and being transformed into a state of

¹⁹⁵ Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, loc. 4290-4297, Kindle.

¹⁹⁶ Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 185-186, Kindle.

moral perfection. It's about relationship with the God whose triune nature enabled him to be a God of perfect love before any human beings were created.”¹⁹⁷

With this in mind, one can see that *ought* implies *can*, and *can* implies *with help*, and suddenly striving for perfection becomes a reality, although not in this world, but the process certainly begins here. This provides for another facet contributing to the efficacy of theism in relation to existential viability and coherence to the moral facts present in the world.

As proposed earlier, setting aside personal feelings and bias, and looking objectively at the claims of theism about the ontology of moral obligations, it is reasonable this view is existentially viable. Groothuis posits that for a worldview to be existentially viable one must not engage in philosophical hypocrisy. Objectively viewing the claims of the Anselmian God with all his *omni*-attributes and understanding God's divine commands in relation to the deontic portion of morality, it is clear the claims are rational, sound, and cogent. Moreover, theism provides a better and simpler explanation given all the evidence available, and this coheres to the principle of simplicity. Therefore, this worldview is not only existentially viable, but it meets all the four analytical criteria.

Atheism—Naturalism, Robust Normative Realism (RNR), Utilitarianism, and Theism have been subject to interrogation. Using the four criteria, theism has offered a better explanation for the foundation of objective moral obligations. Theism is more internally logically consistent, coherent, factually adequate, and existentially viable. When considering the Anselmian God of classical theism, and that his commands are in alignment with his impeccable and perfectly good nature, this provides internal logical consistency for the foundation of objective moral obligations of the deontic variety. Furthermore, since objective moral obligations seem to have

¹⁹⁷ Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 186, Kindle.

authoritative sway on people, and there seems to be a teleological nature to obligations, theism provides a coherent answer to account for these. It seems the simplest, and still reasonable, explanation is a good God, who is a competent authority that has provided moral value in humans as the *imago dei*. Therefore, it seems veridical that moral obligations have purpose and authority, and it follows there would be a commander and authority behind these that has established this transcendent, universal, and objective standard. Theism provides this explanation like no other worldview. When considering actions in the world, and that human language is suffused with *oughtness*, it is important to recognize the importance of this word. In many cases one ought to, or ought not, perform, or refrain from performing, an action implies a moral obligation. This seems to be true, and seems more than just a pattern of behaviour, or what is best for one's own DNA propagation or a societal agreement. Theism's account for this provides robust reasons as to the value in people as people. All these elements together provide an existentially viable case for theism. Theism provides a means for redemption and a way through the problem of *ought implying can*. If there is an ought then this implies can, and on theism, can means with help. This gives hope that the perfection people often strive for is attainable at some point. As has been evident, atheism—naturalism had many contradictory claims and does not provide an adequate account for the foundation of objective moral obligations. Sociobiological reasons, biological determinism, or chance and time do not provide competent, deep reasons for objective moral obligations. Utilitarianism and RNR make a better effort at answering some of the criterion, but they ultimately fall short of valuing the individual rights, or at providing a competent authoritative explanation for the foundation of objective moral obligations. The three competing worldviews seem also to employ some circular reasoning and special pleading to attempt to make a case. As such, theism provides a better explanation for the ontological

foundation of objective moral obligations, and premises 7 – 10 of the abductive argument put forth.¹⁹⁸

This brings the analysis of the four views to a conclusion. It is important to engage in discussion and dialogue to thoughtfully consider other views and challenge one's own position. As Feser declared the importance of pursuit of what is true as an essence of humanity, the importance of analyzing these others views in relation to their explanation of the existence and authority of objective moral obligations cannot be overstated. If one of these views had an adequate view this would detract from the theistic explanation of moral obligations and the broader moral argument. However, as noted, there is a recurring objection that the ontology of moral obligations encounters. That is the Euthyphro dilemma, and this leads to Divine Command Theory (DCT) as has been briefly noted above, and this is covered in chapter 3.

Chapter 3

Euthyphro Dilemma

The Euthyphro Dilemma (ED) is an objection often utilized by atheists to call into question God's character and thereby undermining his existence since dilemmas, by their nature, provide two choices, and neither are acceptable. It is critical to address the ED and DCT. If the ED challenge is successful, it undermines the objectivity of moral obligations. Furthermore, if the character of God is undermined, as this objection attempts, it seems that either moral obligations exist independent of God or God could be capricious and arbitrary. If the character of the Anselmian God argued for in this project is undermined by the ED then this undermines those critical moral facts and tenants of authoritative universal, objective moral obligations that

¹⁹⁸ See p. 7 above.

seem veridical. It will be shown that the Euthyphro Dilemma is not a true dilemma. There is a third option that is the solution. The Dilemma also reveals a misunderstanding of the character and nature of God and his commands.

The Euthyphro Dilemma is one which was written by Plato involving a conversation between Socrates and Euthyphro written in 380 B.C. The discussion takes place at court and centres around defining piety or virtue. The question or dilemma that Socrates puts to Euthyphro—and that has become the challenge to theism and divine command theorists—is whether what is right is commanded by God because it is right, or because God commands something makes it right. In the dialogue, Socrates submits, “The point which I should first wish to understand is whether the pious or holy is beloved by the gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved of the gods.”¹⁹⁹ The challenge to theism from this dilemma stems from its two horns, the first being that it is God’s commands that determine what is good and conversely what God prohibits is then determined to be bad. The second horn of the dilemma places goodness as independent of God, therefore, God’s commands are good only because *the good* is already so separate of him. The first horn is in alignment with a “voluntarism” or “pure will” theory of the good and the second horn with a “nonvoluntarism” or “guided will” theory of the good.²⁰⁰ On the one hand, the typical challenge is that God’s commands are arbitrary, and he could have commanded heinous acts of violence to be good. Intuitively, this seems vicious to think of rape or torture to be good. On the other side of the dilemma, *the good*, or morality, being independent of God is wrong on classical theism since it calls into question the Anselmian view of God, and his omni-attributes, that being the greatest conceivable being. The Anselmian view

¹⁹⁹ Plato, *Euthyphro*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (A Public Domain Book, 2012), loc. 246-247, Kindle.

²⁰⁰ Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 33, Kindle.

of God would entail characteristics such as all-loving, all-good, all-powerful, all-knowing, just, generous, omnipotent, omnipresent, etc.²⁰¹ Although this dilemma has presented a challenge to theism and has managed to stay as an ongoing topic of discussion for a significant time, it is in fact escapable. This dilemma would be considered by many as a false dilemma as its original form is presented as having only two alternatives, neither of which is without their negative implications, but there is arguably a solution or other alternative(s) to this dilemma. In fact, Richard Joyce points out that the manner with which philosophers formulate the argument today “...bears little resemblance to anything presented by Socrates.”²⁰² Furthermore, Joyce also points out that a typical dilemma is presented in the fashion of proposing two disjunctives, both of which are assumed to lead to undesired consequences. Joyce submits this is how many present the Euthyphro dilemma, but in fact, Socrates presents Euthyphro a disjunctive choice and is able to attain his assent to one of the disjunctives and proceeds on from there with his reasoned argument giving little treatment to the other.²⁰³ Consider this dilemma: A loaded passenger train racing down the tracks. Ahead is a split in the tracks. Part of the way down the tracks, there are people bound to the tracks. To the right are three people and to the left there is one. There is no stopping the train and you have control of the lever to choose which way the train will go. Neither option is attractive making this a real dilemma. One would strive to choose the least bad option. Despite this interesting point, the fact is that the Euthyphro is presented now as a

²⁰¹ Deane with Saint Anselm, *Major Works of Anselm*, Logos. Specific page numbers were not cited for the characteristics as Anselm develops these in the different works and throughout the argument and responses. Also, see above p. 75-76 in this work.

²⁰² Richard Joyce, “Theistic Ethics and the Euthyphro Dilemma” in *Journal of Religious Ethics* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2002), 50, accessed March 21, 2018, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0001283067&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 50.

dilemma and a challenge to theism, and because of its persistence, it requires consideration to assist those struggling with it.

Considering the interlocutors of theistic arguments, many utilize this dilemma and provide apparent sound argumentation or assertions in support of it. For example, the materialist may use Euthyphro to point out that although their position may not be able to explain all aspects of their worldview, such as objective moral values or duties, the Euthyphro serves to demonstrate that the theist too, has little more to offer. Victor Reppert submits,

We can see this typology at work in responses to the argument from objective moral values. Materialist critics of the moral argument can argue that there is really no objective morality, they can say objective morality is compatible with materialism, or they can use arguments such as the Euthyphro dilemma to argue that whatever we cannot explain about morality in materialist terms cannot better be explained by appealing to nonmaterial entities such as God.²⁰⁴

It appears, by this reference, that perhaps the materialist and the theist may be at a stalemate where neither can *prove* their position. It is for this reason that the assertion of the Euthyphro, although argued is not a true dilemma, does need to be analyzed and answered since it appears to present a barrier for many. Many objectors request proof, and evidence of a variety of forms is important. It is contended that it is difficult to *prove* anything to any degree of certainty, but one can formulate reasoned arguments that lead to logical conclusions and cumulatively lead to inferences to the best or a better explanation. In dealing with the contention of the Euthyphro, one needs to consider the first horn and the voluntarism or pure will theory. Using reasoned arguments and logical conclusions the Euthyphro will not pose a credible objection to theism.

²⁰⁴ Victor Reppert, "The Argument from Reason" in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 350, Kindle.

Euthyphro First Horn – Arbitrariness

Voluntarism, in the negative view associated to it, adopts the stance that it is God's will that makes an action good or right. In Euthyphro, this position is that of arbitrariness and that whatever God may choose would be good, such as the torture of innocent children. A skeptic may argue that if this is the case divine commands have no grounding to be relied on because God, if he exists, may well chose one day to make good bad and bad good. It is this divine capriciousness that causes many to question voluntarism or divine command theory, and if these do not hold weight, then theism can be called into question. This could be viewed as God's good nature or integrity being unreliable. For the sake of argument, it is posited the God of theism is a *good* God. 'Good' here would be the standard understanding of good, pure, loving, just, kind, etc., although linguistically the term good is used in a variety of ways. Here the sense of good would include all the attributes of classical theism or an Anselmian view of God, as noted above. Anselm thought of God as a necessarily existing being that he termed the greatest conceivable being. Anselm submitted, "God cannot be conceived not to exist.—God is that, than which nothing greater can be conceived.—That which can be conceived not to exist is not god. AND it assuredly exists so truly, that it cannot be conceived not to exist."²⁰⁵ The argument raised by the non-theist is: if God has arbitrarily decided or commanded what is right as people know it, then by what standard has he done so; and if he is God, then he could have chosen differently or could change. This challenges God's reliability, but also, how people are to know God's nature. However, if God did will to change our world so that child torture is right, that would not make it so, as intuitively people know this to be wrong. Wielenberg agrees that this scenario, where an omnipotent being would make torture to be right, is counterintuitive and suggests that power by

²⁰⁵ Deane with Saint Anselm, *Major Works of Anselm*, Logos., 8-9, Logos.

itself cannot change ethical claims.²⁰⁶ Thinking in human terms of power, Adolf Hitler, in his height of power and the resulting atrocities of the systematic extermination of Jews, Gypsies, and the disabled; was justified as right according to his view, but that did not make this claim true. It seems to be veridical that if he had won the war, this worldview would still be wrong.

If one allows for a non-theistic account, the issue of an explanation for moral obligations remains. As shown earlier, given the resources available, naturalism and a random process cannot explain moral obligations or their authority. It was noted earlier the inalienable rights each and every human has and are widely recognized throughout the world. It seems veridical with reality that these are objective, universal, and distinctively human rights. This is directly tied to moral obligations and duties, and the foundations of society. However, given no moral lawgiver that sets the standard by his own perfect and good nature, one is left with the issue at hand, of what the competent and authoritative explanation for these obligations, duties, and human dignity. As indicated above, there are theories and systems that do provide a basis for some moral obligations, and from outward appearances these seem logical and existentially viable. However, as noted in chapter 2, it was argued that theism was the only worldview analyzed that was able to adequately answer all four of the analytical criteria. It is when these other views are pressed to their limits that it seems logical that without a divine moral lawgiver, the establishments and dignity we afford ourselves are also arbitrary and baseless. Even theists can be guilty of this with some of their claims. This is not to say that the non-theist's claims are without merit and completely baseless. On the contrary, as indicated above there certainly are claims that have some basis to them and these seem logical. This is not to claim that unless one has belief in a divine moral lawgiver, that a person(s) cannot develop and improve absent this

²⁰⁶ Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue*, 42, Kindle.

belief in this transcendent lawgiver but grounding this absence of belief in our own selves becomes rife with contradictions, arbitrariness, and illusions. Abdu Murray posits, “Inalienable rights, therefore, must be grounded in a source beyond human authority. In this way, their existence doesn’t depend on human opinion, reasoning, or behavior. If they did, inalienable rights simply wouldn’t exist. And if inalienable rights don’t exist, then America itself is an illusion.”²⁰⁷ Murray makes a very bold statement here and although using rhetoric to make a point, it is recognized it is a logical fallacy to assert that if there were not inalienable rights then America would not exist.

Euthyphro Second Horn – Platonism

The second horn of the dilemma places *good* outside of God and he commands it because it is good. Essentially, this makes God into a glorified weatherman only letting humanity know what is good and right because this has already been decided. Clearly, for the classical theist, this does not seem veridical, since: how can something so critical be outside of God; and it raises many challenges to his being the greatest conceivable being. Such a concept makes goodness to be a Platonic form or concept and John Milliken rightly asserts, “If this is so, then morality does not really rely upon God’s commands at all. God might still bear *some* relationship to morality under such a view... Yet there would seem to be no reason why the facts upon which he relies should be unavailable to lesser agents.”²⁰⁸ Although, on the surface, it may seem that the fact of morality just existing, or as a “brute” fact, may seem to be acceptable; it is, in fact, not a

²⁰⁷ Abdu Murray, *Saving Truth: Finding Meaning and Clarity in a Post-Truth World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 83, Kindle.

²⁰⁸ John Milliken, “Euthyphro, the Good, and the Right” in *Philosophia Christi* 11, no. 1 (2009), 146, accessed April 26, 2018.

sustainable view. Wielenberg holds to a view of brute ethical facts with his defense of non-theistic moral realism, asserting that some ethical facts just form part of the reality that humanity lives in.²⁰⁹ Some difficult questions arise as to how morality, or the desirable moral traits, arose or came to be. A further challenge for the atheist or naturalist would be, as Milliken asserts above, to explain, if there is no intelligent agent behind these, then how do humans apprehend and assimilate these facts? However, this becomes an issue of moral epistemology rather than ontology. Craig identifies the argument of atheistic moral Platonism and posts three answers to this argument: (1) The idea of moral values in abstraction of people does not make sense, (2) there is no basis of moral duties or authority from a moral lawgiver to require moral duties on people, and (3) it is “fantastically improbable” that a blind evolutionary process could spit forth creatures that would correspond exactly to this abstractly existing realm of moral duties.²¹⁰ Moral epistemology is not within the scope of this work, but it is a highly important topic in relation to morality. In relation to the second horn of the Euthyphro, if *the good* is outside of God, then this becomes greater than him. Moreover, if there is not a moral lawgiver, it begs the question of the origin of the authority of moral obligations. Douglas Groothuis submits:

...how is moral obligation possible on the basis of impersonal, abstract and brute moral facts? Can we be obligated to a mere idea (which is not even in a mind)? The necessary and sufficient conditions for moral obligation depend on God... The very concept of moral law implies a lawgiver to whom we are obligated... Moral obligations make sense if understood as duties imposed by God.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ Erik J. Wielenberg, “In Defense of Non-Natural, Non-Theistic Moral Realism” in *Faith and Philosophy* 26, no. 1 (2009), 23-41.

²¹⁰ Craig, *On Guard*, loc. 2238-2250, 137-138, Kindle. It is understood this work is a popular level book, but Craig is a recognized scholar, and the points are still accurate and based on his other works as he has noted this material was developed from his academic level works.

²¹¹ Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, loc. 3796-3801, chapter 15 The Moral Argument for God, heading “Are moral values brute facts?”, Kindle.

So, on theism moral obligations point to a divine lawgiver, but consider moral obligations on naturalism. On this view some issues come forth, such as if moral obligations just exist as brute facts that humans have apprehended and adapted or, are they Platonic forms in a third realm that people discover and exemplify. If humans have evolved, on a purely naturalistic view, and along the way developed the objective, morally obligatory duties present in our world, the issue, seems to be at the forefront as to the explanation and the authority demonstrating the reliability and authority of these obligations. In chapter 2 the three non-theistic views were unable to adequately meet this standard. On this view development is random and unguided as well as biologically deterministic. However, the deontic nature of morality that is evident in the world is, as argued, objective. Decisions, thoughts, and the like, arising from people are subjective and go against the objectivity of these obligations. If moral obligations are objective, universal, and authoritative they require an authoritative explanation and must derive from an ultimate and competent lawgiver. This would be contrary to the second horn and not consistent with an Anselmian God. For now, the ground of the two horns of the Euthyphro have been covered and as noted above that this is not a true dilemma.

Euthyphro—Not a Real Dilemma

A dilemma is typically a problem that has two solutions, and neither is appealing. On the face this may not seem like a dilemma for Christians, as the solution rests in God's nature. *The good* cannot exist outside of God since God's character is necessarily perfectly good and therefore, God would not issue abhorrent commands since this is not in alignment with his perfectly good character and nature. To restate the objection: Is that which is right commanded by God because it is right, or because God commands something thus makes it right? The answer is neither. The third option is that God's nature is perfectly good and holy. He is, as Plato in his

dialogue the *Republic* famously termed, *the good*. One can understand this as God being goodness himself, and since he freely chose to create, and humans are created as the *imago dei*, then our moral obligations and doing *the right* is following his good nature or an imitation. When utilizing this objection, even skeptics of theism, for the sake of argument, will often admit that the God of theism holds the omni-attributes described earlier, since on another front, these form grounds to object to his existence. So, if, for the sake of argument, it is agreed the God theism ascribes to is perfectly good, as people understand good being loving, just, etc., then this dilemma fails on the second horn. Since if *the good* is simply like a weather report that God gives people, then *the good* on account of these facts exists outside of God. This cannot be as this is at odds with his nature of being all-good and all-powerful. The first horn fails due to *commands being arbitrary* which goes against God's character of being all-good and impassable in his nature. The thought that God could decide to change good to bad and bad to good if he decided to, seems to be reaching for ground that simply is not there. Given God's good nature, he simply cannot command something such as rape or torture to be good or right as this goes against his divine nature. Milliken expounds this:

Even if God cannot make torture *good* by declaring it to be so, is it anymore plausible to say he could make it *right*...One reason God could not make just anything right is that His commanding is constrained by His character. This may at first sound odd, for is God not supposed to be completely free in His actions? Indeed He is; yet acting freely is not acting randomly. Instead, God's free action flows from His divine nature. He would not therefore command just anything, but only what is consistent with who He is. It is usually held that God is perfectly good, and if so, His commands will be also.²¹²

Therefore, as Milliken has explained here, God's character and alignment with this nature, eliminates any arbitrariness to his commands, and a light is seen to guide one to the solution to Euthyphro. It is important to note Milliken's use of the word "constrained." Although it can be

²¹² Milliken, "*Euthyphro, the Good, and the Right*," 148.

understood the point he is driving at, it is submitted that a more appropriate phrase would have been that God commands are ‘consistent with’ or ‘in alignment’ with his divine character. This topic itself could be analyzed further, but the *constraints* on this work do not allow. To conclude the Euthyphro dilemma Milliken aptly summarized, “The theist can claim God’s commands *do* ultimately establish the right, but this does not make the right arbitrary. The reason why is that God’s commanding is constrained by His nature, and His very ability to be the source of moral obligation depends on His goodness.”²¹³

Divine Command Theory

The topic of Divine Command Theory (DCT) is of paramount importance in relation to moral obligations and to answering the Euthyphro dilemma. The deontic portion of morality is relevant to DCT, and in turn moral values is not something God commands but is inherent in humans being made in the *imago dei*. God’s commanding moral obligations and *the good* and *the right*, it is argued, are consistent with his impeccable good nature and character. This will provide the way through the Euthyphro.

DCT summarized is essentially that morality and moral obligations are dependent on God and his commands, and obedience to these commands, or obligations, is what is *the good* and *the right*. Right actions, or wrong acts, are based on God’s commands and his prohibitions.²¹⁴ It is argued that God’s commands are in alignment with his will and his perfectly good nature. John E. Hare offers a simple definition, “...what makes something morally obligatory is that God

²¹³ Milliken, “*Euthyphro, the Good, and the Right*,” 153. This author takes issue with the use of the phrase “constrained by his nature” preferring “consistent with his nature.”

²¹⁴ Michael W. Austin, “Divine Command Theory” in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ISSN 2161-0002, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/>, November 9, 2020.

commands it, and what makes something morally wrong is that God commands us not to do it.”²¹⁵ Not only is God’s nature good, but his will, and therefore his commands and objective moral obligations, is directed at *the good* and *the right*. Evans submits, “Some theory of the good must be presupposed, however, since an important part of what makes God’s commands binding is that God himself is essentially good and thus his commands are directed to the good.”²¹⁶ Evans goes on to explain that a relationship with God, for believers, allows for the concept of understanding the authority God has over what he has created. Furthermore, he does not deny that the claim of God having moral authority has not gone without challenge, but that many non-believers will admit that if God exists, he will have such authority.²¹⁷ The importance of this theory to moral obligations is fundamental on several fronts. It explains the authority of objective moral obligations and duties, it speaks to the apprehension of these duties, and further answers the Euthyphro dilemma to name only a few. At the outset, one must understand God’s commands are not arbitrary, and God has freedom and alternatives to chose from in his decrees. On this account, the connection between DCT and objective, universal moral obligations from a good and authoritative God makes the most sense. Evans aptly posits:

The claim is not that “moral obligation” and “divine command” have the same meaning, for clearly they do not. Rather, the claim is that the two expressions refer to the same reality. The primary reason for thinking this is the case is simply that viewing moral obligations as divine commands makes more sense of these obligations than any alternative account.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ John E. Hare, *God’s Command*, ed. Oliver O’Donovan (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1.

²¹⁶ Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*, 26.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

A few points are worth emphasizing here. If an authoritative good God exists then it seems that the simplest explanation, the one that makes the most sense, is in fact that his divine commands lead to objective, universal moral obligations. Next these obligations have distinct qualities in addition to being objective and universal such as they are connected to us being distinctively human, and they give strong reasons for action, or inaction. Evans again assists in this understanding as he elucidates important qualities of moral obligations and DCT:

1. ...they are objective, in the sense that they are the kind of thing that people can be mistaken about.
2. ...they provide compelling reasons of a distinctive kind for actions...
3. An account of moral obligation should not only explain why we have reasons to perform our moral duty; it should also explain why we should be motivated to do so.
4. ...an adequate account of moral obligation should help us understand the universality of morality...First, all humans are subject to the claims of morality. No one is so "special" that he or she gets a free pass and can ignore those claims. Second, some of our moral obligations extend at least to all human persons.
5. ...moral obligations can be objective in relation to human beliefs and emotions, since there will be a fact of the matter about whether God has given some particular command, as well as about the content of the command.
6. ...we can understand why moral reasons are overriding in character (Evans explains this in two senses for a person who understands DCT being overriding, and the understanding this is not the only reason for fulfilling commands since there is a moral and psychological understanding and satisfaction in doing right, or guilt for doing wrong).
7. ...we can understand why moral obligations are universal, in both senses identified above. All humans are God's creatures and thus all participate in the social relation that grounds moral obligations. All of them are thus subject to God's laws.²¹⁹

One can at least see the reasonable nature of DCT leading to authoritative and objective moral obligations that are distinctively human and universal. This leads to understanding the connection to relationships, moral satisfaction or guilt, which assists in explaining the social

²¹⁹ Evans, *God and Moral Obligations*, 29-32. See also, C. Steven Evans, *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God: A New Look at Theistic Arguments* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 132-136. This work also affirms the above qualities.

connection to moral obligations, be that to each other as people, or also, the vertical relationship of human to God.

As noted above, God's commands are aligned with his good nature. It is this fact that makes it *impossible* for God to issue abhorrent commands, such as making something like child abuse good or right. Some with a flawed understanding of God's nature, or attributes, or of a being who is 'pure actuality', may bristle at this and suggest an all-powerful being can do anything; otherwise, he is not all-powerful. Even Christians will quote Matthew 19:26, Luke 1:37, or Ephesians 3:20 to support the idea that God can do the impossible. These verses speak of all things being possible with God, nothing being impossible with God, and God being able to do far more than we can ever think or ask.²²⁰ God certainly is powerful, and the personal being classical theism believes him to be, but the thought that he can do anything at all seems at first blush to make sense. On deeper thought, one can think of many things God cannot do such as lie, sin, create a square circle, create a stone too heavy for him to lift, commit suicide, and the list can go on. These things in the context of the God of classical theism are simply nonsense, but this realization does reveal something; God can do what is logically possible. Returning to abhorrent commands, due to God being omni-benevolent, it is this very nature that makes it so he cannot issue such commands. Baggett and Walls elucidate this, and it is worth quoting at length:

For if child torture for fun is necessarily and irremediably bad, as it surely seems to be, our account is not only that God never will command it, but that he can't. The moral truth in question would be a reflection of his very nature, upheld by his faithfulness to it in this and all possible circumstances. It's potentially a veridical window of insight into an aspect of his own holy and loving character. To issue a command at variance with it would be to deny himself, which God simply can't do...Our confidence is rooted in classical Christian convictions about God's impeccability and essential goodness...The Bible itself makes clear that God can't do everything. He can't be tempted to sin, for example, we're told, or deny himself. Does this mean he's not omnipotent? Not at all; it

²²⁰ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the New American Standard Bible (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

just means that we need a more sophisticated analysis of omnipotence than an affirmation of it so simpleminded that we end up spouting contradictions and incoherence. God can do everything that's consistent with his perfect nature. Sinning is not. This doesn't show that God is "limited," but rather that his perfection is without limitation. The ability to do some things, such as lie, is a weakness, not a strength. It's not that he isn't free to sin; rather, he's entirely free from any vulnerability to sin. It has no hold on him and does not constitute a temptation for him.²²¹

This clarity is of great assistance in understanding that it is not a limit on God's power to not be able to issue abhorrent commands, but that it is in fact a contradiction of his nature, and some valuable insight is gained into his character. It is also worth highlighting the fact that God is not at all vulnerable to sin. Thomas Aquinas offers a helpful insight:

Since the evil of sin consists in turning away from the divine goodness, by which God wills all things, as above shown, it is manifestly impossible for Him to will the evil of sin; yet He can make choice of one of two opposites, inasmuch as He can will a thing to be, or not to be. In the same way we ourselves, without sin, can will to sit down, and not will to sit down.²²²

Aquinas' insight here expands on God being unlimited in his perfection and evil commands being out of alignment with his good character. Timothy A. Stratton in expounding on Aquinas posits:

...freedom in God is "limited" to what he is—"good"—and thus evil is impossible with him. But he nevertheless has free will in areas consistent with his nature. That is to say, God is free to choose among a range of equally good options. Based on the illustration that Aquinas gives about human freedom in areas not related to moral issues—such as sitting or not sitting—God is free in areas compatible with his goodness: to create the universe or not to create the universe,²²³

These points by Baggett and Walls, Aquinas, and Stratton are both insightful and helpful, because in the marketplace of ideas and debates about God and his commands, both believers

²²¹ Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 131-132, Kindle.

²²² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Complete & Unabridged), trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Claremont, CA: Coyote Canyon Press, 2010), 203, Kindle.

²²³ Timothy A. Stratton, *Human Freedom, Divine Knowledge, and Mere Molinism: A Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Philosophical Analysis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2020), 109, Kindle.

and non-believers alike premise their understanding on the human realm. People often visualize someone really, really good, and then try to imagine God being better than that, and then people extrapolate his character and the options for his commanding. This is a categorically flawed view of God's character. With that in mind now, when one thinks of God's commands it gives a new sense of confidence in God's commands and his character.

Furthermore, think back to Euthyphro, and one can see the way through the false dilemma here in that God's commands are not arbitrary, nor are they something he is just *reporting on* from outside himself. Someone may mistakenly argue that God is not omnipotent due to his being limited, but as Baggett and Walls make clear above it is not that God has limits, but rather his *ultimate perfection* is unlimited. Clearly such a perfect being would not be capricious or arbitrary. This is encouraging and gives one confidence in God's commands and prohibitions. Additionally, it is held, humans are the *imago dei* and as such are reflections, although not perfect reflections, of the Creator. It follows that just as the character traits of a child are reflections of their parents, sometimes quite accurately and sometimes pale or distorted, that humans reflect characteristics of God. It is this nature that allows believers and non-believers to be moral creatures. To be clear, it is not being claimed that one must believe in God in order to be good, or to recognize *the right*. Each human has this capacity within them. Hare posits, "But God's command to us fits our nature very well in the sense that it guides us in discerning which of these inclinations found in our nature we should embrace and which we should not. We also, however, need some discernment about what to take as a divine command."²²⁴ An anticipated response is that the discernment needed here requires some

²²⁴ Hare, *God's Command*, 2, Kindle.

elucidation and careful analysis, but this is a topic of epistemology not ontology and falls outside the scope of this work.²²⁵

It is worth mentioning that earlier it was granted that people, or humanity, can develop and grow within the moral framework. This point requires clarification since one may question the stability of God's commands and the objective nature of these considering they are the same for all people, at all times, and in the same way. This raises questions regarding issues such as some of the difficult passages from the Old Testament such as slavery or the war texts. Have God's commands changed since then? Have objective moral obligations changed since then? Although this project will not address biblical authenticity and reliability, the answer is simply, no, they have not. Views of morality or moral obligations have changed since then, but objective moral obligations remain the same. In God's view, and by God's commands, people still bear the same inherent worth, dignity, and value that they always have. God did not have a lowered view of people at one time or another. However, the human view of the moral landscape and the world has changed and evolved. Alongside this, there has not been a change to objective moral obligations and God's commands, but there have been changes to the ever changing and developing world, and people's view and application of these obligations. It is contended, the obligations and duties God has commanded remain the same.

Human reason and rationality allow for the fact that people can make decisions, and take action, based on these objective moral duties. For the sake of argument, it is stipulated that being the free and rationally endowed beings humans are, God does not need to tell people every step and action to take. Furthermore, it is stipulated God has endowed us with the faculties, provided they are functioning properly, to draw appropriate conclusions and make reasonable inferences.

²²⁵ Moral epistemology is a vital topic related to moral obligations and although outside of the scope of this project refer to Evans, *God and Moral Obligations*, 114-115 for some points on this.

Combine this with what some would refer to as Adams' social agreement theory and one can see a robust and reasonable ontological foundation for the moral obligations and prohibitions that are a result of God's divine commands. As seen above, Wielenberg's own theory of RNR argues that even though with no God, humans have the moral properties they do by accident, does not diminish the fact we have them.²²⁶ In his theory, Wielenberg overall argues for rationality, progressive development, and moral realism, which are all very real qualities in the world, but that humans came by these qualities by accident does not seem plausible.

Throughout this information on DCT, one of the facets that has been presumed is wrongness. Some on a strong atheist or naturalist view will take the position that *wrongness* or *rightness* does not exist. It begs the question then, when such a person asserts this, how they know this assertion to be correct or right? This seems to strain credulity to hold such a position. Similarly, at times such people protest when injustice is observed, or these same people perceive religious views being promoted or "forced" on them or others. If there is no good or bad, right or wrong, it seems these aforementioned points should not matter on this view. Therefore, a definition of wrongness is in order. From a theistic perspective, Robert Merrihew Adams theorizes that wrongness is "contrary to the commands of a loving God."²²⁷ Wrongness would be something objective regarding the actions or inaction of a person. Furthermore, it may even apply to someone's wrong thoughts. An argument can be made that not carrying out those thoughts is an example of restraint and character and most would tend to agree. However, if God

²²⁶ Wielenberg, "Defense of Non-Theistic Moral Realism," 40.

²²⁷ Robert Merrihew Adams, "Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again" in *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1979), 74, accessed July 6, 2017, Divine command metaethics modified again

in fact exists, and possesses the qualities he is typically ascribed, there are thoughts that most people would rather not have to explain to him. Adams submits the following:

...first of all, that wrongness is a property of actions (perhaps also of intentions and of various attitudes, but certainly of actions); and second, that people are generally opposed to actions they regard as wrong, and count wrongness as a reason (often a conclusive reason) for opposing an action. In addition I think the competent user must have some opinions about what actions have this property, and some fairly settled dispositions as to what he will count as reasons for and against regarding an action as wrong. There is an important measure of agreement among competent users in these opinions and dispositions—not complete agreement, nor universal agreement...but overlapping agreements.²²⁸

This issue was also addressed by C.S. Lewis in his writing of how people define good, and he questioned where this concept came from, and that often for people good equates to being happy. Furthermore, this leads to how God is referred to as love, but perhaps it is the human concept of love that is distorted.²²⁹ To use Lewis again, he declares “My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line.”²³⁰ Lewis, along with Adams, point to a concept of wrong and of good, but also accounting for the fact there may not always be universal agreement. However, if there is an objective standard of what is right and wrong, then there must be an authoritative explanation for those objective duties people hold to and expect of each other. It is suspected, even a person with the strongest atheistic position, if victimized in some way would hope for justice for the injustice they had suffered. Many of the most outspoken atheistic thinkers are strong proponents of positive social and moral values and speak out against some of the clear injustice in the world.

²²⁸ Adams, “Divine Command Modified Again,” 74.

²²⁹ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain, The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 569.

²³⁰ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 41.

One could go on at length on DCT, although important to have an understanding, this work is unable to do full justice to this important facet of moral obligations. However, a few summative points should be made. Not much has been said here of secular views on DCT, since if one does not believe in God or an all-powerful infinite being who does in fact issue commands in line with *the right*, then this topic becomes somewhat of an in-house theistic debate. This is not to simply dismiss one's true struggle with the concept of DCT, but many of these struggles come down to the Euthyphro dilemma. As has been indicated this is not a true dilemma; there is a logical 'escape' from this situation that upholds the accepted character traits of the God of classical theism. For the purposes of this work, it is important to note that although one can think of limits to God's abilities, these equate to nonsensical things, but God is unlimited in his perfection. It is this nature with which God's commands are aligned, or his prescriptions and proscriptions are based. Also, an important distinction not yet touched on is that just because something is good, does not equate to 'commanded by God.' People can think of many good things to do that are not moral obligations. It has not been claimed that moral values are commanded by God, but it seems to make sense the deontic nature of moral obligations are the divine commands of a good God. Finally, since God is, as Baggett and Walls fittingly characterized, unlimited in his perfection, one can see how the objection that God could command terrible things is simply to mischaracterize and completely misunderstand the arguments and the character of the theistic God, as well as to apply a human standard of the fear of ultimate power in an incorruptible being. If a truly good God, who is unlimited in his perfection, exists, then, it is argued, DCT is a reasonable explanation for the universal and authoritative nature of objective moral obligations.

Deontic Divine Command

A critical point in this argument is the deontic nature of morality. As noted earlier this refers to the obligatory portion of morality, not moral values. To assert Divine Command Theory in a deontic way is to assert that God himself is logically prior to God's values, and that God's values are logically prior to God's commands. This means that God (prior) is good, ergo, God signifies commands which are consistent and aligned with, his good nature (post). If this were not the case and if the command itself is logically prior, or, if good itself is logically prior, this brings one back to the Euthyphro Dilemma. If a component of morality is moral values, and a key part of moral values is human dignity and worth, then it forms part of the reason for certain objective and universal moral obligations. On the deontic DCT view, it does *not* seem veridical that God would command the value of something. The value of something is inherent in it or what someone holds or ascribes that value to be. It seems to be accurate with the nature of the world, language, and human value, that people have inherent value and worth. To deny this, as some do, just seems to deny what is generally held to be apparent and leads to the suspicion of some ulterior motivation for such a denial. This inherent value comports perfectly with theism and deontic DCT. If people are created in the image of their Maker, it follows logically that there would be value on such a being, if an ultimate being endowed them, above all else in the material world, with these higher-level qualities. Despite this fact, judging by our actions over the millennia, humans have not demonstrated that same value for humanity.

Take for example the value of a country's currency. Being from Canada, the currency at this time is not valued as highly on the international market as Canadians would like, but the value of the currency within Canada for merchandise is the same independent of the international market. The point being, that currency is only worth what people, or a body of people,

subjectively ascribe to it, even if based on certain factors, but human dignity and worth is something inherently known to be priceless. One is left to question or presume this value comes from somewhere outside of persons. The trading of currency is set by people, but market trends can cause people to subjectively impose a new value on a particular currency. These trends and regulations are set in place, supposedly, for the purpose of a fair international market. Similarly, laws are in place to regulate and protect people and inherently, for the most part, support the value of a human person as a person, but the entire premise behind the law is the fact that how one values another does not follow from commands. The value of something is inherent in it, but still is subjective to those outside. The way something or a person is treated can be directed, and this is the point being made; this leads one to the deontic portion of morality. It is held that moral obligations or prohibitions are prescribed and proscribed by God. Baggett and Walls clarify the deontic nature of morality:

Deontic concepts include issues of moral permissibility, moral obligation, and moral forbiddenness, and often get expressed with such locutions as (morally) “right” and “wrong” used in various ways. An action wrong not to do is a moral obligation; an action not wrong to do is morally permissible; an action wrong to do is forbidden. Although moral duties do not cover the whole moral terrain, they represent, by the lights of many ethicists, an essential part of ethics, and *one that cries out for adequate explanation* [emphasis added].²³¹

The deontic nature of morality, or moral obligation, is not referring to people’s feelings of obligation. It is referring to those objective, perhaps even absolute and universal, obligations people have of a moral status. Earlier it was mentioned that our feelings at times, and perhaps many times, do correspond to reality and to actual moral obligations. However, often people’s feelings of moral obligation may not be actual commands from God.

²³¹ Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 147, loc. 2875-2879, Kindle.

Consider this thought experiment. Perhaps a person is particularly gifted in mathematics and so it would reasonably make sense that it would be good for this person to pursue a career in the field of math. However, despite the ease and proficiency with which math comes to this person, sufficient to fulfill certain academic endeavours, math, in fact, gives no personal fulfillment or purpose to this person. So, this person pursues studies and a career in the arts, and this is highly rewarding for them. Would it have been *good* for them to use their mathematical abilities in a related field? Certainly, and to not do so they may have even evoked feeling like they were squandering a gift, but it certainly was not a moral obligation. A simple example like this is important in understanding the difference between those authoritative, objective, and universal moral obligations that people *ought* to do, and those things people use the language of “good to do” and “should do” that may correspond to strong feelings one may have. The deontic portion of morality speaks to the objective and universal nature of our obligations as humans. Furthermore, the feelings of guilt experienced by one is more of a personal ethical standard.

Baggett and Walls posit,

Moral obligations are the clearest example of what is morally right, or wrong not to do. Something can be morally good without being obligatory; moral duties, in contrast, are not voluntary, but required. They are authoritative, prescriptively binding, indications of what we morally ought to do. They are the sort of thing that we are morally blameworthy if we fail to do.²³²

In consideration of the position that the deontic nature of DCT presupposes the good Evans submits:

...that it is only the commands of a God who is essentially good that can create moral obligations...Although the goodness of what God commands does not by itself make those acts obligatory, God’s goodness puts a constraint on what can be morally obligatory. The good itself cannot be determined by God’s commands since it is the good that motivates and provides the point of those commands. Hence it is clear that a DCT

²³² Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 104, Kindle.

presupposes *some* account of what is good, and a natural law ethic provides exactly that.²³³

One can see here how this version of deontic DCT theory makes sense on a number of levels, and it also answers the Euthyphro challenge. However, it is not without challengers, and although Chapter 2 covered some of these it is worthwhile to briefly mention a challenge here.

Louise Antony and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong raise a challenge to DCT. They grant the theistic position that God never would issue abhorrent commands, but what they give with one hand they take away with the other. They still maintain that *if* God *did* command some terrible act this would in fact be obligatory. This addresses the voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro dilemma. In short, this issue with the voluntarist horn is what Antony and Sinnott-Armstrong describe in that God has the voluntary choice to command and can command if he wills. Should God command something abhorrent, then it would be an obligation. The negative view of this is oft associated with William of Ockham, which is that God could command terrible things, but what makes him worthy of our praise and adoration is the fact that he does not in fact do so. Ockham believed that “God’s sovereign choice fills in the content of morality.”²³⁴ One can see some appeal to this theory since it seems to make God completely free to decide whatever he may, but he chooses to command only the good. This exemplifies God’s complete sovereignty over all including the complete content of morality, both value and obligation. To the contrary, this view is not complimentary to God’s impeccable nature in that he commands the good because he does have freedom to command, but also because he is wholly good and could not issue abhorrent commands. Baggett and Walls summarize Ockham’s view,

²³³ Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*, 62.

²³⁴ Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 35, Kindle.

Ockham of course felt God never would issue abhorrent commands, but that he could. That he doesn't is one of the reasons that God is thoroughly praiseworthy. The fact that Ockham thought that God can issue such commands and, if he did, morality would follow suit, makes him a paradigmatic example of a radical voluntarist; indeed, for this reason radical voluntarism is sometimes dubbed 'Ockhamism.'²³⁵

Ockhamism is relevant to this project as it addresses the voluntarist and nonvoluntarist positions, which are related to the Euthyphro and challenge the legitimacy of God's commands. This is a significant challenge, even for the theist, since Baggett and Walls aptly summarize that the issues thusly, "To embrace nonvoluntarism is to locate the authority of morality outside of God, which strikes classical theists as a huge mistake. However, to affirm divine command theory, or voluntarism, the 'because God says so' approach..."²³⁶ The first position is the position of making God a moral weatherman, and the second addresses the arbitrariness of commands issue and makes the good, good only because God has commanded it. Much of this has been addressed above in the Euthyphro section. The position of the argument presented is that of nonvoluntarism on axiological issues and voluntarism when it comes to deontic DCT.²³⁷ The topic of voluntarism/nonvoluntarism and nominalism/realism are inextricably connected to this project but cannot be addressed comprehensively.²³⁸

Returning now to the objection. Louise Antony posits, "If DCT is correct, then the following counterfactual is true: If God had commanded us to torture innocent children, then it

²³⁵ Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 36, Kindle.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 33, Kindle.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 47, Kindle.

²³⁸ This topic cannot be ignored in connection with the Euthyphro Dilemma and as noted is inextricably connected to this topic. It would take this project to far outside the scope of this project. Suffice it to say Baggett and Walls' position on this is in alignment with this project's overall argument. The reader is encouraged to refer to their book *Good God* where this is addressed throughout the book, but specifically in chapters 2-6.

would have been morally right to do so.”²³⁹ Furthermore, Sinnott-Armstrong argues, “Moreover, even if God in fact never would or could command us to rape, the divine command theory still implies the counterfactual that, if God did command us to rape, then we would have a moral obligation to rape.”²⁴⁰ Now, if one considers their position, this is a counterfactual that is trivially true. Clearly, based on the above information, one would argue that this is not actually true if the God of classical theism exists. This argument is the Euthyphro Dilemma restated with a counterfactual, but as has been shown above it seems the way through the Euthyphro is either not understood, not considered, or ignored. If it were understood, perhaps this assertion by Antony and Sinnott-Armstrong would not even be used. The argument of this work, regarding moral obligations in a deontic fashion, holds that God is logically prior to his values, and his values are logically prior to his commands. Furthermore, as indicated above, God is unlimited in his perfection, so for him to issue an edict such as is suggested by Antony and Sinnott-Armstrong could never occur. Considering the universality, objectivity, and distinctive humanness of moral obligations clearly raping or torturing their offspring, or being raped, is not in alignment with God’s character and therefore, his commands. It follows it can be agreed by all parties this is not good for people. If humans are made in the *imago dei* this would be veridical with our nature and God’s deontic DCT. Edward Feser explains:

Now, when we turn to human beings we find that they too have a nature or essence, and the good for them, like the good for anything else, is defined in terms of this nature or essence. Unlike other animals, though, human beings have intellect and will, and this is where moral goodness enters the picture. Human beings can know what is good for them, and choose whether to pursue that good...So, a good human being will be, among many other things, someone who pursues truth and avoids error. And this becomes moral

²³⁹ Louise Antony, “Atheism as Perfect Piety” in *Is Goodness Without God Good Enough?: A Debate on Faith, Secularism, and Ethics*, ed. Robert K. Garcia and Nathan L. King (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2009), 71, Kindle.

²⁴⁰ Sinnott-Armstrong, “Why Traditional Theism Cannot Provide an Adequate Foundation for Morality,” 106, Kindle.

goodness insofar as we can choose whether or not to fulfill our natures in this way. To choose in line with the final causes or purposes that are ours by nature is morally good; to choose against them is morally bad.²⁴¹

If one applies the rationality and final causality of humans, then it is to seek truth and do what is good for them. Part of this final cause is to pursue truth and moral goodness, and it seems correct that a naturalist may agree with this, but to deviate from what the human form and essence's final causality is supposed to would be bad. On this line of argument then, it follows that rape may not be the most optimum circumstance for humanity, and based on Sinnott-Armstrong and Antony's objection, a naturalist or atheist may agree at this point with the argument. If part of human form is the pursuit of truth and moral goodness, then it seems to follow that treating all humans with inherent dignity and worth is objectively good. This dignity and worth are, the same afforded by God to people because they are the *imago dei*. From here it seems veridical that the better explanation as to where the authority for these obligations come from is it requires adherence to objective, universal moral obligations, and these are the type of the deontic DCT nature.

Returning to Antony's and Sinnott-Armstrong's counterfactual, they grant the fact of DCT, for the purpose of their argument, this entails they grant that God exists and is responsible for creating all there is. Now, given this fact, and the added premises of human essence and purposes, their own argument fails. If human form/essence is for the above purposes, then it is nonsensical to consider that the creator would suddenly reorder the programming of his main species to begin to engage in acts that are contrary to their nature, and contrary to the benefit of the species as a whole. Moreover, it would be anathema to the character of the Anselmian God of classical theism. It would seem contrary to something created with design and purpose for the

²⁴¹ Feser, *The Last Superstition*, loc. 2598-2610, cp. 4 "Natural Law" heading, Kindle.

creator to subvert this design. This position also fails on this factor of the essence of humanity, not to mention God's impeccable nature and limitless perfection.

A final note that carries some weight in defense of deontic DCT comes from Glenn C. Graber. Graber posits in his article that the voluntarist horn can be broken by God's benevolence in that he wills the good. Good and bad may be independent of God's will, but right and wrong are not. What follows from this is that there may not be an inherent moral reason for a command, but God's being benevolent clearly indicates to us the motive.²⁴² This view does compliment the deontic DCT theory in that God's impeccable nature would include his being benevolent, and given the thought exercise above, this does further comport with his nature and motivation for people to be obligated to do what is right.²⁴³

Considering the arguments put forth for deontic DCT in conjunction with disagreement of the possibility God could command cruelty for its own sake, as this is not in alignment with God's character, some conclusions can be drawn. Also, considering God's nature has been *impressed* upon humans as the *imago dei*, understanding deontic DCT forms yet another piece of evidence in the cumulative case being developed. The objective and universal moral facts seem to be veridical with the evidence in the world, and the better explanation for objective moral duties is an objective standard outside of humanity. Given God's perfectly impeccable nature and that his perfection is unlimited, and sin has no hold on him, it follows his commands align with the deontic nature of moral obligations.

²⁴² Glenn C. Graber, "In Defense of a Divine Command Theory of Ethics" in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 43, no. 1 (March 1975), 62-69, accessed July 6, 2017, In defense of a divine command theory of ethics.

²⁴³ As noted earlier, this topic cannot be ignored in connection with the Euthyphro Dilemma and as noted in inextricably connected to this topic. It would take this project to far outside the scope of this project. Suffice it to say Baggett and Walls' position on this is in alignment with this project's overall argument. The reader is encouraged to refer to their book *Good God* where this is addressed throughout the book, but specifically in chapters 2-6.

Returning to the abductive argument presented in the Introduction that was argued in Chapter 1 and 2, some may recognize the form of this argument bearing some resemblance to St. Anselm's Ontological Argument not to be covered in this work, is presented here again. It is argued a reasonable case has been made, that given the evidence available, the better explanation of the objective, universal, distinctively human moral obligations and their ontological foundation in the impeccable Anselmian God of classical theism. Here is the argument presented again:

1. It seems more likely than not that objective moral obligations are real.
2. Theism offers a better explanation than atheism for the realness of objective moral obligations.
3. Therefore, there is some reason to think that God exists.
4. Humans seem to be able to apprehend objective moral duties and discern right from wrong.
5. Objective right and wrong has been consistent over time for all persons, at all times, in all places, in the same way. For example, cruelty for the sake of fun.
6. Therefore, those objectively right and objectively wrong actions (premise 5) have been objectively right and objectively wrong for all persons, at all times, in all places, in the same way.
7. For there to be such an objective rule or standard, 5 and 6, that fulfills these premises, there must be a transcendent standard or authoritative being that exists and has always existed.
8. Because material and physical beings and objects are subjective and subject to change and alteration, the standard, or authoritative being, must exist outside of the material world for this excludes it being subject to change and subjectivity.
9. For humans to recognize this objective standard of moral duties, and moral value, dignity, and worth, demonstrates this is an idea in the human mind which is universal, and this combined with actions demonstrates its existence in reality.
10. If moral duties exist in reality, and in human minds, and humans can conceive of an even greater moral reality, then they appeal to this higher, objective, transcendent standard.
11. This standard must be the greatest standard, and be perfectly good, loving, and personal.
12. It cannot be an abstract object since they are causally effete.
13. Therefore, the *best* explanation is God (abductive conclusion).

Given the evidence presented, this argument is at least sound, and it seems more likely than not that moral obligations are real. Theism and DCT from the deontic perspective provide a robust understanding of the foundation of moral obligations in the world and gives a cogent and better

explanation for these obligations. Given these facts, there is at least some reason(s) to think God exists.²⁴⁴ The informal abductive argument is effective as it opens discussions and deals with evidence and objections as they come. The approach of abductive dialogue is supported by the moral facts above considering the conclusion that theism was found to be more consistent in its internal logic and its coherence. Moreover, in explaining the foundation and authority for moral obligations, theism also was more adequate factually in addition to being more viable in an existential sense. However, another option that is supported by many of the same moral facts is the deductive version of this argument.

Chapter 4

Abductive to the Deductive Argument

There is a deductive version of the theistic argument from moral obligations as has been outlined earlier. Not only is the deductive argument pithy, but there is value to this version as well. The strength of this version is that it is sound, and arguably, is less-escapable. The abductive version of the argument certainly has some distinct advantages. It is not as ambitious as the deductive version, and it fosters more discussion with interlocutors. For a theist, an abductive approach certainly would be more advisable in an open dialogue or informal argumentative setting. However, for those seeking understanding to their faith, or perhaps a more logical thinker, the deductive argument can be fulfilling and is supported by many of the above moral facts. The classic deductive argument for moral obligations would be framed thusly:

1. If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.

²⁴⁴ The author recognizes that there seems to be an epistemological issue in relation to moral obligations and moral intuition. It is not within the scope of this work to address this. For more on epistemology refer to Mark D. Linville, "The Moral Argument" in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). Also, James Porter Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

2. Objective moral values and duties do exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.^{245,246}

The deductive portion of the argument presented in this work, supported by the abductive moral facts and case, can be informally viewed as an additional four premises of the argument or an alternative manner of argumentation, is as follows:

14. If it is God, then it follows he is unchanging, impeccable, and cannot command evil acts.
15. If God does not exist, then objective moral duties do not exist.
16. Objective moral duties do exist.
17. Therefore, God exists.

As indicated, the abductive version is much humbler in the sense of weighing the evidence, and this is veridical with how people often operate in the world and come to conclusions. This is what one would ask of people in coming to important decisions, but the difficulty is that in a post-truth world many people question the evidence or only will objectively weigh the evidence when it suits them or fits their theory. To combat the deductive version, it seems reasonable that one must deny premise 2 of the classical version, or premise 16 of this project's version, that objective moral values and duties exist, in order to deny the conclusion. To deny moral obligations as objective universal obligations does not seem reasonable, but there are arguments that some people present in an attempt to justify this position.

One argument that seems to take an antirealist position on morality is a view put forth by Sharon Street. Street asserts that in Darwinian adaptations, links were created, and in the struggle for survival certain behaviours came to be valued. It just so happened the creatures who valued

²⁴⁵ Craig, *On Guard*, 129, Kindle. Also, Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 30, Kindle. The deductive argument is presented here too in relation to moral values and formulated thusly: (1) If God did not exist, objective moral values would not exist. (2) Objective moral values do exist. (3) Therefore, God exists.

²⁴⁶ Evans, *God and Moral Obligations*, 156. Evans outlines the argument in reference to his book as a *reductio ad absurdum* argument if his arguments have been found to be powerful and details it as follows: (1) If moral obligations exist, then God exists. (2) Moral obligations exist. (3) Therefore, God exists

certain things survived, and thus concluded certain things to have value.²⁴⁷ Street constructs a Euthyphro type case to call realist theories into question, as well and the ability for accurate evaluative human judgements. Street submits:

Consider again the old dilemma whether things are valuable because we value them or whether we value them because they are valuable. The right answer...is somewhere in between. Before life began nothing was valuable. But then life arose and began to have value – not because it was recognizing anything, but because creatures who valued tended to survive. In this broadest sense, valuing was (and still is) prior to value. That is why antirealism about value is right.”²⁴⁸

One could use such an argument to fortify belief in a naturalistic explanation in order to justify avoidance of even entertaining the other side of the coin. This antirealist view is based on the presumption of Darwinian theories to be true, and for these random forces to be reliable in deriving values. This theory also raises the question of whether valuing was before values. On Street’s view, humans determine to value what provides for evolutionary success and survival, but then she jumps to this correlating to *the good*. A serious issue that arises is what the odds are of a random process hitting the mark of inherent and objective good correlating under these factors to the world we have today. With this view, Street is still deriving values and worth, and she seems also to hold to a worldview of scientism. It is not meant to be dismissive or short with her work, but this view offers another theory, that when borne out, presents another challenge to theism. However, it falls short of logical consistency when depending on many variables that are random by nature. Moreover, these still have an underlying presumption of moral duties, and values, with no authoritative explanation for adherence to these values. The authority seems to come from sociobiological adaptations and societal agreements, which as seen already, only

²⁴⁷ Sharon Street, “A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value” in *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 127(1), (January 2006, Part I), 109-166, accessed January 12, 2018, doi. 10.1007/s11098-005-1726-6.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 155-156.

provide part of an authoritative explanation for objective, universal moral obligations. Street's view seems to be evident in other arenas of thinking in today's culture, which makes the point relevant to morals and ethics.

In this project a moral realist position was presupposed, and it seems, given the observations and evidence in the world, this eminently makes sense. If this is the case, then the abductive or deductive versions of the argument are sound. It is evident in the world that there are certain actions, or inactions, that are right or wrong, without regard for whether it harms a person or not. Consider a "victimless" crime. Evans gives a good example of a man paid for playing his trumpet at a wedding and that he should report the income he received. Now, he will not be caught for not reporting, but he knows what his obligation is. This is an example where doubting the reality of moral obligations, and thinking the foundations are something humans have contrived and just agree to, can assist in one's case building against honestly reporting as one should. A person's desire to be free of certain obligations, as Evans characterizes, can lead to becoming skeptical of moral obligations.²⁴⁹

Despite case building excuses a person can make to themselves such as, "No one will know," "It is not hurting anyone," "The government always takes and taxes," this is still wrong. Many of the most notorious people having committed some of the most reviled acts were just normal people under certain exceptional circumstances. These *normal* people, with certain personal case building and with a progressively abhorrent line of rationalization, justified their acts. An example would be some of the war criminals from the Nazi regime who claimed to be only following orders. The Nuremberg trials held out that, although the accused defended themselves as following orders, and having obligations to their country and leaders, it was

²⁴⁹ Evans, *God and Moral Obligations*, 159.

recognized there is a *self-evident moral obligation* that superseded this obligation. To deny objective moral duties has several negative implications. It seems even proponents of worldviews that may object to theism would stand with the theist in agreement that these sorts of negative outworking's would not be acceptable.

The issue that arises is that many do not deny that moral values and duties exist, for to do so leads to a scenario where statements such as, "It is wrong to torture babies for fun," cannot be retorted as being wrong if there are no objective moral values and duties. Some propose this is a weakness of the deductive version as it is not as *welcoming* to open dialogue. Reason being, in the follow-up of explaining this argument, and the force of that follow-up, it has with it some strong statements of the implications of there not being a foundation for moral obligations. On the other side of this discussion, some would contend that if one is arguing for moral duties and their foundation, one will eventually lead to the deductive version. By this logic, it follows that one should simply begin with the deductive version.

This can be an either-or situation, and a both-and situation. Referring to police work for an example, when planning for a significant suspect interview, a prepared interviewer never plans only one strategy. There are a variety of strategies and methods employed. Interestingly, a suspect interview is much like a philosophical argument. One presents a variety of premises, and support for these premises, and builds on these as the interview progresses. These begin to lead to a conclusion(s) to elicit a truthful statement from the interviewee by leading them to where the evidence objectively points. The interviewer comes equipped with a variety of *tools*, and so too can the person who employs these two kinds of moral arguments for theism. Perhaps, the best method, in a police interview or for arguing for objective moral obligations, is to generally begin with an abductive approach to present gently the case to a person. This allows for open

discussion and the opportunity to engage with the arguments and evidence and lead someone to a better explanation, and then eventually to the *best explanation*. Once convinced or persuaded by the evidence, or mostly convinced, one can conclude with the deductive version.

1. It seems more likely than not that objective moral obligations are real.
2. Theism offers a better explanation than atheism for the realness of objective moral obligations.
3. Therefore, there is some reason to think that God exists.
AND,
4. If God does not exist, objective moral duties do not exist.
5. Objective moral duties do exist (premise 1 and 3).
6. Therefore, God exists.

It seems reasonable to begin slowly and build the case, and if the first three premises of this argument are successful, then it certainly has warrant to move to the deductive version. This certainly has proven true in the aforementioned interview techniques. It should be noted that although the argument for moral obligations and their ontological foundation is persuasive and referred to as a proof or evidence for God, it is fully recognized that this is by no means a knock down argument that *proves* God's existence, but it can be known with Cartesian certainty.

People often seek tangible evidence, and objectively considering arguments such as this project are difficult to consider. Many people, whether fully aware or not, ascribe to scientism and declare that they only believe in what science can prove. One must recall that science itself does not prove or *say* anything, it is the human scientists that interpret the data. Science simply is a process through which data and facts are gathered. Frank Turek posits,

So when you hear people say, 'Science says . . . [whatever]' don't believe them. What they really mean is that a scientist says [whatever]...we often take a scientist's conclusions on authority. But too often atheists are feeding us materialistic philosophy stuffed in a dress of science. Perhaps they just don't see what they're doing. They have blind faith in their religion of science."²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ Frank Turek, *Stealing from God: Why Atheists Need God to Make Their Case* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 173, Kindle. It is recognized Turek's book is a popular level writing, but his quotes make the rhetorical point the author was seeking.

Turek affirms the point that people often put their faith in something, and it is misplaced, or places too heavy a burden on that thing, that in fact does not provide what one believes it does when the evidence is examined. Perhaps there is an unwillingness to consider the strength of this argument for personal reasons. Consider Thomas Nagel's position on theism:

I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that. My guess is that this cosmic authority problem is not a rare condition and that it is responsible for much of the scientism and reductionism of our time.²⁵¹

Like the good detective builds a cumulative case to determine who is responsible for a crime, and get to the truth for justice, so too the argument for the moral obligations is a piece in the case that requires explanation. With the support of the abductive case made, it seems reasonable to go a step further, and deductively conclude the best explanation for objective moral obligations is God. The abductive version of the argument opens the door for the discussion and to adduce cordially what better explains the moral facts people generally acknowledge. It can also serve to provide a springboard at the appropriate time for the less-escapable deductive version. One certainly can try to object to the fact God exists, which is why the emphasis has been on the pursuit of truth, laying aside personal bias and self-interest. There is a wealth of information out there about the reasonableness of belief in God. Prior to introducing the deductive version, hopefully one has built relationship with a person or people. This includes that one should have done the work of the abductive argument to look fairly at the evidence your interlocuter has agreed with, or is at least leaning towards, the *better explanation for all the evidence available*.

²⁵¹ Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996), 130.

Conclusion

The main goal of this project was to determine, from a moral realist position the universality, foundation, and authority of moral obligations. A moral realist argument was outlined that made an inference to a better explanation for the ontological foundation of the deontic features of morality. The moral facts in support of this, ultimately lead to the additional option of a deductive conclusion. The authority of moral obligations is vital in maintaining their objectivity. It was primarily informally abductively argued that God and his commands provide a better explanation for the authority of moral obligations than the atheist worldview, or the utilitarian and robust normative realist ethical systems. It seems more likely than not that objective moral obligations are real, and on a moral realist account, if these obligations are real there must be an authoritative explanation why these have sway on human action and inaction. Furthermore, moral obligations are universal and distinctively human. It is reasonable and veridical that humans have objective moral obligations, and many of these obligations are based on the inherent worth and dignity of human persons as human persons, as covered in chapter 1.

The importance of the moral argument cannot be overstated since moral obligations and the inherent value of humans as humans influences many aspects of human reality. Some of these areas are human decisions, actions, societal interactions and agreements, and ethics to name just a few. Because of the broad and deep influence of moral obligations the importance of the ontological foundation of *objective* moral obligations is critically important. An authoritative source for the deontic, that portion of the moral argument that has to do with what people ought to do, aspect of the moral argument provides a foundation and stability. There are a variety of competing explanations for objective moral obligations. This work analyzed four of the major contributors to the discussion in chapter 2 – Atheism—Naturalism, Robust Normative Realism,

Utilitarianism, and Theism. This work also presented an informal abductive argument for objective moral obligations. The abductive approach is a humble, but powerful argument that inherently invites dialogue and deep thought. The short form of this argument is:

1. It seems more likely than not that objective moral obligations are real.
2. Theism offers a better explanation than atheism for the realness of objective moral obligations.
3. Therefore, there is some reason to think that God exists.

Having this argument in mind the four criteria of internal logical consistency, coherence, factual adequacy, and existential viability were utilized for the analysis of the four worldviews. As covered, these alternate worldviews required analysis as they attempt to provide an explanation for moral obligations. This is an important endeavor because if one can undermine an argument for God's existence one can potentially and theoretically undermine theism. Analysis such as this is critical in seeking the truth of what provides the better explanation of the ontology of moral obligations.

In conducting the analysis of the worldviews, relative to the deontic portion of morality, theism was the superior worldview being the most internally logically consistent, coherent, factually adequate, and the most existentially viable. The law of non-contradiction is an essential law of thought and forms part of the analytical criteria of internal logical consistency and coherence. When applied to the theistic explanation for objective moral obligations, theism was found to be not be self-contradictory and was coherent in its position. The Anselmian God of classical theism with his perfect character and omni-attributes most fully explains the ontological foundation of moral obligations. The God of classical theism is unlimited in his perfection, which makes his commands to be in alignment with his good character. Considering the theory of Ockham's razor theism provided a better and the simplest explanation for the authority of objective moral obligations. The theistic position considering the abductive argument is at least

reasonable and worth serious consideration. Theism was also found to be more adequate factually in consideration of this worldview's explanation of the authority of moral obligations, and how these explanations correspond to reality. Considering if the Anselmian God of theism exists, and his commands and prohibitions are in alignment with his perfect character, then this certainly does provide a better explanation not only for the authority of moral obligations, but the value of human persons made in the *imago dei*. This included people made with the ability to apprehend moral obligations and to freely act rightly. This view further accounts for the explanation of the objectivity, universality, and distinctively human aspect of moral obligations. Moreover, the language of 'oughtness,' mixed with the teleological aspects of the moral world humans seem to live and operate in, adds to the factual adequacy of theism over subjective explanations and reliance on scientific processes and accounts for moral obligations. The final criteria of existential viability, or the livability, of theism was also high. This is not simply a measure of whether a human individual(s) favor a particular view, or if it evokes happiness. Rather this has to do with avoidance of doublethink or philosophical hypocrisy. When assessed deeply, theism was found to not be subject to internal doublethink as it not only better explains objective moral obligations, but it clearly accounts for these. On theism, objective moral obligations have a purpose and are expected in a world created by a good God. On theism, moral obligations are not an accident or thought up by subjective human beings. Theism provides a robust explanation for the existence of the authority of these obligations outside of human persons, while still allowing for altruism and the further development of good actions in human persons with a basis in God's deontic divine commands.

A primary objection to the moral argument for theism is the Euthyphro dilemma, which was covered in chapter 3. The Euthyphro is a major question to the moral argument for theism

that challenges the objectivity of moral obligations and God's good character, divine command theory provides an answer to it, and deontic divine command theory is the methodology. The Euthyphro is not a true dilemma since DCT, of the deontic type, provides a way through it. When carefully considered in light of deontic DCT, it is evident that the value of humanity comes from the understanding that people are made in the *imago dei*. Therefore, God does not command moral value or worth, but it is inherent in his creation. Furthermore, God's commands extend to moral obligations, prescriptions and prohibitions, and these are in alignment with the good and perfect character of the Anselmian God of classical theism. God does command humans to do what is *good* and *right*, and he prohibits that which is *bad* and *wrong*. A simple way to understand this is a good, impeccable God who is unlimited in his perfections, issues good commands that are in alignment with his good character.

It is necessary to understand the usage of both the informal abductive and deductive arguments in this project. The abductive argument that was outlined in chapter 1 and was utilized as the primary argument throughout is compelling. It supplies an understanding of the moral argument, and objective moral obligations, by prompting natural discourse and weighs the evidence critically, allowing logical and reasonable conclusions. In this project, abductive reasoning established a strong case for theism. Once the premises and conclusion of the abductive version are established, it is clear many of these moral facts can support a deductive conclusion as well. There is opportunity and benefit to utilize the deductive version in relation to the argument for objective, universal, and distinctively human moral obligations. The beauty of the deductive version is that it provides a concise, direct form of the premises. In this project, it was important to establish abductively the case and then as an option, or complement, is the presentation of a deductive conclusion. Clearly, the abductive approach is more welcome in

discussion or evangelistic environments, but the deductive version is useful in a more formal environment, or for those perhaps seeking understanding for their existent faith.

The breadth and depth of morality is vast, and this issue is vitally important now more than ever in the rapidly changing world of morality and ethics. A worldview should be able to answer important questions about moral obligations: Are they objective? What best explains them? Are they authoritative? Where do they come from? These name only a few, and this project found theism provides a superior answer to questions such as these. This project has established, from a moral realist perspective, that it is reasonable that moral obligations are likely real and objective, universal, authoritative, and distinctively human in being tied to inherent value. Furthermore, the deontic DCT view provides a defensible version of the theistic God that is unlimited in his perfection, where his character is the standard of good, making his commands wholly good, and providing for a solid foundation for objective moral values. This provides a better, and simpler, explanation for the ontological foundation of objective moral duties and the reason they have sway on human action and behaviors.

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